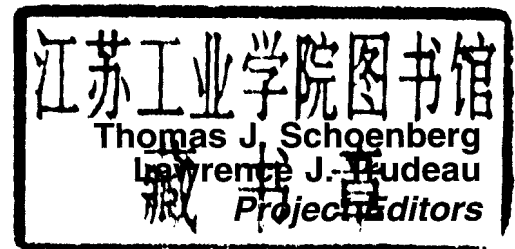


Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 176

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol. 176

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Preface

Since its inception more than fifteen years ago, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by nearly 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 500 authors, representing 58 nationalities and over 25,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

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TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Thomson Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

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- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
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works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Isabella Augusta Persse, Lady Gregory

1852-1932

Irish playwright, folklorist, historian, poet, autobiographer, translator, producer, and editor.

The following entry presents criticism on Lady Gregory from 1973 to 2004. For additional information on her career, see *TCLC*, Volume 1.

INTRODUCTION

Lady Gregory, a prolific playwright, folklorist, and historian, is primarily known for her pivotal role in the development of Irish national drama at the beginning of the twentieth century. She promoted fledgling playwrights, such as Sean O'Casey, and greatly influenced the work of John Millington Synge and William Butler Yeats. In 1899 Yeats and Gregory, along with Edward Martyn, formed the Irish National Theatre Society and founded the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. The Abbey provided a venue for new Irish playwrights and a platform for the creation of dramatic art based on the concerns, folklore, and history of the Irish people. Gregory wrote more than forty plays for the theater, often in Kiltartan, a local Irish dialect. Many of these explore themes and stories from Irish folklore and Celtic mythology. Her one-act plays, including *Spreading the News* (1904) and *The Gaol Gate* (1906), have been cited as important examples of the form. Gregory also contributed to the preservation and promotion of Irish folklore. Not only did she record stories that had previously existed only in oral form, but her translation of Celtic legends into English made those stories available to a wider audience. Although critics generally place more emphasis on her contributions to the Irish Literary Renaissance than on her plays, recent scholarship has taken greater appreciation of Gregory's skill and importance as a writer.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Lady Gregory was born Isabella Augusta Persse, on March 15, 1852, in Roxborough, County Galway, Ireland. Her parents, Dudley and Frances Barry Persse, had her privately educated. In 1880, at the age of twenty-seven, she married Sir William Gregory, an influential Irish member of parliament, and they took up residence on Gregory's large estate at Coole Park. Lady Gregory had learned several languages over the course



of her education, including Italian, French, and German, and in 1894 she began to study Irish. During her married life, Gregory wrote poetry and a few short stories. Her first published work was the essay *Arabi and His Household* (1882), which was originally a letter to the *Times* newspaper in support of Ahmed Arabi Bey, the leader of the Egyptian nationalist revolt against the repressive regime of the Khedives. After her husband died in 1892, Gregory edited and published his autobiography in 1894. That same year, she met Yeats and formed the beginning of a lifelong friendship. The two began to gather stories from local people and to record oral poetry. Over the next few years, Gregory published several volumes of collected Irish folklore, including *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902), *Gods and Fighting Men* (1904), and *The Kiltartan History Book* (1909).

In 1898 Gregory, Yeats, and the Catholic dramatist Edward Martyn began discussing the idea of a national theater in Ireland, which led to the creation of the Irish National Theatre Society and the founding of the Abbey

Theatre in 1899. During her years with the society, Gregory served on the board of directors, collaborated anonymously with Yeats on his own plays, and managed daily operations of the Abbey Theatre, all in addition to writing her own one-act plays, comedies, tragedies, and a few fantasy plays for children. Her influence on the artists of the Irish Literary Renaissance was significant. In addition to her collaborations with Yeats and others, Gregory assisted many fledgling playwrights in the revision of their works for production at the Abbey Theatre. Her incorporation of the Kiltartan dialect in her plays inspired Synge to experiment with dialect in his own plays. She wrote more than forty plays for the theater before retiring for health reasons in 1928. Even after her retirement, the Coole Park estate remained a meeting place for the artistic community associated with the Irish Literary Renaissance, including Yeats, Synge, O'Casey, George Moore, and Katherine Tynan. Gregory died May 22, 1932, and was buried at Coole Estate.

MAJOR WORKS

Lady Gregory's most successful and best known play is *Spreading the News*, a comedy in one act focusing on rumor and character defamation in a rural Irish town. Formally, the play has farcical elements, including quick exchange of dialogue and a rapid escalation of events. Through a series of misunderstandings, the protagonist of the play, Barley Fallon, is wrongfully accused of murdering Jack Smith and having an affair with his wife. As this false information spreads quickly through the town, Fallon is charged with murder. When the supposed victim enters the scene, he believes the rumor about his wife's affair. At the end of the play, both Fallon and Smith are to spend the night in a jail cell together, and Fallon fears that now he will be the one whose life is in danger. Gregory has been praised for her characterization of Fallon, in whom she carefully blends elements of the comic and tragic. In recent scholarship, the play has been lauded for its tightly structured plot and its scathing social commentary.

Among her short plays, *The Gaol Gate*, a folk-drama, is considered one of Gregory's more powerful works. In this somber piece, the playwright explores the themes of societal pressure and self-sacrifice. The story revolves around two women, Mary Cahel and her daughter-in-law, Mary Cushin. The play begins at dawn in front of the Galway Gaol, where the two women wait to hear the fate of Denis, Mary Cahel's son and Mary Cushin's husband. They discover that Denis has been hanged and are told that he has informed on a neighbor. When they discover that Denis did not in fact leak the information, the two women react in contrasting ways. Mary Cahel, concerned with her neighbors'

opinions and her son's reputation, rejoices and proclaims Denis a hero who gave his life for a friend. Mary Cushin, conversely, laments her husband's death and decries the injustice of an innocent man's sacrifice. Some critics have noted parallels between the characters of the play and the two Marys who mourned for Jesus in the New Testament.

Grania (1912) is often regarded as Gregory's greatest work in the tragic form and one of the most accomplished of her full-length plays. However, Gregory never allowed the play to be staged, because she was never satisfied with the casts that were assembled. The tragedy is based on a story from Irish folklore. Both the original tale and Gregory's retelling focus on the events of a love triangle. The young woman Grania falls in love with Diarmuid, the companion of Finn, an older man whom she has promised to marry. In the original folktale, Finn discovers Grania and Diarmuid, kills Diarmuid and recovers Grania. The main themes of passion, jealousy, and desire in the story remain intact in Gregory's version, but as the title suggests, her version of the tale emphasizes the motivations and actions of the heroine. Recent critics have noted the play's exploration of femininity as Grania develops from a conventional, youthful feminine ideal, to a confident, self-realized woman struggling for control over her life.

Other of Gregory's plays often cited as among her best works are *The Rising of the Moon* (1907), *Dervorgilla* (1907), and *The Workhouse Ward* (1908). In both *The Rising of the Moon* and *Dervorgilla*, Gregory expresses her commitment to the political and cultural nationalism of the Irish Renaissance. The former portrays the story of an Irish police sergeant who helps a political outlaw escape from prison. The outlaw, a man named Jimmy Walsh, is a ballad singer, and when he sings "The Rising of the Moon," a song inspired by the Fenian movement, the sergeant is so moved by memories of his own rebel days that he lets his prisoner escape. The play's ending deftly dramatizes the internal conflict of the policeman between his old and new loyalties, and in so doing implies that Irish nationalism lies at the heart of even those who ostensibly uphold the British crown. *Dervorgilla* treats the issue of England's presence in Ireland from the perspective of the young men and women who repudiate the title character, who as a young woman left her husband, O'Rourke of Breffney, for the king of Leinster, thereby provoking the Norman invasion of Ireland. But the play is more than a political tract in support of Irish nationalism, as it offers a moving study of youth and age. *Dervorgilla*'s youthful passion, which she regrets in old age, makes her a figure of disgrace during her lifetime, while the young men and women who scorn her remain oblivious to her suffering and regret, because they are too young to understand and lack sympathy for her remorse. *The Workhouse Ward* depicts the close but argumentative relationship of

two old men who live in an Irish workhouse. When one of the old men receives an offer to move to a more comfortable environment, with a relative, he instead chooses to remain in the workhouse and stay with his lifelong friend. All three of these plays have been praised for their technical perfection and their subtle characterizations.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Gregory's plays, especially her one-act comedies, were generally praised during her lifetime. But early reviewers limited their accolades to her "amusing" depictions of Irish peasants and local dialects, considering her plots "thin" and her work, while entertaining, not the stuff of serious drama. Her tragedies and full-length plays received less critical recognition, and her contributions to the works of key figures of the period, such as Yeats and O'Casey, went virtually unnoticed. Contemporaries, such as St. John Gogarty and James Joyce, painted a rather negative portrait of Gregory. In 1903 Joyce dismissed her for her romantic brand of Irish nationalism; in his novel *Ulysses*, the character of Buck Mulligan refers to her work as "drivel." For many years, Joyce's comments cast a long shadow over Gregory's reputation. More recently, critics have sought to reclaim Gregory's place among other architects of the Irish Literary Renaissance, such as Yeats, Synge, and O'Casey. The beginning of this reassessment was Ann Saddlemyer's 1966 study, *In Defense of Lady Gregory, Playwright*. Saddlemyer argued that Gregory, more than anyone else, shaped the direction of the Irish National Theatre, adding that she "deserves her place in the constellation so clearly marked by her friends and fellow image-makers who worked together for art and for Ireland."

Since the 1970s, critics have generally lauded Gregory's effective use of Irish myth and folklore in her plays, her use of humor in her best works—such as *Spreading the News*—her subtle characterizations, and her successful development of the one-act play. Many, such as Maureen Waters, Patricia Lysaght, and Cathy Leeney, have emphasized her deft handling of gender issues and matters of female identity within her nationalistic themes. In an examination of a number of Gregory's plays, Dawn Duncan has asserted that the playwright "transforms our notions of the archetypal hero" by depicting independent, self-sufficient women on "a journey of self-discovery." What has emerged is a greater appreciation of Gregory's art and her significant contribution to the Irish Literary Revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the words of Edward A. Kopper, Jr., Gregory "shaped the energies of the principals and added her own blend of humor and magic to the more dour moments of Irish Renais-

sance literary polemics and politics. . . . At all times, her great wish was to create what was worthwhile and artistically truthful, in spite of nationalistic and religious pressures, and to provide a forum for others capable and willing to add dignity to Ireland."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Arabi and His Household* (essay) 1882
- Sir William Gregory: An Autobiography* [editor] (autobiography) 1894
- Mr. Gregory's Letter-Box, 1813-1830* [editor] (letters) 1898
- Ideals in Ireland: A Collection of Essays Written by AE and Others* [editor] (essays) 1901
- Cathleen ni Houlihan* [with William Butler Yeats] (play) 1902
- Cuchulain of Muirthemne: The Story of the Men of the Red Branch of Ulster* [editor and translator] (folklore) 1902
- Twenty-Five* (play) 1903
- Gods and Fighting Men: The Story of the Tuatha de Danaan and of the Fianna of Ireland* [editor and translator] (folklore) 1904
- Spreading the News* (play) 1904
- Kincora* (play) 1905
- The White Cockade* (play) 1905
- A Book of Saints and Wonders* [editor] (folklore) 1906
- The Canavans* (play) 1906
- The Doctor in Spite of Himself* [adaptor; from the play *Le Medecin malgre lui* by Molière] (play) 1906
- The Gaol Gate* (play) 1906
- Hyacinth Halvey* (play) 1906
- The Jackdaw* (play) 1906
- Dervorgilla* (play) 1907
- The Poorhouse* [with Douglas Hyde] (play) 1907
- The Rising of the Moon* (play) 1907
- The Unicorn from the Stars* [with Yeats] (play) 1907
- The Rogueries of Scapin* [adaptor; from the play *Les Fourberies de Scapin* by Molière] (play) 1908
- Teja* [adaptor; from the play by H. Sudermann] (play) 1908
- The Workhouse Ward* [with Hyde] (play) 1908
- The Image* (play) 1909
- The Kiltartan History Book* (folklore) 1909
- The Miser* [adaptor; from the play *L'Avare* by Molière] (play) 1909
- Coats* (play) 1910
- The Full Moon* (play) 1910
- The Kiltartan Wonder Book* (folklore) 1910
- Mirandolina* [adaptor; from the play *La Locandiera* by Carlo Goldoni] (play) 1910
- The Travelling Man* [with Yeats] (play) 1910
- The Deliverer* (play) 1911

- The Marriage* [adaptor and translator; from the play *An Posadh* by Douglas Hyde] (play) 1911
The Nativity Play [adaptor and translator; from the play *Drama Breite Criosta* by Hyde] (play) 1911
The Bogie Men (play) 1912
Damer's Gold (play) 1912
**Irish Folk History Plays*. 2 vols. (plays) 1912
MacDaragh's Wife (play) 1912
Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter in Autobiography (autobiography) 1913
The Wrens (play) 1914
Shanwalla (play) 1915
Hanrahan's Oath (play) 1918
The Kiltartan Poetry Book: Prose Translations from the Irish [translator] (prose poetry) 1918
The Dragon (play) 1919
The Golden Apple (play) 1920
Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland. 2 vols. [editor] (folklore) 1920
Aristotle's Bellows (play) 1921
Hugh Lane's Life and Achievement, with Some Account of the Dublin Galleries (biography) 1921
The Old Woman Remembers (play) 1923
The Story Brought by Brigit (play) 1924
The Would-be Gentleman [adaptor; from the play *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* by Molière] (play) 1926
Dave (play) 1927
Sancho's Master (play) 1927
Lady Gregory's Journals, 1916-1930 [edited by Lennox Robinson] (journals) 1946
Selected Plays [edited by Elizabeth Coxhead] (plays) 1962
The Collected Plays [edited by Ann Saddlemyer] (plays) 1970
Seventy Years: Being the Autobiography of Lady Gregory [edited by Colin Smythe] (autobiography) 1976
Lady Gregory's Diaries, 1892-1902 [edited by James Pethica] (diaries) 1996

*This work includes the plays *Grania*, *Kincora*, *Dervorgilla*, *The Canavans*, *The White Cockade*, and *The Deliverer*.

CRITICISM

Hazard Adams (essay date 1973)

SOURCE: Adams, Hazard. "Mythological History." In *Lady Gregory*, pp. 45-71. Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1973.

[In the following essay, Adams examines the tone, technique, and organization of Gregory's adaptations of Irish legends, including *Gods and Fighting Men*, *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, *Kincora*, and *Grania*.]

Writing of his youth, Yeats remarked that, nineteenth-century science having deprived him of "the simple-minded religion of my childhood, I had made a new religion, almost an infallible church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions. . . ." The spirit of this remark can be found hovering over the writings of numerous authors of his time. It is expressed in critical debates over the problem of belief, in laments over the disappearance of common myths, such as those out of which Dante wrote his *Commedia*, and in romantic internalizations of quest motifs. Yeats's statement is personal; he sought to deal with his problem by rediscovering poetic conventions in underground sources—astrology, theosophy, and neo-Platonic symbolism. Lady Gregory's view of her work was in this sense less romantic, less subjective, and more self-consciously purposeful and public. She was, like Yeats, a mythmaker, but her work grew more directly and more consistently than did Yeats's out of the local life she observed and the life she read about in the Irish sagas.

Ireland had become a country nearly bereft of its language and its mythology. Leprechaun and wolf-hound, the popular icons, were no more than the Mickey Mouse and Pluto of America: the symbols of national sentimentality. The intellectual and artistic side of the nationalistic movement had as its task to restore the language and the old tales. Otherwise, cultural models would continue to be those imposed from England, and the Irish would remain similar to the models for the women in Lady Gregory's *The Gaol Gate*, who described themselves as "astray and terrified 'like blind beasts in a bog.'" It has long been recognized that mythology is not purely historical. Indeed, mythology performs a social or cultural function that history cannot perform. History can be only a contrary to myth, not a corrective so much as a means of liberation from a mythology that has become too culturally restrictive and brutalizing. This is the perpetual problem in a sovereign nation, one would think. But Ireland was not free and had not been for centuries. Its traditional cultural forms had been suppressed systematically by massive political power. Ireland did not, then, require the contrariety of history and the emancipatory power of fact and science. Rather, it required a mythology, built out of the fundamental life of the people. Yeats's attacks on rationalism and scientism were also attacks on the English oppressor. His characterization of the Celt as emotionally contrary to the English is really the expression of an ideal image, a mythology that could effect a containment and civilizing of the rational powers. When Lady Gregory defended the Abbey Theatre against "patriotic" attacks, she was also defending the re-creation of an Irish mythology.

Giambattista Vico pointed out long ago that "poetic" knowledge, or mythology, identifies beginnings. Myth,

in Mircea Eliade's sense, constructs a sacred history of the primordial reality of a culture with exemplary models. It provides a means by which these models are ritually reborn in the retelling, which is the traditional function of the poet. Not moral codes, mythologies express the social fabric from which codes are abstracted. By apprehending the myth, as Eliade remarks, one knows the "origin" of things, but not in the temporal sense or in an external or abstract way. One lives *in* a myth; one lives *by* a code.

The real Irish world, shaped by its ancient language and mythology, had been pushed farther and farther from the original "pale" around Dublin to the western regions of the island. Of course, it went underground too, persisting where it did in oral form. No play had been presented in Dublin in Irish until Hyde's *Cusadh an Sugain*. Irish was hardly studied at all until the language revival, and the mythological cycles were denigrated by the professors, whom Lady Gregory takes to task in her preface to *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* and in notes to her *Gods and Fighting Men*. Dr. Atkinson of Trinity College had testified before the Commission of Intermediate Education that the old literature of Ireland was isolated, "almost intolerably low in tone—I do not mean naughty, but low," and lacking in idealism and imagination.

There had been considerable scholarship in the nineteenth century on the saga material, including the work of the pioneer Eugene O'Curry (1796-1862), H. D'Arbois de Jubainville, Kuno Meyer, Whitley Stokes, and Alfred Nutt. Translators preceding Lady Gregory included Standish Hayes O'Grady, whose work *History of Ireland: Heroic Period* (1878) and *History of Ireland: Cuchulain and his Contemporaries* (1880) Yeats said "started us all." Yet O'Grady's work was written in a flowery style of the time and did not catch any recognizably Irish mode of speech. After O'Grady, Lady Gregory was the popularizer of the movement, and she was the first to render Irish mythical history in an Irish idiom. Her *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902) is dedicated to the people of Kiltartan in the style she adopted from them: "I have told the whole story in plain and simple words, in the same way my old nurse Mary Sheridan used to be telling stories from the Irish long ago, and I a child at Roxborough."

The principal Irish mythology is twofold. The one part, which is Lady Gregory's concern in *Gods and Fighting Men* (1904), tells of the coming of the Tuatha de Dan-aan (the people of the goddess Danu) to Ireland, their victories over their predecessors, the Firbolgs and the Fomorians, in two epochal battles, the second of which gained for them full supremacy over the land. It goes on to describe the ultimate defeat of the Tuatha by the Gaels and their subsequent disappearance underground, where they persisted, ghostlike, as those shadowy su-

pernatural figures, the Sidhe (Shee). The coming of the Gaels ends the age of the gods and ushers in that of the heroes, the Fianna, or sons of the heroic figure, Finn, first among whom was Oisín (Usheen), also the last survivor. He returned from a long sojourn in the Country of the Young to find Ireland Christianized, and he lived on to engage in dialogues with St. Patrick.

The other cycle of tales is that of the Red Branch heroes of Ulster, centering on the reign of King Conchubar (Conachoor) and the heroic exploits of Cuchulain (Cuhoolin or Cuhullin). The most celebrated of these stories is the *Tain bo Cuailnge* (cattle raid of Cooley), in which Queen Maeve of Connacht attempts to kidnap a fabulous brown bull from Conchubar's domain, only to be frustrated by the valor of Cuchulain.

Lady Gregory's *Gods and Fighting Men* tells the principal stories of the Tuatha, Finn, and Oisín. Her *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (Mur-hev-na) is a syncretic rendering of the tales of the Ulster heroes, taking the life of Cuchulain as the main thread. This device provides an organizational principle, emphasizes the exploits of an incredibly heroic and lone spirit, and yet does not prevent her from offering a few important interludes in which Cuchulain himself does not figure prominently. One of these is the story of Deirdre, from which Yeats and Synge made famous plays.

In his preface to *Cuchulain* Yeats emphasizes the lyric impulse of the Irish as against the narrative, factual interest of the Danes in order to explain the diffuseness of the story or stories Lady Gregory tells. Actually, though, Lady Gregory's arrangement has brought a considerable order into the mass of her sources. She has also sharpened and clarified the traditional characters and, as Yeats remarked, given to the women of the stories a special attractiveness:

Women indeed, with their lamentations for lovers and husbands and sons, and for fallen rooftrees and lost wealth, give the stories their most beautiful sentences; and, after Cuchulain, we think most of certain great queens—of angry, amorous Maeve, with her long pale face; of Findabair, her daughter, who dies of shame and of pity; of Deirdre who might be some mild modern housewife but for her prophetic wisdom.

Thomas Kinsella, who has recently translated the *Tain*, using not the *Book of Leinster* as his principal source but the earlier *Lebor na hUidre* (*Book of the Dun Cow*) and the *Yellow Book of Lecan*, says of Lady Gregory's work that she, though making "only a paraphrase," gave the "best idea of the Ulster stories." At the same time he regrets that she refined away the "coarse elements" of the stories and rationalized what was originally "monstrous and gigantesque." The bowdlerization Lady Gregory defended to a worried Yeats by insisting that it was slight. She was, I think, correct in this. Her rationalization of the monstrous is more noticeable, and here her explanation is less satisfactory:

I have sometimes tried to give the meaning of a formula that has lost its old meaning. Thus I have exchanged for the grotesque accounts of Cuchulain's distortion—which no doubt merely meant that in time of great strain or anger he had more than human strength—the more simple formula that his appearance changed to the appearance of a god.

Right or wrong, and it reflects, I think, a mistaken view of metaphor, her decision here expresses her artistic temperament. Her own tastes are for the spare and simple. Within the bounds of her own capacity for mythmaking, she is a kind of realist. The fantastic, even in her wonder plays, is never hyperbolic, nor is her expression of its existence flamboyant. Her characters are people, not gods. She is rarely an inventor of metaphorical flights, except in the mouths of certain of her dramatic characters, and such speeches are designed to give the illusion, at least, of common speech, not authorial power or assertion of a personal imagination.

Lady Gregory did not herself employ any of the Cuchulain stories for her plays. No doubt she considered that this was Yeats's territory. A. E., Yeats, and Synge all dramatized the legend of Deirdre. She tended, at least in the beginning of her career, to attempt plays that would fill a void.

Her *Gods and Fighting Men* followed upon *Cuchulain*. Again she consulted the available texts, the works of scholarship, and the people of the West for variants. The stories themselves combine to create a quite different impression, though her techniques remain the same. The tone is nostalgic and emphasizes decline rather than exploit. We are witness first to the descent under the earth of the Tuatha de Danaan and the subsequent wearing away of the Fianna until only aged Oisín remains. It falls on him to take the part of this ancient civilization in its dialogue with the new world, represented by St. Patrick:

OISÍN:

You say that a generous man never goes to the hell of pain; there was not one among the Fianna that was not generous to all.

Ask of God, Patrick, does He remember when the Fianna were alive, or has He seen east or west any man better than themselves in their fighting.

The Fianna used not to be saying treachery; we never had the name of telling lies. By truth and the strength of our hands we came safe out of every battle.

There never sat a priest in a church though you think it sweet to be singing psalms, was better to his word than the Fianna, or more generous than Finn himself.

If my comrades were living to-night, I would take no pleasure in your crooning in the church; as they are not living now, the rough voice of the bells has deafened me.

Later Patrick breaks in:

PATRICK:

Stop your talk, you withered, witless old man; it is my King that made the Heavens, it is He that gives blossom to the trees, it is He made the moon and the sun, the fields and the grass.

OISÍN:

It was not in shaping fields and grass that my king took his delight, but in overthrowing fighting men, and defending countries, and bringing his name into every part.

And:

OISÍN:

I am the last of the Fianna, great Oisín, son of Finn, listening to the voice of bells; it is long the clouds are over me to-night!

Lady Gregory does not sentimentalize these tales, though it would be easy enough to do so. Her firm style retains an appropriate austerity. Yeats's preface praises *Cuchulain* excessively and does not serve Lady Gregory's effort well when it suggests that she has done the job of translation once and for all. Nevertheless, its conclusion reflects the spirit of cultural nationalism in which the work was done: "If we will but tell these stories to our children the Land will begin again to be a Holy Land, as it was before men gave their hearts to Greece and Rome and Judea."

Lady Gregory chose only one theme from *Gods and Fighting Men* for a play. It was the story of Diarmuid and Grania, attempted not very successfully by Yeats and George Moore. There has been some speculation about why Lady Gregory never permitted *Grania* (written 1911) to be played. Lennox Robinson reports that she could not find satisfactory actors; others have suggested that there was something too near self-portraiture in it. She, herself, writes of it in a way that invites speculation:

I think I turned to Grania because so many have written about sad, lovely Deirdre, who when overtaken by sorrow made no good battle at the last. Grania had more power of will, and for good or evil twice took the shaping of her life into her own hands. The riddle she asks us through the ages is, "Why did I, having left great grey-haired Finn for comely Diarmuid, turn back to Finn in the end, when he had consented to Diarmuid's death?" And a question tempts one more than the beaten path of authorised history.

It is partly to deal with this question that Lady Gregory has shaped her action and has deviated from the syncretic version of the story presented in *Gods and Fighting Men*. There the story quite naturally meanders, covering numerous adventures inappropriate to a dramatic

structure. It was necessary, no matter what her theme, to reduce the tales to an essence. In the syncretic version Finn, now past middle age, chooses to take a wife and is impressed by Grania's quickness and wit. No doubt Grania is anxious to marry a man of his eminence, but she thinks him too old and does not care for him. Their initial conversation takes the form of a verbal test:

they talked together for a while, and Finn was putting questions to Grania, for she had the name of being very quick with answers. "What is whiter than snow?" he said. "The truth," said Grania. "What is the best colour?" said Finn. "The colour of childhood," said she. "What is hotter than fire?" "The face of a hospitable man when he sees a stranger coming in, and the house empty." "What has a taste more bitter than poison?" "The reproach of an enemy." "What is best for a champion?" "His doings to be high, and his pride to be low." "What is the best of jewels?" "A knife." "What is sharper than a sword?" "The wit of a woman between two men." "What is quicker than the wind?" said Finn then. "A woman's mind," said Grania. And indeed she was telling no lie when she said that.

This is an important passage because it presents the character of Grania as quick, strong, and willful. In her play, Lady Gregory omits the episode. At its outset Grania is a more naïve and conventionally romantic heroine, even though she does take the "shaping of her life into her own hands" by her advances to Diarmuid. Of course, Lady Gregory writes with the legend in the background. We know that before Finn sought her Grania had turned down many suitors and that she has come to him by choice.

In the legend, when Diarmuid appears, the supernatural love spot on his forehead is accidentally uncovered, and Grania is immediately enchanted. She places him under Druid bonds to protect her from marriage with Finn. A most reluctant Diarmuid accepts the bonds. Eventually, after years of hiding from Finn's relentless search and of Diarmuid's refusing to sleep with her out of loyalty to Finn, a quarrel erupts between them. A visiting Fomorian "from over the western ocean in a curragh" defeats Diarmuid at chess and demands Grania as his trophy: ". . . and he put his arms about her as if to bring her away. And Grania said: 'I am this long time going with the third best man of the Fianna, and he never came as near as that to me!'" Angered and perhaps humiliated, as was Grania's intent, Diarmuid kills the Fomorian, quarrels with Grania, reconciles with her, sleeps with her that night and afterwards. Subsequently, Diarmuid is killed hunting a fabulous boar. Finn has the opportunity by a magic power accorded him to save Diarmuid's life, but jealousy intervenes each time he makes the attempt. After Diarmuid's death Grania long rejects Finn's advances, "but all the same, he went on giving her gentle talk and loving words, till in the end he brought her to his own will."

Una Ellis-Fermor, who thinks that the play loses much that is potentially dramatic in the legend, justly points out that Lady Gregory cannot include all the epic background, which establishes the recessionary theme of the decline of the Fianna, partly represented by Finn's gradual aging. She feels also that without this background Finn may seem only a jealous, absurd old man. She complains that Grania and Diarmuid are conventionalized into a "bewildered girl overpowered by love" and a "chivalrous and protecting man." It is true that something of Grania's force and Finn's clever strength is lost when Lady Gregory does not exploit the possibilities of Finn's riddling questions and Grania's bright answers. At the same time something is gained by pushing Grania's first sight of Diarmuid back into her childhood, thus playing down the supernatural, and treating the occurrence as vaguely remembered. This is more dramatically credible. The emphasis on the love spot will do in the epic, but it cannot carry the full responsibility for the emotions of a character who is consistently given, in Northrop Frye's terms, a "low mimetic" credibility.

Finn's questioning of Grania reveals his fears and jealousy, for he asks her at once whether she has ever been in love. The early experience she mentions—an unknown young man (Diarmuid) separating some fighting hounds below her window and all the time full of gay laughter—seems little enough:

FINN:

Did they not tell you his name?

GRANIA:

I was shy to ask them, and I never saw him again. But my thoughts went with him for a good while, and sometimes he came through my dreams,—Is that now what you would call love?

FINN:

Indeed I think it is little at all you know of it.

Finn cannot yet sense that she has resources of determination in her equal to his capacity for jealousy.

Lady Gregory substitutes a more chivalrous Diarmuid for a grudging, brave one. She also hints strongly that the loyal Diarmuid is immediately attracted to Grania—by his reticence in praising her beauty to Finn, despite Finn's probing, and in his suddenly expressed desire to be sent away. Lady Gregory does not press this point. It is as if she is pulling back from evoking the typical situation of romantic comedy, in which lovers—often at first sight—are blocked from marriage by an elderly fool. The Finn of the play is not the witty, stern riddler of the legend but a man beset by fears and quick to accuse—a man used to power, who feels it waning.