Land Goddesses, Divine Pigs, and Royal Tricksters: Subversive Mythologies and Imperialist
Land Ownership Dispossession in Twentieth Century Irish and American Literature

by

Elizabeth Ricketts

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Susan Mooney, Ph.D.
John Lennon, Ph.D.
Quynh Nhu Le, Ph.D.
Stanley Gontarski, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
March 24th, 2021

Keywords: African American Literature, Drama, Postcolonialism, Land Ownership, Myth

Copyright © 2021, Elizabeth Ricketts
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is the product of true collaboration from an unbelievable support network throughout my career. I’d like to thank Dr. Glenn and Diane Steinberg, two of my English professors from my undergraduate program at the College of New Jersey (I like to joke that I “minored in Steinberg” due to the number of classes that I took between the two of them) who believed in me enough to support my application to graduate programs after I had been out of college for several years. During my master’s program at Marymount University, I received the excellent guidance from Dr. Amy Scott-Douglass, who would eventually direct my thesis, to “make my seminars work for me” and take the plunge headlong into Irish topics in her Shakespeare course through an interpretation of *Troilus and Cressida* as subversive commentary on the Nine Years War between England and Ireland. I also had the pleasure of doing an independent study on Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope with the fantastic Tonya Howe, who deepened my knowledge of the Irish literary canon and helped me create a conference paper that I would eventually present at that hallowed American bastion of Irish Studies, the University of Notre Dame.

I would also like to express my sincerest gratitude towards my wonderful committee members who have guided me from preparing my PhD portfolio to writing my prospectus and now the dissertation itself. Dr. Stanley Gontarski at Florida State University took a chance on an unknown student outside of his university to offer his guidance and immense wealth of knowledge on twentieth century Irish literature to shaping this project from prospectus to final draft of dissertation. I am also indebted to Dr. Quynh Nhu Le, in whose Critical Theory course I
wrote a seminar paper on Brian Friel’s *Making History* that would become one of my first publications. Dr. Le also guided me through the theories of myth and postcolonialism that provided the critical theoretical basis for this dissertation and generated my unique approach, mytho-postcolonial theory. My thanks also go to Dr. John Lennon, whose Publishing an Article course helped to refine the *Making History* paper that I wrote with Dr. Le into the publishable article that served as a major component of my PhD portfolio. With Dr. Lennon, I completed an independent study on the American texts on my reading lists, and his guidance in exploring these texts and the related critical conversations created a strong foundation for the American chapters of my dissertation.

I can’t say enough about the unwavering support and crystal-clear guidance of Dr. Susan Mooney. There were times when Dr. Mooney believed in me far more than I believed in myself. Dr. Mooney encouraged me to stretch myself beyond what I perceived were my capabilities, especially in applying for the Harry and Julian Newman Archival Research Fellowship, which would allow me to travel to archives in Galway, Dublin, and New York City and add crucial insights to this dissertation. Dr. Mooney embodied the perfect balance between empowering me to develop my original ideas and providing crucial input throughout the course of this project. I am so grateful to Dr. Mooney for her mentorship during my time at USF.
DEDICATION

I’m going to do that ever-so-trendy millennial thing and blame my parents for everything. Yes – it is all their fault. This whole graduate school endeavor and my entire professional career all started because I couldn’t sit still in church. My mother used to call me the “whirly girl.” My parents were desperate for solutions that didn’t involve horse tying me to the pew. As avid churchgoers, my parents were horrified with my constant squirming and attempts to bother everyone around me when boredom would set in after approximately 0.02 seconds after Mass began. Besides the giant illustrated book of Bible stories, ironically enough, the only thing that would keep me occupied throughout the entire Mass was the beautiful D’Aulaires’ Book of Greek Myths. I can’t tell you how many times I read that thing, both inside and outside of church. I memorized the stories of the Greek gods, goddesses, heroes, Fates, Titans, wayward mortals, and the entire cast of characters in the Greek mythological universe. I toted that tome around until I had practically memorized it and its pages grew worn and faded. I can still picture some of the beautiful illustrations when I call to mind certain stories and characters.

When I was twelve years old, my grandparents and parents sent my older brother and me on a life-changing trip to Ireland. While I had always grown up with a sense of a truly trans-Atlantic family with Irish and English relatives coming to America for lengthy stays every couple of years, this trip connected me to my Irish heritage and family at just the right point of my life when I was starting to figure out just who I was and who I wanted to be. Even though it would be twenty-two years until I returned to Ireland to present a paper on J.M. Synge at the American Conference for Irish Studies at University College Cork, my interest and passion for
Irish culture, literature, history, and music only grew deeper and inspired my focus on Irish and Irish-American literature in my graduate work.

When I got to high school, it was a foregone conclusion that I would take Latin. My Latin-Mass loving, Wheelock grammar-toting Dad mandated it for all my siblings. Sure, I moaned about it a good deal, especially since I was already taking Spanish and band as electives, meaning that I didn’t have a lunch period and had to scarf down a sandwich in one of my other classes that took place around lunchtime and one of my kindly teachers (usually English) took pity on me. I was absolutely determined to hate Latin because of this. However, due to my amazing Latin teacher, fun times in Latin Club, and great classmates, Latin turned out to be one of my favorite classes in high school. My high school Latin experience culminated in AP Latin in which we read and translated the entire *Aeneid*.

Here’s the part where I proceed to blame my parents for my entire graduate career, especially my dissertation. During my master’s degree, I started honing my focus on Irish literature, thanks to that life-changing trip at twelve years old. In my research for various classes and my eventual master’s thesis, I happened upon some fascinating conjunctions between Irish literature, literary depictions of English colonialism in Ireland, and the classics, particularly the Trojan War. My in-depth knowledge of the *Aeneid* and its function as Roman imperial propaganda fueled my interest in this particular line of inquiry, which has become one of the most important strands of my work: the topic of my master’s thesis, the scholarly foundation for my entire dissertation, the subject of the first chapter of my dissertation, the topic of my master’s thesis, the topic of my most recent publication, and the subject of a future book I hope to write. In addition to this experience with the *Aeneid*, my almost encyclopedia-like familiarity with Greek mythology led me to investigate the ways that authors refashioned myths for subversive
anti-colonial purposes. I turned this lens to twentieth-century Irish and Irish-American literature, an area I was drawn to because visit Ireland that sparked my fascination with Irish cultural heritage and my own experience within an Irish-American extended family.

Thus, besides my growing up in a household with books and literary discussions aplenty, my parents got me into this happy academic predicament where I now find myself. The further implications of all these decisions for the rest of my life could fill their own dissertation. But, in the meantime, this work will be dedicated to them and their unfailing belief in a squirmy whirly girl who needed to be quieted down with books and sometimes pushed in the right direction. Thanks Mom and Dad – it really is all your fault.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ iii

Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 1
  Myth/Ritual Theory and Modern Drama ....................................................................................... 3
  Trans-Atlantic Imperial Contexts: Land Ownership Dispossession in Ireland and America ....... 5
  Mytho-Postcolonial Theoretical Framework ............................................................................... 14
  Mytho-Postcolonial Analysis: Comparative Reading of Land Conceptualization .................... 22
  Chapter Overviews ...................................................................................................................... 24

Chapter One ................................................................................................................................. 29
  Mythology: Destructive Nostalgia or Cultural Preservation? ..................................................... 32
  Translations and Postcolonial Mythological Language ............................................................... 35
  Place, Language, and Myth: The Dinnshenchas Erenn and Translations .................................. 43
  Classical Languages and Homer’s Iliad in Translations: Postcolonial Mythology and the Trojan War in Ireland ..................................................................................................... 52
  Postcolonial Bricolage and Mimicry in the Irish Hedge School: The Classics as Anti-Colonial Resistance ................................................................................................................ 61
  Mimicry and (Anti)Colonial Ideology: The Trojan War as Dissident Resistance ..................... 70
  Conclusion ................................................................................................................................... 77

Chapter Two ................................................................................................................................. 80
  The Sovereignty Goddess Figure in Irish Myth, Literature, and Nationalism: Internalized Patriarchy and Bourgeois Values ....................................................................................... 82
  Imposed Imperial Bourgeois Land Ownership Values in Kathleen ni Houlihan and By the Bog of Cats ........................................................................................................................ 89
  Landed Security and the Sovereignty Goddess Myth in Kathleen ni Houlihan and By the Bog of Cats ............................................................................................................................... 93
  Kathleen ni Houlihan’s and By the Bog of Cats’ Portrayal of Internalized Imperialist and Neocolonial Commodification of Land and Women ..................................................... 116
  Women’s Disenfranchisement Through Embodying Ireland .................................................. 126

Chapter Three ............................................................................................................................... 129
  British Imperialism, Irish Dispossession, and Postcolonial Readings of African American Discrimination ................................................................................................................... 133
  Irish Nationalism and the American Dream: Derivative Imperialist Ideologies ....................... 137
  Literary Similarities Between Juno and the Paycock and A Raisin in the Sun .......................... 143
  Mythical Device: Kathleen ni Houlihan and Nationalism in Juno and the Paycock ............... 149
Prometheus and The American Dream: The Subversive Use of Greek Mythology in *A Raisin in the Sun* .......................................................... 158
The Mythical Device of Demeter and Persephone: Gender and Patriarchy in the American Dream and Irish Nationalism .......................................................... 170
Conclusion ....................................................................................... 182

Chapter Four ...................................................................................... 183
The American Dream and Land Ownership: A Reproduction of Land Ownership Ideology ........................................................................... 189
American Dream, British Dispossession: Land Struggles for Irish-American Immigrants in *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* .................................................................................. 196
Archival Research and *Long Day’s Journey into Night*: A Case Study of the Abbey Theatre Production ........................................................................ 203
Irish Mythology in *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*: Tricksters, Storytellers, and National Heroes ................ 210
Conclusion ....................................................................................... 227

Conclusion ....................................................................................... 229

Works Cited ..................................................................................... 244
ABSTRACT

Land ownership dispossession is a key feature in establishing imperial hegemonies. In the colonial context, limiting access to land concentrates wealth, power, and influence in the hands of a small colonial or neocolonial elite, excluding others from financial independence, accumulation of generational wealth, political representation, and a stable living situation. British imperial activities spanned multiple continents, engaging similar patterns of dispossessing the native population from their land, language, and cultures. In this endeavor, culture and literature in particular, as Edward Said points out in Culture and Imperialism, have been complicit in inculcating imperial ideologies and justifying territorial occupation. As Said states, “the main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and now plans its future – these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative” (23). Certain twentieth century British and American writers, especially modernist and late modernist authors, use mythology to subvert the relationship between imperial hegemony and literature and re-imagine the societal beliefs, artistic justifications, and historical assumptions that provided a foundation for colonial ideologies. The authors in this study represent a transatlantic, multi-ethnic literary engagement with the ongoing consequences of British colonialism as related land ownership dispossession in both the Irish and American contexts. The Irish texts include several Northern Irish works: Brian Friel’s Translations (1980), Marina Carr’s By the Bog of Cats (1990), W.B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory’s Kathleen ni Houlihan
(1902), and Sean O’Casey’s Juno and the Paycock (1924). The American texts include Irish-American author Eugene O’Neill’s Long Day’s Journey into Night (1956) and A Moon for the Misbegotten (1947) and African-American author Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun (1959). The authors reveal the complicity of imperialist land ownership dispossession with imposed patriarchy, capitalist reformation of native economies, materialist attitudes towards labor and possession, and cultural domination of how native people relate to their natural surroundings. My project incorporates postcolonial and feminist analysis, myth theories, archival comparisons, and performance studies in its exploration of land ownership dispossession, imperial hegemonies, and mythologies.
INTRODUCTION

Land ownership dispossession is a key feature in establishing imperial hegemonies. In the colonial context, limiting access to land concentrates wealth, power, and influence in the hands of a small colonial or neocolonial elite, excluding others from financial independence, accumulation of generational wealth, political representation, and a stable living situation. British imperial activities spanned multiple continents, engaging similar patterns of dispossessing the native population from their land, language, and cultures. In this endeavor, culture and literature in particular, as Edward Said points out in *Culture and Imperialism*, have been complicit in inculcating imperial ideologies and justifying territorial occupation. As Said states, “the main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and now plans its future – these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative” (23). Certain twentieth century British and American writers, especially modernist and late modernist authors, use mythology to subvert the relationship between imperial hegemony and literature and re-imagine the societal beliefs, artistic justifications, and historical assumptions that provided a foundation for colonial ideologies. The authors in this study represent a transatlantic, multi-ethnic literary engagement with the ongoing consequences of British colonialism as related land ownership dispossession in both the Irish and American contexts. The Irish texts include several Northern Irish works: Brian Friel’s *Translations* (1980), Marina Carr’s *By the Bog of Cats* (1990), W.B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory’s *Kathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), and Sean O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock* (1924). The American texts include Irish-
American author Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (1956) and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1947) and African-American author Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959). The authors reveal the complicity of imperialist land ownership dispossession with imposed patriarchy, capitalist reformation of native economies, materialist attitudes towards labor and possession, and cultural domination of how native people relate to their natural surroundings. My project incorporates postcolonial and feminist analysis, myth theories, archival comparisons, and performance studies in its exploration of land ownership dispossession, imperial hegemonies, and mythologies.

In these texts, the authors re-fashion myth to portray land ownership dispossession of native Irish, Irish American, and African American people resulting from British imperialism and its various afterlives. The re-imagined myths relate to territorial possession (the Trojan War and its surrounding stories), the fertility of the land (the Irish sovereignty goddess, Prometheus, Demeter and Persephone), the relationship between people and land (the *dinnshenshas*), and caretakers of land and domestic animals (sovereignty goddess, Irish pig and swineherd tales). These works also consider the complicity of national and societal myths, such as Irish nationalism and the American Dream, with adherence to materialist land acquisition values and the ongoing struggles of these dispossessed groups, particularly in promising a better future while failing to reform the conditions fueling class, gender, and racially based oppression. As British imperialism often incorporated various traditional and societal mythologies to justify its necessity, the authors in this study use myth to dismantle colonial hegemonies at their foundations.
Myth/Ritual Theory and Modern Drama

While numerous British and American modernist and late modernist authors across genres, including W.B. Yeats, Mina Loy, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Toni Morrison, and Ralph Ellison, re-make myths to address various social injustices, there is a particular power of myth when embodied in drama, especially in its performative, participatory, and community building functions. While selecting texts for this project, I realized that I had, seemingly accidentally, only chosen dramatic texts for comparative analysis. When considering why I made these choices, especially since I had somehow bypassed the rich body of mythologically inspired twentieth century fiction and poetry, I turned to performance theory for answers. There, I happened upon myth and ritual criticism, which solidified why the dramatic texts had seemed so powerful in their depiction of the authors’ use of myth to dismantle imperialist hegemonies and portray the suffering of dispossessed groups. The myth and ritual theory traces drama back to its ancient origins in ritual, stresses the interdependent relationship between myth and ritual, and contends that myth and rituals must go hand in hand. Ritualist analysis, according to Eric Csapo, “explains the meaning or function of a myth by relating it to a ritual” (145). As Robert Segal states, the myth and ritual theory in its most “uncompromising form…contends that myths and rituals cannot exist without each other” (1). Within literary criticism, myth-ritualists believe that myth becomes literature when separated from ritual (Segal 10).

Rituals, drama, and theater remain the cultural and intellectual foundation for many societal practices and traditions. A brief engagement with modern society reveals the ritualistic, performative, and dramatic nature of a seemingly infinitive number of institutions, significant occasions, and processes. Consider the ritual, repetition, and performance inherent in the legal system, especially the modern courtroom and its many roles such as the judge, jury, plaintiff,
defendant, attorneys, etc. Ritualistic elements also imbue local, state, and national government operations with drama and performativity; consider the byzantine procedural requirements, also performed by “players” in their individual roles, to which legislatures must adhere. Even a visit to the dreaded Department of Motor Vehicles contains (deadening) repetitive elements of ritual, drama, and performance. These all are rooted in ancient myths and dramas. Victor Turner traces “the performative genres of complex, industrial societies, as well as many of their forensic and judicial institutions, the stage and the law court” to “the enduring human social drama” (110). Here, Turner reveals that many human practices remain both ritualized and dramatized due to their performative nature, linking them to dramatic literature and creative performance. Turner places of the roots of theatre in what he terms “social drama1,” which fulfilled various community functions, like ritual. This demonstrates the ritual basis of modern drama. While no longer explicitly tied to myth or ritual, one may argue, drama is repetitive, performative, and ultimately both reflects and prescribes norms of its cultural context, engaging many of the social functions of ritual2. According to William Doty, myth and ritual “complexes” have numerous functions3, and he also stresses the “polyfunctionality” of myth as not all myths and rituals always represent the same functions (55-56). Thus, the myth and ritual theory studies the ways

---

1 Turner states: “For the scientist in me, such social dramas revealed the ‘taxonomic’ relations among actors (their kinship ties, structural positions, social class, political status, and so forth), and their contemporary bonds and oppositions of interest and friendship, their personal network ties, and informal relationships. For the artist in me, the drama revealed individual character, personal style, rhetorical skill, moral and aesthetic differences, and choices proffered and made. Most importantly, it made me aware of the power of symbols in human communication” (104).

2 According to Victor Turner, “Theatre is perhaps the most forceful, active, if you like, genre of cultural performance…no society is without some mode of metacommentary…in the case of theatre, a play a society acts about itself – not only a reading of its experience but an interpretive reenactment of its experience” (Turner 104).

3 Per Doty, these functions of myth and ritual are the following: 1) articulate the symbolic nature of social patterns and relationships, i.e. divine right of kings 2) validate the society, evoke and enforce social conformity 3) complete performative functions – involve community members, bring about social integration, establish social roles 4) educate the community 5) solve personal and social dilemmas (55-56).
that myth and ritual, and its descendent, drama, function together to explain phenomena, enforce societal norms, establish identity, etc.

In their embodiment of myth through drama, the playwrights in this study harness an ancient power at the roots of civilization itself that remains structurally foundational within modern society. By maintaining the ancient tie between myth and ritual through drama, these authors engage the full impact of drama’s societally prescriptive and repetitive performativity. Much like ancient rituals, the authors use theatre to enforce, uphold, and demonstrate recreated myths. The role of the audience in the modern theatre also follows that of participatory ancient rituals. The novel or poem that reimagines myth cannot hope to provide the same impact as drama in its performance of myth, per my application of myth-ritual theory, due to drama’s relationship to the audience, its physical embodiment of narratives, and the inextricable ties between myth and ritual.

**Trans-Atlantic Imperial Contexts: Land Ownership Dispossession in Ireland and America**

While the experience of Irish immigrants to America, Irish people living in Ireland, and African Americans is certainly disparate in many ways, a common thread is land ownership dispossession originating in imperial hegemonies. Imperialism imposed liberal Enlightenment ideas of individual liberty, which developed jointly with capitalism, upon more communal indigenous approaches to land and property relationships. The notion of for-profit individual land ownership supposedly provided opportunities for social mobility and self-determination, counter to feudalism’s concentration of land ownership in the hands of the nobility. However, due to both legal and societal practices, capitalist land ownership systems, especially as imposed by imperialism, largely retained the effects of feudalism’s concentration of wealth and power into the hands of a few elite. Additionally, the complicity of patriarchy and racism with
capitalism and imperialism also continued that of feudal land ownership practices; in both the British and American contexts, land ownership has largely been limited to white men, excluding the lower classes. This, in turn, concentrated social and legal power into the hands of the minority as suffrage and societal participation was largely limited to white male landowners until the early twentieth century.

In both the Irish and American contexts, the notion of land can seem mythical and romantic, especially in the romanticized constructions of the western portions of both countries as “virgin” territory that evokes a sense of wildness and a lifestyle unspoiled by modernization. However, these plays envision people’s relationships to land as determined by actual laws and societal practices, especially for African Americans, that both remove and bestow privileges. The playwrights strip away mythical notions of land and the homestead, leaving the reality that land and property ownership dispossession prevents the characters from full societal participation and both lifetime and generational wealth accumulation. In the plays, the Irish, African Americans, and Irish immigrants who do own land or property still endure ongoing prejudice based on race/ethnicity, religion, colonial subject status, immigration status, and gender.

The playwrights conceptualize land and property ownership through a variety of approaches and consider the range of land ownership philosophies from the perspectives of those dispossessed by imperial hegemonies. These land and property ownership philosophies are established by the social and historical context of each play, which determines the colonial or post/neocolonial status of each dispossessed group. In the Irish context, Brian Friel’s *Translations* and Yeats and Gregory’s *Kathleen ni Houlihan* feature native Irish living under direct British rule in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries whose land relationships can be altered at any time due to colonial endeavors. Friel portrays the indigenous connection to the
land through the historical *dinnshenchas* tradition, which imbues places and land features with complex mythologies through place names. The fictional Baile Beag village dwellers mediate their relationship to the land and its natural rhythms through local mythologies and narratives. Unlike the British Ordnance Survey depicted in the play, the villagers do not consider land as a basis of profit or possession but, rather, express the view shared by numerous indigenous cultures that land must be cherished, revered, and shared. In *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, this indigenous relationship to the land is warped by imposed bourgeois materialist land ownership values. The Gillane family, the play’s subject, displays no sense of the mythologically infused relationship to the land depicted in *Translations*. Rather, the family has internalized colonial landowning standards of for-profit individual land ownership to guarantee social standing and economic security. The family’s eerie visitor, the Poor Old Woman, embodies the ancient sovereignty goddess who represents the land’s fertility and power. This figure aligns with indigenous land attitudes regarding communal caretaking land relationships and invites participation in an anti-imperial, anti-materialist revolution that will both free Ireland from colonial control but also reject imposed colonialist land ownership standards.

Marina Carr’s *By the Bog of Cats*... and Sean O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock* depict Irish people in an independent yet neocolonial Ireland and, in O’Casey’s case, in the crossfire of sparring Irish Civil War factions. In these plays, characters struggle in postcolonial power systems that disenfranchise women, ethnic minorities, and the poor. Carr and O’Casey portray the doubling down upon, rather than rejection of, imposed imperial land ownership values and illustrate the replication of colonial injustices in independent societies that have failed to enact comprehensive anti-imperial reform, especially regarding for-profit land ownership systems. In *By the Bog of Cats*..., protagonist Hester Swane is rejected by the greedy, social climbing, land-
obsessed townspeople due to her status as a woman, single mother, and ethnic minority (Traveller people). Her former lover, Carthage Kilbride, has abandoned her to marry the daughter of the town’s wealthiest landowner and inherit his farm. Driven to the brink from her mistreatment by the townspeople and Carthage, Hester destroys her property and livestock, which she had promised to sign over to Carthage, and kills their daughter. *By the Bog of Cats*...invites the reader to consider the psychological and social damage inherent in land ownership obsession and its resulting prejudices. *Juno and the Paycock* envisions the plight of poor urban tenant dwellers whose daily lives and space are constantly permeated by intrusive neighbors, traumatic events, and the fight to survive. Like *By the Bog of Cats*..., *Juno and the Paycock* considers the device of the inheritance. When the struggling Boyle family stands to inherit a large sum from a relative, pompous family patriarch “Captain” Jack Boyle immediately engages in materialist performativity, buying expensive, gaudy furnishings and clothing on credit and demonstrating snobbery towards the less fortunate. When the inheritance vanishes due to a legal wording error, numerous disasters befall the Boyle family, including the death of their son, Johnny, related to the Irish Civil War and the abandonment of their pregnant daughter, Mary, by her lover, who, incidentally, is responsible for the debacle of the will. In the saga of the Boyle family, O’Casey demonstrates the precarious nature of material security in neocolonial society.

The American playwrights in this study consider the reproduction of imperialist land ownership standards in the American context, especially as related to marginalized groups of Irish-American immigrants and working-class African Americans. Lorraine Hansberry and Eugene O’Neill conceptualize land and property ownership ambitions as harmful to family relationships, contradictory to notions of freedom, and dependent upon perpetuating, rather than ending, cycles of societ al dispossession. Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* features the
African-American Younger family’s struggle with property ownership aspiration, racial
discrimination, internalized patriarchy, lack of employment opportunities, and misguided striving
bourgeois values, especially the American Dream, in segregated 1950s Chicago. Walter
Younger, the family patriarch, is obsessed with the idea of the American Dream. Hansberry
shows that Walter’s singular focus on material accumulation leads to his disastrous choice to
invest a large portion of his father’s life insurance money into a liquor store scheme that
disappears due to his business partner’s betrayal. While the play ends with the family moving
from their cramped apartment into a larger house in a white suburb, the resistance of the white
homeowners’ association foreshadows a difficult life ahead as the Youngers’ property ownership
will not protect them from systemic racism. Eugene O’Neill’s Long Day’s Journey into Night
and A Moon for the Misbegotten outline the early twentieth century saga of the Tyrone family,
Irish American immigrants faced with the choice of suffering with ongoing poverty or
perpetuating the white Anglo-Protestant system of land ownership dispossession against their
fellow poor immigrants. In Long Day’s Journey into Night, miserly landowner James Tyrone,
Sr., deprives his own family of a permanent homestead, adequate healthcare, and spiritual
leadership due to his insistence upon investing his significant income into land speculating
endeavors. His wife, Mary, suffers from a morphine addiction stemming from a difficult
childbirth and his son, Edmund, endures worsening tuberculosis, Tyrone so fears the evictions
and poverty of his own childhood that he replicates the same cruel landowning practices against
his fellow poor immigrants as he and his family endured in Ireland. A Moon for the Misbegotten
aligns scheming and manipulative behavior with materialist land ownership values; tenant farmer
Phil Hogan plots to entrap his landlord, Jim Tyrone, Jr. (also a character in Long Day’s Journey
into Night) in a compromising situation, forcing Jim to marry Phil’s daughter, Josie, and sign
over his farm to the Hogans. In both plays, O’Neill shows how land ownership acquisitiveness prioritizes material security over family relationships, leading to alienation, bitterness, and suffering.

These works represent the origin of historical land and property ownership struggles in both direct colonial occupation and its insidious aftereffects, including neocolonial ideology and rigid nationalism. British imperialism employed land ownership dispossession as a primary tool in colonial Ireland. After the 1603 defeat of Hugh O’Neill’s coalition of Irish lords and the subsequent 1607 “Flight of the Earls” in which O’Neill and most Gaelic landowners fled to the European continent, British Protestant settlers seized and permanently settled their forfeited lands in Northern Ireland. During the potato famines of the 1840s, many Irish people emigrated to escape starvation and eviction under an unfair tenant system, and countless who could not afford to emigrate died of starvation and disease after eviction. Agrarian unrest followed from April 1878-1909, known as the Land War, which sought to better the position of tenant farmers and redistribute land from mostly absentee landlords. Irish immigrants also struggled with land ownership dispossession in the new “land of opportunity.” Due to nativist prejudice and lack of economic opportunities, many Irish-American immigrants participated in westward expansion in hopes of land access, as David Emmons explains in Beyond the American Pale: The Irish in the West, 1845-1910, and worked in wildly dangerous conditions for poverty wages in mines and on the railroad. Americans endured denial of land ownership in addition to systemic racism in employment, education, freedom of movement, etc.

As Jacqueline Jones points out in The Dispossessed: America’s Underclasses from the Civil War to the Present, freed enslaved people “demanded land…to resist a slavish dependence on whites” and unsuccessfully petitioned the government for the right to land abandoned by their
former owners (14). Jones states “the goal of landownership served as the heart of this quest [for autonomy]” (16). In each case, land ownership discrimination denied Irish, Irish Americans, and African Americans opportunities for social status, economic security, accumulation of generational wealth, and participation in the democratic process⁴.

In the case of each group, imperial and neocolonial power structures enforced ongoing land ownership dispossession, warranting a postcolonial theoretical approach. Regarding Ireland, there remains ongoing debate on its status as a former British colony. Postcolonial criticism’s application to Ireland began somewhat later in the 1980s after either complete silence or only passing mentions of Ireland in much of postcolonial discourse. While postcolonial theoretical applications to the Irish situation are now prominent in the field of Irish Studies, omissions continue in non-Irish postcolonial discourse. Ireland’s position in this theoretical conversation is complicated by Northern Ireland’s continued subordinate place in the United Kingdom.

While considerably nuanced, the Irish experience in America is rich for postcolonial theoretical inquiry. Even though Irish immigrants to America arrived mostly after American independence from Great Britain, Irish-Americans, in many cases, experienced discrimination under the same Anglo-Protestant standards and social hierarchies they endured in Great Britain. The largely Catholic Irish came to America with a conflicting worldview largely based on communalism simply incongruent with the predominant American emphasis on individuality and self-reliance.⁵ In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Irish Americans also endured pejorative

---

⁴ It was not until 1856 in the United States that the land ownership voting requirement was removed, although it would be a number of decades until African and Americans and women could legally vote (Engerman and Sokoloff 35). The 1918 Representation of the People Act removed full property restrictions for suffrage in the United Kingdom, but women could not vote until 1928 (Dawson 370).

⁵ In Beyond the American Pale: The Irish in the West 1845-1910, David Emmons, while acknowledging that his is a contrarian opinion, nevertheless argues that “true American republicanism was based on Protestantism,” and as such, “…the American response to Irish Catholics was almost a mirror image of what had occurred in Britain” because “both societies were based on a self-conscious Protestantism and on the aggressive anti-Catholicism that was central to it” (6). In her dissertation Regular Wild Irish: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in Irish
racialization with origins in centuries of British colonial ideology that considered the Irish racially inferior. As Sarah Heinz contends, “the Irish have always been seen as the darker race compared with their English colonizers or Americans of Anglo-Saxon ancestry” (82).

The trans-Atlantic slave trade was a key component of British imperialism and the development of America, fostering the accumulation of wealth and land ownership for British merchants and American slave owners. The British slave trade encompassed a vast network of occupied lands, routes of enslaved people, and trading partners between Africa, Europe, and the Americas. The arrival of the first enslaved people in North America in 1619 began centuries of brutality and ongoing dispossession for African Americans. Enslaved Africans were forcefully abducted from multiple regions in Africa, transported in inhumane conditions, displaced from their communities, families, languages, and cultures, and sold as property in the Americas to create wealth for plantation owners and merchants. Prosperity and land ownership security in Britain depended upon the fruits of the labor of enslaved people on overseas plantations. Upon

\textit{American Fiction}, Bridget M. Chapman points out the “unstable and contradictory attitudes towards European immigrant groups whose white legal status was subject to repeated questioning in social and cultural contexts throughout [the late nineteenth and early twentieth century]” (xiv).

6 Spenser’s \textit{View of the Present State of Ireland} outlined the foundation of British racialization of Irish people as savage, mongrels, and inferior to the “pure” English race. The character Irenius in \textit{View} characterizes the Irish race as mongrels without “pedigree,” resulting from the mixings of various peoples who conquered Ireland and concludes that it is “impossible to affirm” the exact national heritage of the Irish (39). Irenius asserts that Ireland was “not of one nation…peopled as it is, but of sundry people of different conditions and manners (Spenser 37). The first people, according to Irenius, who inhabited Ireland were the Scythians who “overflowed all Christendom,” establishing the un-Christian, barbaric origin of the Irish people (Spenser 38). Legends about the Scythians often described their uncivilized ways, even accusing them of cannibalism and human sacrifice (Murphy 67). To further complicate Ireland’s national heritage, Irenius describes a subsequent invasion of Ireland by “another nation coming out of Spain” of decidedly dubious origin (Spenser 39). Eudoxus also mentions other “impeopling(s)” of the island by the Gauls, Britons, and Saxons, adding other nations to the Irish “mix” and further complicating their bloodline (Spenser 47). Irenius declares that the “last and greatest” of such invasions is by the English, solidifying English cultural superiority (Spenser 47). Here, the conscious creation of Ireland’s mongrel bloodline is apparent as Spenser conjectures the origins of the Irish as a mixing of various and several supposedly barbaric peoples. For centuries, the English would contrast Irish racial inferiority with their own supposed Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic racial purity and superiority (MacDougall 8).

7 British prosperity “at home” resulting from the slave trade appears throughout nineteenth and twentieth century literature. As part of his argument in \textit{Culture and Imperialism} that literature must be understood within an explicitly imperial framework. Said points to Jane Austen’s \textit{Mansfield Park}, which depicts an estate whose beauty
gaining its independence from Britain, America refused an opportunity to forge an economy
independent of slavery. Instead, even without British colonial control, the new American nation
perpetuated imposed imperial systems of slavery and settler colonialism on Native American
land. After slavery was abolished, Jim Crow laws, de facto segregation, and systemic racism
continued to oppress African Americans, blocking them from education, land ownership,
generational wealth accumulation, and equal legal protections.

In this way, the rise of the American nation itself, especially its economic and territorial
expansion, relied upon both slavery and the continued dispossession of the native population, as
did the British imperial system, as Lisa Lowe contends in *The Intimacies of Four Continents*
(23). Not only did the American nation depend upon these systems, British and American
national ideologies of freedom and individual rights (for white men) developed in tandem (and
opposition) to them. Lowe argues that the connections between the continents of Asia, Africa,
Europe, and the Americas are key to understanding not only nineteenth century European
colonialism but also the development of nineteenth century European liberal thought that would
influence American individualism. Lowe contends that the European (and later American) liberal
notions of freedom, morality, and the rights of man were constructed against the flow of laborers
between Asia, in the form of Chinese “coolie” workers, and the North Atlantic slave trade. She
explains that European ideals, which partly became American ones, were constructed as a direct
result and in direct contradiction to their colonial activities\(^8\). Other postcolonial theorists have
argued that, like the creation of America through misguided universalizing Enlightenment

---

and productivity depends on the family’s slave plantation in Antigua, tying domestic order and status to English
dominance abroad (76).

\(^8\) Lisa Lowe argues that “liberal philosophy, culture, economics, and government have been commensurate
with, and deeply implicated in, colonialism, slavery, capitalism, and empire” and that nineteenth-century liberal
ideas of free trade depended upon Britain’s practices of slavery, direct colonial rule, and governance based upon
economic dominance” (22).
thought and concurrent colonial activities, imperialism built Europe itself. Franz Fanon has called European opulence “literally scandalous” as it “has been founded on slavery” and other imperial systems (101). Ania Loomba calls Europe a creation of the Third World as European political and economic systems relied upon economic and territorial dominance overseas, following the model of Enlightenment linear progress of ruthless capitalism and early globalization. This powerful confluence led to the creation of Europe and America as entities according to Loomba, Fanon, and Lowe. Thus, slavery, capitalism, and liberal thought are inextricably intertwined, embedded in the very foundations of European and American society.

**Mytho-Postcolonial Theoretical Framework**

Building upon my analysis of British and its legacy as the foundation of land ownership dispossession in the Irish and American contexts, the main theoretical framework in this project will be a mytho-postcolonial analysis. This approach adds to previous scholarship by incorporating myth, postcolonial, and feminist theories in its consideration of myth as a key tool in dismantling imperial, neocolonial, and nationalist ideologies. The foundational notion of a mytho-postcolonial approach is that both myth and imperialism are totalizing systems that contain and assign societal structures, natural laws, participants, and ideologies that cannot be separated and examined as single strands. Myth, like imperialism, represents a system of interconnected and interdependent parts. Mythological figures and narratives do not operate alone; rather, a mythological reference recalls an entire universe of interrelated participants and stories, all existing within a complete structure consisting of unique own natural, spiritual, and moral laws. Both mythology and imperialism control behaviors through reward and punishment, assign pre-determined societal roles for individuals based on a codified “natural” order and the
notion of fate, justify and explain natural and societal phenomena, and provide a totalizing structure that explains all actions, events, and outcomes.

The modernist and late modernist authors in this dissertation engage with myths in an era of mythological revision and re-invention, using these re-imagined myths to participate in a nuanced process of dismantling colonial ideologies at their core. For these authors, myth does not represent a nostalgic desire to return to a bygone era, a retroactive attempt to resurrect an authentic cultural core, which postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha would contend was never present in the first place, or support rigid nationalism. Rather, these authors allow their modifications of myth to address societal roles, gender, colonial/postcolonial hegemonies, and race in a complex manner. Myth criticism recognizes that mythology is the origin and foundation of many cultural forms. Northrop Frye identifies mythos, or narrative, following Aristotle’s definition, as the primary component of literature, claiming that “myth is and always has been an integral element of literature, the interest of poets in myth and mythology having been remarkable and constant since Homer’s time” (587-588). As such, myth has been an integral component of diverse civilizations, especially through literary and artistic expression. Myths provide captivating stories and characters that provide either examples or warnings. Myths perform nation and/or society building functions, especially to either reinforce or resist the creation and maintenance of power hierarchies, structural imbalances based upon class, race, gender, sexuality, etc., and restrictive ideologies.

---

9 According to William Doty, “Myth is not unsophisticated science but sophisticated poetic enunciation of meaning and significance” (Doty 61).

10 Frye goes on to explain, “Myth thus provides the main outlines and the circumference of a verbal universe which is later occupied by literature as well. Literature is more flexible than myth, and fills up this universe more completely: a poet or novelist may work in areas of human life apparently remote from the shadowy gods and gigantic story-outlines of mythology. But in all cultures mythology merges insensibly into, and with, literature. The Odyssey is to us a work of literature, but its early place in the literary tradition, the importance of gods in its action, and its influence on the later religious thought of Greece, are all features common to literature proper and to mythology, and indicate that the difference between them is more chronological than structural” (Frye 600).
The selected playwrights in this dissertation confront deep social injustices through *mythos* and harness myths’ ancient power. In remaking myths, these twentieth century authors incorporate the foundational stories of civilization to dismantle its accompanying societal injustices, per William Doty’s emphasis on “the importance of reflecting on the traditional myths and rituals and to the dangers of ignoring the big stories” (19) in *Mythography: the Study of Myths and Rituals*. Clarifying that he is not “calling for a new primitivism,” which is similar to my analysis, Doty emphasizes “the dangers of letting the dangerous and false mythical stories, such as the Nazi myth, racist myths, and the like, obtain dominance…because we have not given proper and sustained attention to the foundational mythic stories that have set us into motion and sustained us for generations” (19). Doty’s analysis is particularly salient at this very moment with the rise of far-right ideologies all over the world and particularly the United States; a lack of understanding of myth’s structure and function can engender dangerous yet seductive ideologies. Owing to myths’ magical and larger-than-life qualities, they can have an unassailable, pervasively persuasive hold upon the imagination. Their lack of a determinate origin makes their influence diffuse and permeable throughout a society’s consciousness.

Broadly, myths are legendary stories concerning events or people, with or without a basis in fact, that explain aspects of life, nature, and society. In this study, I separate myth into the (loose) categories of traditional, national, and societal. Traditional myths portray supernatural beings and events and are mostly associated with specific cultural traditions and religious beliefs, such as the tales of the Greek pantheon deployed in so much of the Western literary canon.11

11 This definition is based in myth criticism. In *Theories of Mythology*, Eric Csapo writes that myths are usually sacred; and they are often associated with theology and ritual. Their main characters are not usually human beings, but they often have human attributes; they are animals, deities, or culture heroes, whose actions are set in an earlier world, such as the sky or underworld…legends are more often secular than sacred, and their principal characters are human” (4).
Importantly, traditional myths providing structuring principles for all aspects of the world, including natural laws, explanations for natural phenomena, societal roles, behavioral codes, reward and punishment, and the relationships of individuals and groups to others, their surroundings, and their very purpose in life.

National myths inspire loyalty and unity, confer identity, and shape collective national values; they are often, but not always, based on historical figures and events. Through repetitive deployment in society, they become master narratives which provide foundations for national beliefs and pride. As Jan Ifversen states, “myth is a discourse that is activated in situations where a community faces catastrophe” and that mythical “master narratives…confer identity” upon a national community (452, 455). In this way, national myths are like traditional myths in their codification of identity, relationships, and communities. While seeming to unify based on national identity, national mythologies are often built upon oppression of the most vulnerable in society. For example, the American national mythologies of Manifest Destiny, the frontier myth, and the myth of American exceptionalism relied upon the dispossession and genocide of Native Americans and labor by enslaved Africans. In the Irish context, the national myth that grew around Hugh O’Neill, the Earl of Tyrone, performed systematic erasure of O’Neill’s complicated identity and vacillating loyalties to create a monolithic portrayal of a Gaelic, Catholic warrior hero complicit in exclusively rigid nationalist identity codification.

Societal myths reinforce cultural and societal values and maintain the social order, following traditional myths in their systematization of societal roles and explanation of social phenomena. They are often related to, work in tandem with, and provide ideological foundation for national myths. They create unrealistic ideals only attainable by a small number within a society yet hold the supposed promise of collective liberation. For example, the myth of the
American Dream has often been deployed to anesthetize the frustrations of working-class Americans for whom that dream remains out of reach, especially for African Americans, as the American Dream elides structural racism by emphasizing individual determination.

Traditional, national, and societal myths are not mutually exclusive. For example, the personification of the Irish nation as female originated from the traditional ancient Irish sovereignty goddess myth, became an Irish national myth for the nationalist cause during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and later transformed into a societal myth of women’s function as the backbone of the Irish family. Also, as societal and national myths create unity around a specific set of values and/or collective identification, they can seem incontrovertible; to question such foundational myths is to question entire systems of belief and reference. While the American Dream functions as a societal myth, it also is used to codify a specifically “American” national belief system increasingly required for consideration as a patriot. In recent months, any perceived criticism of the American Dream, particularly discussion of systemic racism and patriarchy, was deemed “un-American” by the Trump Administration.¹²

Like mythology, imperialism is a system that contains its own morals, values, “natural” order, and explanation for phenomena, both natural and societal. Postcolonial theory, especially its feminist applications, reveals imperialism and nationalism as totalizing systems of interdependent parts that assign roles and values for all participants. Mytho-postcolonialism specifically examines mythical systems harnessed against imperial systems. Imperialism is

¹² On September 22, 2020, President Donald Trump issued the “Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping” “to promote unity in the Federal workforce” by eliminating “offensive and anti-American race and sex stereotyping and scapegoating.” The executive order decries the “pernicious and false belief that America is an irredeemably racist and sexist country,” deeming the recognition of systemic racism and gender bias as “a destructive ideology,” instead supposedly promoting “the inherent and equal dignity of every person as an individual.” This executive order bans diversity trainings in federal offices and for federal contractors that teach about systemic racism and do not uphold the notion that all Americans can achieve success or failure in a color-blind meritocracy, thus codifying the American Dream as the required ideology for all federal employee trainings.
bolstered by the interconnection between its efforts to establish the inferiority of the subaltern, enforce the superiority of the conqueror, and impose standards of patriarchy, capitalism, and racism upon a displaced and/or subdued indigenous population. Especially important in this assessment is postcolonial theory’s attention to the intertwining of culture and imperialism. Numerous scholars, including Edward Said, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, Lisa Lowe, Franz Fanon, Ania Loomba, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Eoin Flannery have argued that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century liberal Enlightenment thought’s emphasis on narratives of universalism and linear forward progress reinforced imperialist systems. Postcolonial theory explores how imperialism promotes essentializing ideologies that cast the colonized as ‘naturally’ inferior; as Edward Said establishes in *Orientalism*, the “civilized” conqueror’s success depends on creating a colonial “other” who is racially, culturally, and religiously inferior. Of further importance to a mytho-postcolonial analysis is postcolonial theory’s establishment of the interworking relationship between language, discourse, imperialism, and land-based oppression. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, language is one of the main features and weapons of colonial oppression, and the “pure” imposed imperial mother tongue makes all variants of itself into “impunities” (7). Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s groundbreaking *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* demonstrates the relationship of language to imperialism in its examination of how language emblematizes both colonial oppression and anti-imperial struggle, showing the interconnectedness between

---

13 Edward Said contends that while liberal anti-colonialists often argued for humanity in the treatment of colonists and enslaved people, they did not usually dispute the “fundamental superiority of western Man or…the white race” (241).

14 This process of “Othering” is apparent in the work of English national poet and early colonial civil servant in Ireland Edmund Spenser. He infamously outlines the basis of British imperial ideology in Ireland, which also served as a model for its future colonial activities, in *View of the Present State of Ireland*, which establishes the Ireland as bestial cannibals of inscrutable racial origin who, in remaining too recalcitrant to the civilizing effects of English common law, can only be subdued through violence and the thorough destruction of their religion, culture, and language.
language and imperialism. Linguistic dominance establishes the colonial “other’s” inferiority and justifies the theft of their lands, customs, and culture.

Postcolonial theory also outlines the danger of nationalism and its derivation from imperialism as part of a totalizing system. Numerous postcolonial theorists have warned that nationalism can lead to dangerously restrictive ideologies and misguided nostalgia for an ultimately false pre-colonial “pure” cultural ideal while simultaneously failing to liberate the most vulnerable members of society. Nationalism imitates imposed imperialist standards and ignores the need for complete economic and societal reform that elevates the lowest classes (e.g. Fanon, Said, Kearney, Graham, Bhabha, Chatterjee, etc). In addition to warnings against calcification of identities and ideologies through excessive nationalism, postcolonial critics assail nationalism as an imposed construction alien to indigenous value systems. Nationalism’s

---

15 Wa Thiong’o argues that language is a key component of imperial domination, observing that the physical, “visibly brutal” violence of the battlefield of colonialism was followed by the psychological and “visibly gentle” violence of the classroom (9, 15). Physical control by armies and governments is supplemented by mental control, achieved by two aspects of the same process: the destruction or deliberate denigration of culture and the conscious elevation of the colonizer’s language (wa Thiong’o 16). The use of the colonizer’s language in school alienates native children from their local social environments and conditions them to understand their place in the world through imperialism’s imposed language and culture (wa Thiong’o 17).

16 Franz Fanon cautions that a unifying national consciousness can lead to retrogression to tribalism, especially through religious boundaries and xenophobia and outlines the dangerous progression from “nationalism…to ultra-nationalism, to chauvinism, and finally to racism” (Fanon 156-158). Insurgent leaders of the colony unify subjugated peoples through ultimately divisive rhetoric characterized by what Fanon terms a “racism of defense” which stokes fears of the reestablishment of foreign powers (160). In Culture and Society, Edward Said echoes Fanon, warning that colonial nationalist consciousness can lead to “frozen rigidity” (214). Homi Bhabha expands upon both Said’s and Fanon’s analysis in his consideration of nationalist discourse through the concepts of ambivalence and ambiguity. Bhabha argues that the entire concept of a national culture is, in fact, a “national performance” rather than a unified force and that national discourse itself performs a “vacillation of ideology…sliding ambivalently from one enunciatory position to another” (Bhabha 147). In his book Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse, Partha Chatterjee warns that while nationalism may attempt to actualize liberty for oppressed people, it can also lead to chauvinism, xenophobia, and justified violence and tyranny. Ashcroft, Gareth, and Tiffin point to nationalists’ problematic desire to recover an “essential cultural purity” that ignores the lived reality of the experience of the colonized, excluding notions of identity that do not concur with nationalism’s rigid vision (41). Dipesh Chakrabarty bemoans the “inherently polemical” nature of colonial nationalist ideology which seems to unite subjugated peoples but polarizes a postcolonial population in doing so (40).

17 Rather than engage native intellectual forms, colonial nationalism often adopts outwardly imposed metrics by which colonized peoples must prove their deservedness of independence. Postcolonial theorists argue that before imperialism, colonized peoples lacked the highly individualistic, linear, Enlightenment-based ideologies essential to nationalist thinking. Fanon criticizes nationalist parties for imitating the methods of Western political
imposed Western hierarchies also cause native cultural practices to be rejected as “backward,” as in Partha Chatterjee’s assessment of nationalism as a “European export” in which simultaneously occur the ambivalent rejection of the alien intruder who still must be “imitated and surpassed by his own standards” and, in the name of modernity, the rejection of ancestral ways deemed “obstacles to progress but cherished as marks of identity” (7). In postcolonial assessments of nationalism, scholars also discuss the phenomenon of the nationalist bourgeois, a concept first made salient by Fanon, in which a new nationalist regime perpetuates colonial abuses and employs capitalist imperialist hegemony to maintain its own power. This is particularly relevant to this study’s attention of the perpetuation of imperial systems in postcolonial societies, particularly Ireland and America.

Within postcolonial theory, there has been a staggering lack of attention to women’s concerns and lack of female representation, both authors and theorists. This dearth mirrors a parties in ignoring the rural masses in favor of city-dwelling, educated colonial elites in nationalist politics (111). In doing so, nationalists reinforce the same class-based system imposed by imperialists’ restructuring of native economies. Additionally, Fanon argues that nationalism’s attempt to reclaim unifying native cultural expressions conforms to colonial frameworks by reinforcing imperialist standards in which the colonized must first justify their humanity and right to independence (Fanon 244).

18 Chatterjee argues that nationalism’s claim to universal values and the idea of the autonomous identity of a national culture are Western European Enlightenment values rarely congruent with native cultures seeking liberation (38). Dipesh Chakrabarty focuses on the doctrine of individual liberty that so often bolsters nationalist ideology. Chakrabarty points to the Indian constitution’s appropriation of the “classically liberal [Western European Enlightenment] definition of citizenship,” a philosophy that simply did not exist in India before British rule but was harnessed by nationalist discourse in the interest of the nation (33).

19 In exploring the trajectory of anti-colonial resistance and liberation, Fanon explains the rise of a bourgeois class that fills the former colonizer’s power vacuum and maintains power through a rigid, xenophobic nationalism. The eventual power shift does not amend abusive imperialist systems. Rather, decolonization often bequeaths the role of exploiter upon the nationalist bourgeois of the newly liberated nation as independence is rarely accompanied by the restructuring of the imperial capitalist economy and the empowerment of the masses. The newly landed and monied bourgeois refuses to take risk for the economy and liberate the rural masses that have already been excluded from the nationalist movement (Fanon 155).

20 Partha Chatterjee connects this pattern with nationalist bourgeois attempts to achieve modernity in the name of nationalist economic and social development, which exclude the common people, accept the claim to universality of a “modern” framework of knowledge, and assert the autonomous identity of a national culture dependent on the maintenance of nationalist bourgeois hegemony (11). Ngugi wa Thiong’o echoes Fanon’s contention that a “rapid step must be taken from national consciousness to political and social consciousness” that completely rejects the capitalist domination of imperial economic structuring for a country to avoid regression, focusing on the liberation of the common people (2). Wa Thiong’o contends that while imperialism in Africa is maintained by the international bourgeois class, the resistance tradition is maintained by the working people (2).
failure to recognize patriarchy’s complicity with imperialism’s enforced capitalism, imposition of racial stereotypes, and reinforcement of colonial and neocolonial hegemonies. A mytho-postcolonial critical approach considers imposed patriarchy as a key imperial tool, especially in the prescription of restrictive Westernized gender binaries onto indigenous societies, that is inseparable from colonial racial, linguistic, religious, and economic oppression. In particular, the works in this study show the interconnection between capitalism, patriarchy, and land ownership materialism through the exploitation of women in practices such as marriage exchanges and restriction of women to the domestic sphere. Additionally, anti-imperialist nationalism often adopts extreme patriarchy in its misguided attempts to recover a “pure” pre-colonial culture. Just as myth criticism must consider how mythological systems and ideologies depict and enforce gendered oppression as an integral structuring principle of the mythical universe, mytho-postcolonial analysis must also recognize patriarchy’s key role in upholding and reshaping colonial and neocolonial societies. A postcolonial feminist reading of women’s place in modern Ireland, for example, emphasizes women’s ongoing marginalization on the gendered, class, ethnic, and religious basis discussed by Sa’ar, especially in challenging the notion that women benefit equally from modernization. This analytical lens is also fruitful within the American context in showing the American Dream’s failure that the American Dream liberate women, especially when considering the American Dream as derivative from imposed colonial ideology of individualism, emphasis on work ethic, and Enlightenment-based forward progress narratives.

**Mytho-Postcolonial Analysis: Comparative Reading of Land Conceptualization**

A mytho-postcolonial comparative reading of Brian Friel’s *Translations*, W.B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory’s *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, Marina Carr’s *By the Bog of Cats*, Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, and Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A
*Moon for the Misbegotten* considers how the playwrights re-imagine various myths related to land, its fertility, control, and possession to reveal imperial ideology’s imposition of capitalism, bourgeois values, patriarchy, and the depreciation of native culture. In these works, both mythology and imperialism represent structures with interdependent ordering principles that assign a role, function or specific outcome to all individuals, structures, and natural phenomena.

In each of the plays, the authors choose land-based mythologies to portray land and property dispossession originating from imposed imperialist hegemonies. In the colonial context of *Translations* and *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, the relationships of the native Irish to their land are facilitated through direct British territorial occupation. In the case of *Translations*, the British mapping project to anglicize Gaelic place names alienates the Baile Beag villagers from their land and counters the tradition of the *dinnshenchas* that imbues local landforms with complex mythologies. The villagers harness Trojan War mythology, itself based on territory and possession, in their resistance to the new map. In *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, rural farmers seeking financial independence through land ownership must face the harsh reality that only independence will provide them the security they seek. The Poor Old Woman, who embodies a revised sovereignty goddess figure, associated with the land and its fertility, visits the family to call for a revolution that rejects imposed colonial land ownership materialism. In the postcolonial societies of *Juno and the Paycock, By the Bog of Cats*..., and *A Raisin in the Sun*, neocolonial power structures of patriarchy, racism, and capitalism contribute to ongoing oppression of native Irish people and African Americans through property ownership dispossession. In these plays, O’Casey, Carr, and Hansberry invoke the mythologies of the sovereignty goddess figure and Demeter and Persephone, which are directly related to feminine embodiments of the land, its fertility, and control, to demonstrate the independent nations’ lack of anti-colonial societal
reform. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry re-fashions the myth of Prometheus, the bringer of fire who allowed humans to learn agriculture and communal living practices, to criticize the American Dream. Finally, in *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, Eugene O’Neill calls upon traditional mythological Irish pig and swineherd figures heavily associated with the land and its caretaking to reveal that land-based acquisitiveness, based on the American Dream, will not allow poor Irish Catholic immigrants to enter the middle class. Using these trickster figures, O’Neill questions the strength of the white Anglo-Protestant capitalist hegemony and reveals its derivation from imposed British imperial hegemonies to show that land ownership materialism will only lead to material, spiritual, and emotional affliction for its pursuers.

**Chapter Overviews**

Chapter One argues that land and property dispossession are intertwined with the loss of the Irish language. In *Translations*, local mythologies, inextricably tied to the land through place names, perform anti-imperial resistance and reveal the complex relationship between language, culture, and land. Additionally, Friel revises Trojan War mythology to undo the ideological foundations of British imperialism and territorial occupation in Ireland, as the Trojan War is a British national myth integral to the establishment and expansion of the British Empire. In the field of Irish Studies, the exploration of Irish adaptations of Greek themes and works, especially tragedies, is prominent, but specific attention to the Trojan War myth as a particularly subversive form of anti-colonial expression in modern and contemporary Irish literature is lacking. Many Renaissance scholars have noted that the English harnessed Trojan War myths to justify their colonial activities during the reign of Elizabeth I, but this connection is currently under-explored in approaches to today’s literature. Friel demonstrates how the loss of language through
imperialism dispossesses the local people from their land, turning them into exiles in their own country, and incorporates Trojan War mythology as subversive anti-imperial commentary.

Chapter Two contends that the plays *Kathleen ni Houlihan* by W.B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory and *By the Bog of Cats* by Marina Carr create modified sovereignty goddess figures to reveal that the feminine gendering of land in Ireland and its accompanying adherence to bourgeois values of capitalism and land ownership, largely based on a system of bartering women as material objects, reflect imperialist hegemony. Both playwrights incorporate the relationship between the ancient Irish myth of the sovereignty goddess and its subsequent appropriation in establishing pejorative roles for women in Irish society societal pressures to acquire land and property as a male-dominated, capitalist system in neocolonial Ireland. The playwrights’ re-fashioning the sovereignty goddess figure demonstrates the intertwining of patriarchy and imperialism, especially in masculine acquisitiveness regarding land ownership. This chapter contributes to an ongoing reclamation of women within the Irish theatre tradition that centralizes Irish women dramatists rather than tokenizing them. Scholarship on these playwrights has noted the connections between Lady Gregory and Marina Carr within the context of women’s representation within the Irish theatre and their mythological significance, especially regarding Greek myth, and how Gregory and Carr adapt myths to address issues of gender, nation, and literature.21 Wider scholarship and commentary on the feminine gendering of

---

21 In her scholarship, Melissa Sihra explores Irish drama by and about women and has focused specifically on Carr and Gregory, especially their use of myth and representations of female figures. Sihra’s chapter “Greek Myth, Irish Reality: Marina Carr’s *By the Bog of Cats*” in the 2005 collection *Rebel Women: Staging Ancient Greek Drama Today* treats the appropriation of the Medea in Carr’s protagonist Hester Swane. Sihra’s introduction “Figures at the Window,” which took its name from the Old Woman in Gregory and Yeats’s *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, in the 2007 collection *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation* explores the depiction of women in Irish theatre. Additionally, Sihra’s most recent monograph, the 2018 *Marina Carr: Pastures of the Unknown*, traces much of Carr’s work to the influence of Lady Gregory. The notions of gender, identity, and mythology within Lady Gregory’s (and other Abbey Theatre/Irish Revival works) and Marina Carr’s works receive a great deal of wider critical attention as well as Sihra’s scholarship. In her 2008 book *Modern Irish Theatre*, Mary Trotter examines Greek mythology in *By the Bog of Cats*, noting not the much-explored Medea connection but also
Ireland within Irish nationalism and the position of Irish women in society as related to the sovereignty goddess myth also informs this project.22

Chapter Three argues that Sean O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock* and Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* revise the traditional myths of Prometheus and Demeter and Persephone to engage with property and class-based dispossession in urban settings using traditional myths and reveal that both the American Dream and Irish nationalism fail to liberate the most vulnerable by maintaining the imperialist social order. While these plays may seem disparate in their settings, protagonists, and historical contexts, their structural and thematic similarities, particularly in their approaches to the plight of poor city tenants, the family as the drama’s subject, long-suffering female characters, and treatments of social mythologies of location and property ownership, merit scholarly attention. This chapter will demonstrate that the comparison between these works was first established by Lorraine Hansberry herself and that Hansberry’s affinity for O’Casey is not unique among African-American writers and African-American theater. African American playwrights, directors, and stage troupes in the United States dedicated to social change and awareness of black life found and established meaningful

---

22 Numerous books, including Rosalind Clark’s *The Great Queens: Irish Goddesses from the Morrigan to Cathleen ni Houlihan*, Miranda Aldhouse-Green’s *The Celtic Myths: A Guide to the Ancient Gods and Legends*, and Birgit Breninger’s *Feminist Perspectives on Cultural and Religious Identities: Rewriting Mary Magdalene, Mother Ireland, and Cú Chulainn of Ulster*, have explored the ancient sovereignty goddess myth and its role in Irish society, literature, and history.
artistic connections between their themes and subjects and the works of Sean O’Casey, particularly in their attention to the experience of oppressed groups and the inability of current social conditions to address these concerns. This seems to be a largely underdeveloped critical focus in the scholarship of both plays. Peter L. Hays’s 1972 article represents the single (yet brief) comparative analysis of Juno and the Paycock and A Raisin in the Sun. The chapter analyzes the re-fashioning of traditional Greek myths for subversive purposes, the national and societal myths operating within the plays, the gendered constructions of family patriarchs and matriarchs, and the ultimate failure of promises of property ownership and a better life to improve upon the characters’ lived experiences.

Chapter Four examines the use of traditional Irish pig and swineherd mythology and the mythologized Irish national hero Hugh O’Neill in Eugene O’Neill’s Long Day’s Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten to show the societal myth of the American Dream as related to land ownership and inheritance. Through his Irish Catholic immigrant characters, O’Neill depicts the reproduction of British colonial ideology in their relationship to land as both landlords and tenants, especially in their beliefs (and ensuing consequences) that land will bring social and economic security. In both plays, O’Neill presents troubled landlords in the forms of protagonists Jamie Tyrone and James Tyrone, Sr. Despite their personal experience, especially James Tyrone, Sr., with unscrupulous landlords and the hardships of eviction, both men internalize oppressive landholding practices and seek to improve their own situations at the expense of their own community and to the detriment of their family and personal relationships.

In humorous confrontations between poor Irish-American pig farmers and wealthy “Yankee” Anglicized landlord figures in both plays, O’Neill harnesses traditional Irish mythologies that feature royal and divinely favored pigs and swineherds and embodies the characteristics of the
national Irish hero, Hugh O’Neill, to dismantle land-ownership and social class hierarchies that reflect similar dispossession of native Irish people by absentee British Protestant landlords.
CHAPTER ONE

“‘Two Young Gallants with Pikes Across Their Shoulders and the Aeneid in their Pockets:’ Myth as Heritage and Anti-Colonial Resistance in Brian Friel’s Translations”

Set in the fictional village of Baile Beg in 1833 (pre-famine) County Donegal, Brian Friel’s 1980 play Translations addresses issues of land, language, and education in its portrayal of the British Ordnance Survey, whose mission aimed to create a map of Ireland using English, rather than Gaelic, place names. While much critical attention has focused on Translation’s linguistic aspects, my study incorporates a mytho-postcolonial approach that foregrounds myth as anti-colonial critique and makes land ownership dispossession a key concern in the play. First, Translations addresses British linguistic and territorial occupation of Ireland through by showing how myth, through place names, defines the people’s relationship to their land. Next, the Baile Beag villagers use Greek and Roman classics, especially Trojan War references, to protest their dispossession and dismantle colonial ideology. Irish revision of Trojan War mythology and its surrounding stories undermines the foundations of British territorial occupation in Ireland, as the English frequently employed Trojan War myths as a basis for their imperial activities. Rather than a retrogressive form of backwards nostalgia often assigned to literary revivals of classical

---

23 According to David Bergman, Translations is based on an “auspicious time in British history” during which the English Parliament had established state-run schools in Ireland and began standardizing the map of Ireland. Bergman notes that “these ‘reforms’ aided English control more than the Irish” as the native Irish “had no trouble with their old maps and parish registers” as “everyone knew his or her own property and where everyone lived,” making more supposedly accurate measures unnecessary.

24 In Translations, communication and linguistic issues are central, not just through the imposition of anglicized place names, but also the interactions between characters. Characters speak in four different languages: Irish, English, Latin, and Greek. English, Latin, and Greek are spoken by the actors onstage, while characters speaking in Irish deliver the lines in English for the sake of a mostly English-speaking audience, but they are understood to be speaking in Irish.
mythologies, Brian Friel’s 1980 play *Translations* is a key example of the under explored
dissident potential of Trojan War mythology in its dismantling of British imperial and land
occupation ideologies.

*Translations* demonstrates the dual oppression of linguistic and territorial domination
through the British mapping project. The historical 1833 Ordnance Survey’s\(^{25}\) mission to
“standardize” (anglicize) place names for a new map, which came in close relationship to
numerous legal reforms and the imposition of a National School System in England and Ireland,
exemplifies Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s theories on imperialism and language in *Decolonizing the
Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* in its depiction of how language
emblematizes both colonial oppression and anti-imperial struggle. Wa Thiong’o argues that
language is a key component of imperial domination and that mental control by cultural and
linguistic domination supplements physical control by armies and governments (wa Thiong’o
16). In *Translations*, British imperialism imposes linguistic hegemony to disrupt the villagers’
relationship to their culture and surroundings. As Ashcroft et al state, “language becomes the
medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through
which conceptions of ‘truth,’ ‘order,’ and ‘reality’ become established” (7). The imposition of
English place names through the creation of the map intertwines linguistic and land-based
colonial domination in *Translations*.

The Baile Beag villagers appear in *Translations* as an indigenous people per the United
Nations’ definition. According to the United Nations, “indigenous peoples are inheritors and

\(^{25}\) It must be noted that Friel took what many critics considered to be an exaggerated amount of poetic
license in his recreation of the Ordnance Survey. According to famed Irish theater critic Fintan O’Toole a review
titled “Distorting the Past, True to the Present,” ¾ of the survey’s employees were Irish, and the survey was carried
out “primarily for the purposes of land valuation” (10). O’Toole notes that most place names were already
Anglicized, making invented place names rare, and that the surveyors did not exercise military powers: “Captain
Lancey’s burnings, evictions, and levellings, the dramatic high-point of the action, are pure invention” (10). O’Toole
quips that *Translations* is “a myth about the past invented for contemporary political purposes” (10).
practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment” who have “retained social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live.” Indigenous peoples experience “common problems related to the protection of their rights as distinct peoples,” per the United Nations. The imperial encroachment of the Ordnance Survey and the National School system directly threaten the Baile Beag villagers’ way of life, which depends upon an intimate link between their language, culture, life cycle, agriculture, and kinship practices.

Brian Friel’s 1980 play Translations was the first production by the Field Day Theatre Company, founded by Friel and actor Stephen Rea. With a star-studded cast including Liam Neeson, the play established the Field Day Theatre Company’s mission. Field Day consciously aimed to create a Fifth Province that engaged in a non-sectarian artistic discourse of unity and “imagine alternative models of identification” beyond the four provinces of Ireland, which were, at the time, wracked with sectarian violence (Kearney 99). Field Day consciously engaged in theoretical approaches to Irish literature and culture, especially postcolonialism, both in its

---

26 The term Fifth Province came from the first issue of Irish cultural magazine The Crane Bag in 1977. This publication identified the political failure to unify Ireland and called for an artistic solution through the space of the Fifth Province, which “is not a political or geographical position,” but “more like a disposition” (qtd. in Kearney 100). In its quest to create this Fifth Province, Field Day focused on history and the classics to “distance immediate issues of identity” and consider important concerns “without the usual sectarian clichés” (Lojek 337).

27 In this way, Field Day attempted to heed Homi Bhabha’s warning in The Location of Culture of the “dangers of the fixity and fetishism of identities” in its deliberate engagement with Irish issues beyond sectarian identity questions (3). In doing so, Field Day focused on the “deconstruction of myths and stereotypes” as well as “Ireland’s need to reassess its own nationalist myths and symbols” (Regan 30).

28 Field Day is so prominent in Irish postcolonial studies that it is difficult to find Irish postcolonial theorists or scholars of modern Irish literature, culture, history, etc., who do not include Field Day in their writings. For example, the first chapter of Eoin Flannery’s Ireland and Postcolonial Studies: Theory, Discourse, Utopia, which is a comprehensive study of Irish postcolonial theory, is devoted to Field Day, which she claims has “effectively set the tone and trajectory of much Irish critical, literary, and historiographical debate in recent years” (19). Colin Graham identifies Field Day as a key cultural movement within the field of Irish postcolonial studies as well as international postcolonial studies (35). Joe Cleary traces the emergence of postcolonial studies within the Irish academy to the start of the 1980s, claiming that Brian Friel’s Translations was a “formative moment” during this time as the play “raised a cluster of issues about the nature of nineteenth-century social and cultural transformations that would subsequently be taken up in postcolonial studies as well” (16).
plays as well as its published pamphlets. Although Field Day’s critics dubbed it the cultural wing of Sinn Fein and the IRA, the theatre company consciously embraced pluralism in its makeup and artistic vision (Szabo 6). As a theatre company, Field Day did not support either nationalism or revisionism, the two dominant scholarly approaches that dominated the Irish studies of the 20th century. Its choice of headquarters in Derry/Londonderry was also a deliberate choice in favor of inclusivity.

Mythology: Destructive Nostalgia or Cultural Preservation?

Rather than an effective methodology of preserving local history and culture, an adherence to mythology can signal a dangerous nostalgia that encompasses a rigidity or an unwillingness to adjust to changing times. Critics have bemoaned Irish authors’ repeated attention to local, rural settings that seemingly eschew a “modern” Ireland to support the identity-forming goals of the nationalist project. However, in the case of Friel and other late-
twentieth century authors, portrayals of rural life and the inclusion of mythology investigate modernity as an unsettling colonial imposition. According to Eoin Flannery, “the vexed issue in an Irish context is that Ireland’s enforced insertion into imperial modernity under a British colonial regime, contraditorily, preceded any process of domestic modernization” (10-11).

Flannery’s observation of Ireland’s participation in “global modernity in the nineteenth century” as a “paradoxical historical development” coincides with Translations’ depiction of the national school system and the map as “modernizing” colonial implementations. Considering this, authors such as Friel, in their choice of rural settings, do not automatically revert to restrictive revivalist constructions of rural identity but rather engage in what Luke Gibbons terms as “the confounding of such neat polarities” of the “country and the city, tradition and modernity” within Irish culture. As Gibbons argues, “…the backward look towards a peasant arcadia does not represent a form of continuity with the rural past of the emigrant, but a break with it,” pointing out that the “disintegration and fragmentation” of colonialism ensured that “Irish society did not have to await the twentieth century to undergo the shock of modernity” (6, 85). In this way, modernity is implicated as a debilitating byproduct of colonial oppression. A focus on the rural, rather, emphasizes the complicated erasure by colonial influences of entire systems of thinking based upon a connection to land and one’s surroundings, which, in the case of Ireland, are intricately related to language and culture.

---

34 According to Gibbons, criticizing the focus on the rural is problematic as “it assumes the rural ideology which presided over the national revival was a genuine expression of country life” and “ignores the extent to which idealizations of rural existence, the longing for community and primitive simplicity, are the product of an urban sensibility, and are cultural fictions imposed on the lives of those they purport to represent” (84-85).

35 In “‘Something is Being Eroded:’ The Agrarian Epistemology of Brian Friel’s Translations,” Richard Rankin Russell states: “Rather than celebrating the new Enlightenment and Romantic emphasis on the individual, Translations sanctions an older, communal worldview that provides a satisfying vocational, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual life for each member of the townland…Friel has always argued, with a remarkable degree of consistency, that this communal way of life is threatened by encroaching modernity. The old way is supplanted by a pernicious ideological poverty that purports to elevate the individual but instead increases dependence on dehumanizing, mechanized forms of labor” (109). Russell also argues that Friel’s consistent engagements with rural
Additionally, Friel’s choice of an intensely local setting does not restrict his ability to explore a wide range of issues; rather, Friel’s Baile Beag becomes a microcosm of the intertwined linguistic and territorial dispossession of British imperialism. In his analysis of Translations as a self-consciously local play, Alan Peacock cites Patrick Kavanagh’s term “parochialism,” which represents a “concentrated rather than narrow” focus on “vanishing cultures, vanishing languages and even the nature of civilization and civilized values – important concerns within human culture” (122). Peacock juxtaposes Kavanagh’s “parochialism” with the pejorative term “provincialism,” which suggests a narrow-minded focus on the local that consciously ignores wider issues. Rather, according to Peacock’s application, parochialism requires an engagement with the universal through the known and assimilated prism of a given locale and community” (122). Friel’s parochialism in using Baile Beag as Translations’ setting engages key postcolonial issues such as linguistic domination, colonial cultural hegemony, and the loss of local heritage, none of which are limited to a rural Irish village.

Nicholas Grene echoed Kavanagh’s concept of parochialism in a plenary talk\textsuperscript{36} at the 2019 International Association for Irish Literatures conference, arguing that the focus on the living is “far from nostalgic;” rather, Translations in particular “articulates Friel’s alarm at the loss of the local community” and “inveighs against the advent of the machine in rural culture, which Friel views as evicting laborers from communities, and against the concurrent Enlightenment emphasis on empiricism and the individual – all of which destroy communal identity” (106). Russell contends that “the universality of Friel’s play…becomes clear only when the linguistic, cultural, and epistemological tragedies that occur in Translations are recognized as Friel’s lament for a larger, cross-cultural decline in communal ways of perceiving reality” (106).

\textsuperscript{36} Grene’s talk previewed his upcoming monograph, preliminarily titled The Land in Modern Irish Literature. In this project, Grene will explore the notion that literary treatments of rural Ireland have not disappeared despite the lack of population and employment there; as of 2018, only 5% of Irish workers were employed on the land. In his talk, Grene included various late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century authors such as Seamus Heaney, John O’Donoghue, Jane Clarke, John McGahern, Belinda McKeon, and Anne Enright. Grene remarked that many of the poets include a nostalgic yet nuanced recollection of daily farm chores and experiences, acknowledging that the reality of farm life also encompasses longing for escape from its often-stifling setting. According to Grene, Belinda McKeon’s 2011 novel Solace interwines the Celtic Tiger and urban life with issues of continuity, inheritance, and duty towards the farm. Grene also discussed John McGahern’s 2009 novel That They May Face the Rising Sun juxtaposes rural life and modernity, set without a linear narrative in an indeterminate past that references changing seasons and historical events like de Valera’s death and the Enniskillen bombing. Finally, Grene explored how Anne Enright’s 2015 novel The Green Road questions the binary between city vs. rural life.
rural form does not reflect a regression to 1950s-style nostalgia and eschew the “realities of modern Ireland;” rather, according to Grene, this genre expresses what he terms as the continuities and discontinuities of Irish history. Grene pointed out the crucial place of the land issue in Irish culture. He argued for the value of literature that reminds the reader of what it is like to be in direct contact with the land and animals, and, in this vein, does not necessarily lack “sharp political vision,” nor does it preclude an awareness of a wider road. Finally, like other critics, Grene contended that the connection of folklore and local heritage intertwines people and landscape, protecting them against the colonial encroachments of modernization and supposed “progress.” Per Grene’s analysis, Translations confronts the conflict between modernization and rural communal living through its localized focus, demonstrating a community entangled between struggle for survival that necessitates forced adaptation to modernity and the increasing difficulty of preserving their indigenous culture. Thus, as explained by critics such as Peacock, Kavanagh, and Grene, an intensely rural, local focus in Friel’s Translations allows for a wide, not narrow, view on key issues such as land, colonialism, language, and local heritage.

**Translations and Postcolonial Mythological Language**

Much of Irish postcolonial scholarship has focused on the dominance of English over Irish and the resulting diminished prevalence of the Irish language, despite numerous revival efforts. Friel’s play, while written and performed in the twentieth century, provides a snapshot of key nineteenth century events that intensified centuries-long degradation of the Irish language. While the combined effects of the 1831 imposition of the British National School System and the 1840s Famine would provide a near death knell for Gaeilge, the language was already in decline due to various British legal and cultural hegemonic efforts to achieve the mental control
described by wa Thiong’o through the destruction or deliberate denigration of the native culture and the conscious elevation of the colonizer’s language (wa Thiong’o 16).

At first glance, language issues indeed dominate Translations’s thematic foundation through linguistic debates, speech difficulties, and general miscommunications\(^\text{37}\). The play opens with the schoolmaster’s son, Manus, attempting to teach the mute Sarah how to say her name. The British Ordnance Survey representatives must rely upon the the bilingual Owen, Hugh’s other son recently returned from Dublin, to communicate with the Irish-speaking Baile Beag villagers. When Maire falls in love with Captain Yolland, a member of the surveying team, they can only communicate by reciting place names that Yolland has only recently learned. While attempting to flirt with Yolland, Maire even stammers out some broken Latin: “Tu es centurio in – in – in exercitu Brittanico… et es in castris quae – quae – quae sunt in agro”\(^\text{38}\) (Friel 127).

Several characters, such as hedge school students Bridget and Maire, associate English with progress. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth-century in Ireland, hedge schools were underground educational establishments that existed to provide continuing education in the Irish language and the classics before the establishment of the British National School System (1831). On the new English national school system, Bridget declares that “you’ll not hear one word of Irish spoken” and “every subject will be taught through English” (Friel 399). Maire points out that famed Irish politician and noted advocate for poor Irish tenants, Daniel O’Connell, known as the Liberator, has recommended that the Irish people learn English, calling “the old language a barrier to modern progress” (399). She uses O’Connell to berate Hugh’s approach, stating: “I

\(^{37}\) F.C. McGrath states, “Virtually every character and scene involve a translation of some kind” (183).

\(^{38}\) My translation: “You are a soldier in – in – in the British army… and you are in the army camp which – which – which is in the field.” Adding to Maire’s struggle and the comedic effect, for any Latin students, is the fact that her statement, while using correct vocabulary, does not follow standard Latin word order that places the verb at the end of each independent clause. Her Latin sentence should look more like this: “Tu centurio in exercitu Britannico es et in castris quae sunt in agro es.”
don’t want Greek. I don’t want Latin. I want English” (Friel 400). Finally, and certainly most tragically, when Captain Yolland goes missing under the suspicion of foul play by the mysterious Donnelly twins, Owen must translate to the terrified villagers the British plan to destroy all livestock and crops in Baile Beag until Captain Yolland is discovered. The act of translation, then, illustrates not only the cultural clash between the native Irish villagers and the British Ordnance Survey team, but also that between tradition and imposed colonial modernity.

While a strictly linguistically oriented theoretical approach to Translations is not inherently misguided 39, it is incomplete without placing equal, if not greater, emphasis, on landscape and territorial dispossession in the play 40. Translations depicts British imperialism through a lens of land-based oppression that erases the indigenous Irish mythology-infused place names system as the keeper of local heritage and land relationships. Irish historical, mythological, and literary traditions represent an intimate intertwining of language and place,

39 Numerous critics have emphasized the relationship between language and colonialism in Translations to colonialism. In “‘We Must Learn Where We Live’: Language, Identity, and the Colonial Condition in Brian Friel’s Translations,” Maureen S.G. Hawkins points to England’s longstanding policy of “linguistic imperialism” in Ireland, first debuted by Edmund Spenser in 1596, as a colonial strategy “to persuade the colonized to accept their condition and transfer their allegiance to their conquerors to ensure an uninterrupted flow of benefits from colonized to colonizer without further military intervention” (23). She views Translations as Friel’s assessment of the strategy (24). In Brian Friel’s (Post)Colonial Drama: Language, Illusion, and Politics, F.C. McGrath applies Bhabha’s theories to explore “the colonial implications of translation” (185). He reads the play’s closing scene as an embodiment of “the fatalistic inevitability about the domination of the conqueror’s language” (194). Alan Peacock emphasizes the characters’ “natural, unselfconscious, everyday familiarity with the ancient languages” and argues that “the theme of the play is cultural dispossession, with linguistic dispossession as the symbolic focus” (123). In “Language and Politics in Brian Friel’s Translations,” Lionel Pilkington argues that “the internal tensions of Translations arise…because of assumptions about language and identity that are particularly evident in the play’s portrayal of the Irish language” (284-285). Michael Toolan, in “Language and Affective Communication in Some Contemporary Irish Writers,” incorporates the famous “tundish” language misunderstanding in Ulysses to explore the “unavoidable sense of loss, inadequacy, alienation” that arises from linguistic difficulties in Irish literature. Toolan argues that, in Translations, in its illustration of the Ordnance Survey’s standardization of “barbarous place-names,” the audience is forced to reflect on how language, and other cultural touchstones, can be used not simply to express a tribe or nation, but manipulatively and coercively to delimit and regulate the tribe or nation” (141-142).

40 Kurt Bullock’s Article “Possessing Wor(l)ds: Brian Friel’s ‘Translations’ and the Ordnance Survey” is an excellent example of this dual focus. Bullock states: “While language especially lies at the heart of Friel’s drama about the colonial rhetoric of map-making, the confused mimetics of placenames seem to be of particular significance…the action of Translations disassociates the Irish from their past and control of their future – a control which is linked, deliberately, to the transformation of the Irish landscape on paper” (Bullock 101).
which Gerry Smyth describes as a “‘special relationship’ between community and environment permeating Irish life” (19).  

Within the various interdisciplinary fields that constitute Irish Studies, scholarly work has consistently addressed land and landscape concerns, in relationship to identity construction and (post)colonial issues.

In *Translations*, place names represent complex mythologies through which indigenous inhabitants construct their identities, situate themselves in relationship to their land, and maintain a corresponding agricultural lifestyle. Program materials from various productions consistently note a land and territory theme, especially regarding alienation. This observation coincides with Ashcroft et al’s observations on alienation, language, and place; they describe a “gap which opens between the experience of place and the language available to describe it…for those whose language has been rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the language of a

---

41 Smyth goes on to argue that landscape is the primary concern of all topics within Irish Studies.
42 According to Irene Gilsenan Nordin and Carmen Zamorano Llena, “the central theme of landscape is a preoccupation long associated with the construction and expression of Irish national identity. This is particularly so in relation to the rural landscape, which traditionally has been regarded as an important source of national heritage and culture” (1). In “‘But the Land Itself Does Not Really Change: Diasporic Negotiations of Ancestral Connection and Difference in Ireland,’” Catherine Nash explores “responses to the changing geographies of Ireland both in a material and imaginative sense” and “a geography of culture and collective identity that extends beyond the land itself to its diasporic locations” (90).
43 According to John Wilson Foster, “Named places, sometimes defined and identified by a natural feature (a mountain, a bog, a strand, a river, a natural well, etc.), did not generate simply local lore, but also a topography intimately bound up with families, ownership, genealogy…places, place lore, place names; the landscape of Ireland was seen and read by the Irish through powerful cultural lenses” (qtd. in Smyth 47).
44 In a March 1986 review of *Translations* in *The Guardian*, Francesca Turner states “Losing your language can be like losing your land.” In a 1981 interview for *The Soho News*, Joseph Hurley quotes Friel’s following remark: “Deprive a people of their language and change the name of every road and every hill they know and you’ve done a fair job of disorienting them as human beings.” In *The Sunday Times*’ review of the August 1996 traveling Abbey Theatre production, John Peter and Robert Hewison remark the intertwined linguistic and spatial confusion represented in *Translations*: “The past is slipping away; your names and place names are being changed to suit the incoming empire. Lose your name and you lose something of yourself; to be ‘translated’ is to be moved elsewhere, even in your own land. A new language is a form of exile.” In a program note titled “The Dual Vision of Brian Friel” in the program for *Translations*’ Canadian premiere, Ronald Bryden states that the Irish language “embodied the Irish people’s ancient intimacy with their land.”
colonizing power” (9). Although the Baile Beag visitors remain in the same geographical location, the mapping project imposes alien place names that dispossess them from their land.\(^{45}\)

In *Translations*, the introduction of the Ordnance Survey team and their attempt to explain their mission reveals that the survey causes the villagers’ spatial and territorial dispossession. While Owen inaccurately translates Captain Lancey’s explanation of the survey’s mission to ensure the villagers’ cooperation, the Captain reveals that the mapping project has more far-reaching goals. Owen, Hugh, and Manus are the only English-speaking characters; thus, only they understand the project’s true colonizing purpose:

LANCEY: His Majesty’s government has ordered the first ever comprehensive survey of this entire country – a general triangulation which will embrace detailed hydrographic and topographic information and which will be executed to a scale of six inches to the English mile….

---

\(^{45}\)In a particularly salient program note for the Seattle Repertory Theatre’s March-April 1983 production of *Translations*, Alison Harris notes the “especially tragic” loss of the Irish language, which she terms “the carrier of this people’s cultural identity” as “almost the entire wealth of the Gaelic culture lay in the tales, lore, legends, sagas, and myths that had been orally transmitted from century to century” and details a lengthy and informative timeline of British imperialism as related to land ownership. Harris’s note is worth repeating here as a useful reference to Irish territorial dispossession over the centuries: “The English under Henry VII, Elizabeth I, Oliver Cromwell and William of Orange undertook repeated military campaigns that began to transform the Irish social and political order and to destroy the old Gaelic culture. The conquering English pre-empted most of the land of Ireland and reduced the Irish to a landless peasantry with no legal rights and no fixed tenure in the soil. In 1534 Henry VII commanded that all lands in Ireland be surrendered to the English Crown which, in turn, would re-grant the lands. In the future, landowners would hold title to their property as subjects of the English King and according to English law rather than as Gaelic chiefs under Gaelic tribal law. Many of the new landowners were English – and Protestant – whereas the great majority of the Irish were Catholic. Throughout the Seventeenth Century the English continued to appropriate Irish land and Irish resistance was generally unsuccessful… in 1641 Catholics in Ireland struck again for the return of their lands but the violence of their rebellion prompted Oliver Cromwell to further reduce the percentage of land in Ireland owned by Irish Catholics. By 1652 the Irish held title to only 22% of the land. There was another uprising of the Irish in 1689-1690 across the North of Ireland and this rebellion was supported by the Catholics English King, James II. The Irish were defeated, however, by the Protestant William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne and the rule of a Protestant landowning English minority over a dispossessed Catholic majority was entrenched. Under their rule, what Irish Catholics refer to as the ‘Bad Century’ began. Between 1692 and 1709 the landowning English minority consolidated their authority over the landless Catholic peasants through a drastic Penal Code. Under the terms of the code, no Irish Catholic (and the great majority of the Irish were Catholic) could vote, hold office, or buy land. The Irish Catholics were also prohibited from attending a university or from teaching school. Then in 1801 the British colonization of Ireland culminated in an Act of Union between England and Ireland, and the Irish Parliament, after five hundred years of life, passed out of existence” (18).
OWEN: A new map is being made of the whole country. (LANCEY *looks to* OWEN: *Is that all?* OWEN *smiles reassuringly and indicates to proceed.)*

LANCEY: This enormous task has been embarked on so that the military authorities will be equipped with up-to-date and accurate information on every corner of this part of the Empire.

OWEN: The job is being done by soldiers because they are skilled in this work.

LANCEY: And also so that the entire basis of land valuation can be reassessed for purposes of more equitable taxation.

OWEN: This new map will take the place of the estate agent’s map so that from now on you will know exactly what is yours in law.

LANCEY: In conclusion I wish to quote two brief extracts from the white paper which is our governing charter: (*Reads*) ‘All former surveys of Ireland originated in forfeiture and violent transfer of property; the present survey has for its object the relief which can be afforded to the proprietors and occupiers of land from unequal taxation.’

OWEN: The captain hopes that the public will cooperate with the sappers and that the new map will mean that taxes are reduced…

LANCEY: ‘Ireland is privileged. No such survey is being undertaken in England. So this survey cannot but be received as proof of the disposition of this government to advance the interests of Ireland.’ My sentiments, too.

OWEN: This survey demonstrates the government’s interest in Ireland and the captain thanks you for listening so attentively to him (Friel 406-407).

After this exchange, Manus berates Owen and insists that the Ordnance Survey constitutes a “bloody military operation,” recognizing that it represents land-based as well as
linguistic domination.\footnote{Many programs for Translations included telling quotes from official documents surrounding the historical Ordnance survey that revealed the imperial nature of mapping projects. In 1883, Lord Salisbury stated “The most disagreeable part of the three kingdoms is Ireland, and therefore Ireland has a splendid map.” An extract from the Spring Rice Report advocating a general survey of Ireland to the British government on 21 June 1824 read: “The general tranquility of Europe, enables the state to devote the abilities and exertions of a most valuable corps of officers to an undertaking, which, though not unimportant in a military point of view, recommends itself more directly as a civil measure. Your committee trust that the survey will be carried on with energy, as well as the skill, and that it will, when completed, be creditable to the nation, and to the scientific acquirements of the present age. In that portion of the Empire to which it more particularly applies, it cannot but be received as a proof of the disposition of the legislature to adopt all measures calculated to advance the interests of Ireland” (8).} Owen both misrepresents the Survey and downplays his own cooperation in a dismissive retort: “We’re making a six-inch map of the country. Is there something sinister in that?” (43). He describes himself as “a part-time, underpaid civilian interpreter” whose job is to “translate the quaint, archaic tongue [Irish] into the King’s good English” (Friel 29). Revealing internalized imposed imperial values, Owen reflects English views on the Irish language and downplays the exact impact of the Ordnance Survey’s map. He also refers to his father as “bloody pompous” and criticizes him for his inability “to adjust for survival” in favor of “enduring around truths immemorially” (Friel 43). Owen also describes the existing place names as “riddled with confusion” and ignores Yolland’s question “Who’s confused? Are the people confused?” (Friel 43). Owen here demonstrates Partha Chatterjee’s description in Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse, of the colonized’s “ambivalent rejection” of the colonizer that entails the rejection of the “‘alien intruder’ while imitating and surpassing him by his own standards” and rejecting native cultural practices as “backward” (7, 21). Instead of defending the local place names, Owen decries them as an impediment to “modern progress,” reflecting his internalization of English Enlightenment values of measurement and linearity. In his eagerness to impress his employers, Owen fails to realize that he they will never see him as an equal, simply as an over-zealous intermediary easily discardable once his immediate usefulness has ended.
Captain Lancey both reveals the Survey’s more insidious design and echoes colonial ideology when he describes Ireland as “privileged” to be the subject of this project (408). Lancey’s comments reflect Dipesh Chakrabarty’s argument in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Experience* that colonial activities, such as the map and place names project, depend upon the colonizer’s promotion of linear forward progress as a universal experience, regardless of colonized peoples’ cultural frameworks (9). In this process, the colonized are relegated to the “waiting-room of history” in which European colonialism heralds supposedly enlightened liberal ideas but tell the “savages” that they are “not yet” ready and can only access these principles when they have wholly civilized themselves\(^47\) (9). Per this theory, Captain Lancey insinuates that since the Baile Beag villagers have not yet been “civilized,” they should be grateful that the map will provide this opportunity. Lancey’s announcement also reflects Enlightenment-based linear progress models of colonization that transform indigenous people and their resources into measurable, quantifiable commodities to ensure their maximum productivity for imperialist capitalist endeavors. As Captain Lancey describes it, the map is a tool of colonial discipline that imposes the embrace of standardization and quantification as the civilizing path to colonial modernity and requires the severing of the connection between myth, landscape, and land. The villagers should feel grateful, according to Captain Lancey, that they have been provided with a means that will facilitate “progressive” and “civilized” capitalist land ownership and eliminate their current communal approach that relies on mythical narrative-imbued place names.

\(^{47}\) Chakrabarty goes on to remark that such imperial narratives and historicist approaches “thus consigned Indians, Africans, and other ‘rude nations’” and embodied “a recommendation to the colonized to wait” until they were sufficiently civilized (22).
Place, Language, and Myth: The Dinnschedas Erenn and Translations

The Gaelic narratological practice known as the *dinnshenchas* establishes the relationship between language and land in *Translations*. The *dinnshenchas*, according to Gerry Smyth, refers to both a widespread Gaelic literary tradition of infusing place names with their own mythologies and the body of Middle-Irish toponymic literature known as *Dinnshenchas Erenn*, roughly translated as “the traditional, legendary lore of notable places” (Smyth 47). This literary tradition creates a multilayered relationship between language and landscape that, as it assigns place names, weaves together family genealogies, Irish mythical figures such as fairies, gods, goddesses, and various spirit-realm dwellers; local quasi-history, and folklore. A place name, therefore, does not simply represent a 1:1 method of signification, one aim of the British Ordnance Survey mapmakers. While literature related to land, nature, topography, etc. is certainly not a solely Irish genre, the primacy of place within Irish literature and culture often displays more affinity with global indigenous traditions rather than to similar Western/European literatures. While the practice of recording place names in the *dinnshenchas* did not survive into

---

48 According to Smyth, the *Dinnshenchas Erenn* constituted mandatory education for poets and the higher orders of society, noting that “such knowledge would have been valuable currency within a society so significantly shaped by issues of blood and land” (47).

49 The following example from *The Bodlein Dinnshenchas*, which author Whitley Stokes describes as “the story of the noteworthy steads of Ireland,” illustrates this intricate yet seamless infusion of land and mythological narrative: “Mag mBreg, to wit, Brega, the name of Dil’s ox, that is Dil, daughter of Lugh-mannair, who went from the Land of Promise, or from the land of Falga, with Tulchine, the druid of Conaire the Great, son of Etirscél, son of Mess Buachalla. In the same hour that Dil was born of her mother the cow brought forth the calf named Falga. So the king’s daughter loved the calf beyond the rest of the cattle, for it was born at the same time [that she was]; and Tulchine was unable to carry her off until he took the ox with her. The Morrígan was good unto him, and he prayed her to give him that drove so that it might be on Mag nOlgaidi, [which was] the first name of the plain; (and Brega loved that plain). Hence Mag mBreg is [so] called.” In this example, characteristic of *dinnshenchas* entries, the origin of the plain named Mag mBreg is illustrated through a brief narrative that includes royalty, livestock, druids, a goddess, and mere mortals.

50 According to Tim Robinson, a modern cartographer who practiced these folkloric principles in his creation of maps of the west of Ireland, “Place names are the interlock of landscape and language” (qtd. in Smyth 41).
the modern day, its tradition of imbuing the land with its own mythological stories and local lore is very much present in current Irish literature and culture, such as *Translations*.\(^{51}\)

*Translations* demonstrates how colonial occupation in the Irish context intertwines language and territory. While Friel does not draw directly from the historical *dinnchenchas*, he engages with its legacy by imbuing place names in the play with their own stories, reflecting a mytho-postcolonial understanding of the intertwined nature of mythology, land, language, and local heritage. Even though Friel himself has stated that *Translations* is only about language\(^{52}\), the *dinnshenchas* tradition of Irish place names ties together linguistic and land-based imperial domination. Friel’s original notes from his planning of *Translations* make this connection in several instances.\(^{53}\) Numerous critics have also pointed to the relationship between mapping, land ownership, and colonialism in the Irish context.\(^{54}\) This twin dispossession physically

---

\(^{51}\) For example, this illustrated in folklorist and cartographer Tim Robinson’s mapping projects in Ireland’s West and Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking) areas. In his book *Stones of Aran: Pilgrimage*, Robinson describes his mapping project as “that unsummable totality of human perspectives upon [the Aran Islands] which is my real subject” (3). Throughout his writings, Robinson frequently illustrates the complexity of his endeavors and his realizations that, in this region, quantifiable data collection (represented in *Translations* by the Ordnance Survey) is grossly misguided. In *Stones of Aran: Pilgrimage*, Robinson states: “I have gone hunting for those rare places and times, the nodes at which the layers of experience touch and may be fused together. But I find that in a map such points and the energy that accomplishes such fusions (which is that of poetry, not some vague ‘interdisciplinary’ fervor) can, at the most, be invisible guides, beneficent ghosts, through the tangles of the explicit; they cannot themselves be shown or named” (11). Rather, Robinson states that he has been “chastened in [his] expectations” and “now regard[s] the Aran maps as preliminary storings and sortings of material for another art, the world-hungry art of words” (11).

\(^{52}\) Friel “has said that the play is not ‘about Irish peasants being suppressed by English sappers,’ nor is it ‘a threnody on the death of the Irish language.’ ‘The play, he insists, ‘has to do with language and only language. And if it becomes overwhelmed by that political element, it is lost’” (qtd. in McGrath 34). Despite his self-proclaimed focus on language alone, notes from Friel’s original *Translations* manuscript reveal that Friel considered numerous names for his work before settling on its final title, including baptisms, tongues, the naming ritual, maps, names, namings, christenings, sticks and stones, contours, words, denominations, entitlements, paper landscape, hedge schooling, and the ritual of naming.

\(^{53}\) At one point, in his planning notes Friel scrawls “There are two interwoven themes: the rapid decline of the language and culture and the taming of the country by means of the survey.” Additionally, Friel’s notes recognize the issue of land ownership under British occupation, stating: “Landlord represents not only a social class but a political system – the continuing Protestant ascendancy.”

\(^{54}\) In “Early Mapping in Ireland,” Patrick Duffy outlines the eighteenth century rise of landed estates in Ireland (186-187). In “Possessing Wor(l)ds: Brian Friel’s *Translations’* and the Ordnance Survey,” Kurt Bullock states that “naming is a means of possession and to look beyond this surface – as does Brian Friel in his 1980 drama *Translations* – is to undo the simplicity by which name is ascribed to place” (98). Bullock also argues that “…*Translations* does provide abundant material for analysis of imperialist epistemology in the desire to reinscribe, through cartography, a place to be possessed, noting that “an assessment of postcolonial theories regarding
inscribes the conqueror’s language onto the land, erasing the history of legends and myths such as goddesses, fairies, local folklore, etc.

Through changing place names, the Ordinance Survey in *Translations* transforms the native villagers into exiles in their own land who can no longer describe their relationship to their surroundings. For example, when Owen asks his father if he knows where the priest lives, Hugh responds “At Lis na Muc, over near…” (Friel 42). However, Owen points out that all local landmarks now have new names: “Lis na Muc, the Fort of the Pigs, has become Swinefort…and to get to Swinefort you pass through Greencastle and Fair Head and Strandhill and Gort and Whiteplains. And the new school isn’t at Poll na gCaorach – it’s at Sheepsrock. Will you be able to find your way?” (Friel 42). Ironically, as Owen attempts to deny his father’s claim that the Baile Beag villagers are “a spiritual people” and accuse his father of not even knowing where the priest lives, he reveals that the new place names will disorient those already intimately familiar with their surroundings (Friel 42). These moments echo Lisa Fitzgerald’s analysis that as “place names formed a large part of this political power play over geographical space… the way of knowing a landscape was lost and, as a result, local communities became disenfranchised” (127).

cartography and the naming of place” (99). In “Friel and Heaney, Setting the Island Story Straight?” Shane Murphy contends that “deconstruction of mapmaking enables one to see clearly how the colonizer’s inscription of placenames and territorial boundaries establishes a structural base for sociopolitical institutions, thus delegitimating previous forms of government and territorial ownership” and that “Friel’s critique of the empowering strategies of colonial discourse takes the form of a deliberate foregrounding of mapmaking” (21).

55 In a review of a production of *Translations* at Theatre Hopkins in Baltimore, Maryland titled “The Irish Language” in the local *City Paper*, David Bergman notes that “…Friel dramatizes the dislocation and harm that occurs when people are denied their native speech…the people of Donegal quite literally don’t know where they are because all the names have been changed.” According to “Mapping the Mystery of History,” Medb Ruane’s review of the Abbey Theatre’s 1996 production of *Translations*, “the survey is metaphorically a massive displacement where you not only didn’t know the name of your townland but you had no idea how near or far it was from the next parish and were scapegoated for your alleged ignorance.”

56 In a review of the initial 1980 production of *Translations*, Con Houlihan remarks that while “Mr. Friel does not take sides: this is a play that has no answers,” there is one possible answer in that “the loss of a language is like the tearing up of roots,” highlighting the relationship between language and land.
Such feelings of alienation within one’s own home are all too familiar in the Irish experience, marked by centuries of emigration, exile, land strife, and displacement caused by British settler colonialism with its accompanying legal, religious, and linguistic imperial efforts. According to Helen Lojek, this “thematic concern” of “belonging and not belonging, home and homeland, and an acute awareness of exile in the form of an outsider status that is not necessarily geographic” dominates many late twentieth-century Irish plays (1-2). In this sense, as the indigenous people in *Translations* were stripped of their relationship to the land through naming and further coerced into external governmental systems. Hugh’s telling quote from Ovid in the second act, “Barbarus hic sum quia non intelligor ulli,” illustrates this feeling of exile, particularly in the use of “barbarian,” often applied to foreigners, outsiders, and invaders.

During a map making scene between the British Lieutenant Yolland and the translator Owen, Yolland recognizes that the Ordnance Survey’s mission exploits the native villagers by separating them from their land, commenting that the map is “an eviction of sorts” and insisting that “something is being eroded” (Friel 43). Frustrated at what he deems Yolland’s nonsensical romanticizing of the Irish language and place names, Owen embarks upon a frustrated lengthy explanation of the place name in question and insists exasperatedly that such tales are no longer necessary:

**OWEN:** Back to the romance again…we call that crossroads Tobair Vree. And why do we call it Tobair Vree? I’ll tell you why. Tobair means a well. But what does Vree mean? It’s a corruption of Brian – (*Gaelic pronunciation.*) Brian – an erosion of Tobair Bhriain.

---

57 In his October 1982 interview with Brian Friel, titled “The Man from God Knows Where,” Fintan O’Toole notes that so many of Friel’s characters “seem to lack a sense of place” and are “dislocated.” Friel describes the “sense of rootlessness and impermanence” in his own life, speculating that “as a member of the Northern minority…in some sense exile is imposed.” Friel also explains that the Field Day Theatre Company “has grown out of that sense of impermanence, of people who feel themselves native to a province or certainly to an island but in some way feel that a disinheritance is offered to them,” sensing that they are “exile[s] in [their] own home.”

58 ‘My translation: I am a barbarian here because I am not understood by anyone.”
Because a hundred-and-fifty years ago there used to be a well there, not at the crossroads, mind you – that would be too simple – but in a field close to the crossroads. And an old man called Brian, whose face was disfigured by an enormous growth, got it into his head that the water in that well was blessed; and every day for seven months he went there and bathed his face in it. But the growth didn’t go away; and one morning Brian was found drowned in that well. And ever since that crossroads is known as Tobair Vree – even though that well has long since dried up…so the question I put to you, Lieutenant, is this: What do we do with a name like that? Do we scrap Tobair Vree altogether and call it – what – The Cross? Crossroads? Or do we keep piety with a man long dead, long forgotten, his name ‘eroded’ beyond recognition, whose trivial little story nobody in the parish remembers? (Friel 44).

In his diatribe on what he regards as a (pejoratively) quaint and overly complicated story unnecessary to understanding measurement and precision, Owen unwittingly reveals the Ordnance Survey’s erasure of local heritage. The story also has several mythical elements, such as a crossroads, a well, a mirror, disfigurement, and the salvific power of water. While it may seem that this story has no consequence, like much of local history, this story depicts the shared experience and cultural heritage of the people. The erasure of seemingly “insignificant” tales like this one contributes to the loss of community memory.  

59 Neil Jordan’s undated and unpublished Translations screenplay expands upon these instances to highlight the importance to the native villagers of the folkloric traditions of place. Jordan’s screenplay is located in the Brian Friel papers, held in the National Library of Ireland archives. One shot depicts Owen, the translator assisting the British mapping efforts, and Lieutenant Yolland sitting by a well “set in a natural bowl in the landscape, with a meadow behind it” as an old woman bends over the water and drinks from it with her hands. Owen explicates the significance of the place: “It is said that there was once bog all around here but that the saint walked from the mountains to the west across it and left a flowering meadow behind him. So they call it Machaire Buidhe. When he reached here he was thirsty so he hit the rock with his staff and a spring came up. And you bless yourself in this water to cure everything from ring-worm to gout” (23). This story exemplifies the Irish tendency to combine local mythology with Catholic lore, especially its combination of a saint story and the Old Testament tale of Moses striking a rock with his staff to quench the Israelites’ thirst in their desert exodus. Owen also explains the history of
In addition to severing the Ordnance Survey villagers’ semiotic connection to the land, it undermines their philosophical framework related to land ownership practices. This concurs with Patricia Monaghan’s analysis that privately held land ownership was an “alien concept” in Ireland and that, with the imposition of British colonialism, “land became property, a resource for extraction and sale,” a concept that did not consider native relationships to the land\(^{60}\) (123). While the Baile Beag inhabitants connect to their land and heritage through local mythology, the British, in their role as colonizers, eschew this philosophy in the name of “accuracy” of exact measurements to facilitate for-profit land ownership. The clash between these philosophies as shown in *Translations* recalls centuries of capitalist-driven, land-based difficulties between Britain and colonized Ireland, such the evictions of poor farming families by absentee landlords, exacerbated during the later Famine period. When analyzed as a mournful plea for the validity of indigenous ways that reject land ownership materialism, *Translations* transverses geographical and ideological boundaries and displays remarkable affinity with other colonized cultures\(^{61}\).

The Ordnance Survey’s new map allows the British to further imperial cultural hegemony by privileging precision and linearity over the Baile Beag villagers’ communal approach. In Said’s sense of the process of colonial “othering” in *Orientalism*\(^{62}\), the English use their map to

---

\(^{60}\) Additionally, Monaghan states that “the Irish remain stubbornly unconstrained by objective measurement,” remarking that, especially in rural Ireland, there “is still something called the ‘Irish hour’ (however long it takes to do it) parallel to the ‘Irish mile’ (however long it takes to get there)” (40).

\(^{61}\) For example, a program note titled “Translations: Australian Style” from the program for the University of Melbourne’s 1982 production of *Translations* connects the rural and communal lifestyle of the Baile Beag visitors to Australia’s own Aboriginal people: Accompanying this social pattern of Aboriginal living was a strong religious and cultural background. So strong, indeed, that it is impossible to understand one without a knowledge of the other. This can be seen in the relationship of the Aborigines to the land. Individuals did not own land in the European sense – the land was a sacred trust and was regarded in a religious as well as a practical way, as a home of ancestral spirits as well as a source of food and materials.

\(^{62}\) Irish postcolonialism would subvert the imperial nature of Orientalism itself. According to Joseph Lennon in “Irish Orientalism: An Overview,” Ireland invoked the “Oriental” and Far East connections that the English used to justify their subjugation and supposed barbarity to “justify [their] civilized pedigree” as descended from founders of
reveal the Irish approach to land ownership as primitive, backwards, and lacking preciseness. This additionally reflects Declan Kiberd’s contention in his seminal work of Irish postcolonial literary criticism, *Inventing Ireland*, that English colonialism constructed the Irish subject as inferior and used the nation of Ireland to enhance English virtue. As Kiberd states, “the English helped to invent Ireland” and “…through many centuries, Ireland was pressed into service as a foil to set off English virtues, as a laboratory in which to conduct experiments” (1). In doing so, Kiberd argues, the English constructed Irish values as inferior and provincial, stating that the English constructed Ireland “as a fantasy-land in which to meet fairies and monsters” (1). The Ordnance Survey map, then, justified the loss of Irish place names and land relationships to extol modern linear progress over “primitive” ways of thinking. According to Richard Kearney, the Irish mythologically-based approach to the world defied seemingly “logical” methodologies of quantification and linearity imposed by British colonial and juxtaposed as superior to indigenous values. Lancey’s contention that Ireland is “privileged” by British Ordnance Survey efforts reflects Richard Kearney’s description of the “colonial prejudice…that the Irish abandoned order for disorder or reneged on conceptual rigour to embrace formless chaos (10). As Kearney states, the Baile Beag villagers’ relationship to their homeland “flew in the face of such logocentrism by showing that meaning is not only determined by a logic that centralizes and censors but also by a logic which disseminates” and operates “in contradistinction to the orthodox dualist logic of *either/or*” in favor of “a more dialectical logic of both/and” (Kearney 9). Irish rejection of English law and order for communal relationships was particularly troubling to the English and
great civilizations (133-134). Many postcolonial Irish authors, especially W.B. Yeats, linked Ireland “with both Asian cultures and Orientalism, often imaginatively and/or politically unifying the circumference of empire (as opposed to a disjointed periphery” (157).

63 Kearney states that “the Irish mind does not reveal itself as a single, fixed, homogenous identity” that “remain[s] free, in significant measure, of the linear, centralizing logic of the Graeco-Roman culture…based on the Platonic-Aristotelian logic of non-contradiction which operated on the assumption that order and organization result from the dualistic separation of opposite or contradictory terms” (9).
thus formed the basis of Irish inferiority and justification for subjugation. According to Seamus Deane, the English claimed that “the strife in Ireland is the consequence of a battle between English civilization, based on laws, and Irish barbarism, based on local kinship loyalties and sentiments” (35). With English civilization and laws also came imposed capitalist values towards land ownership and inheritance. Thus, the communal relationship to land through language and mythology as portrayed in *Translations* thus represents the very substance of Irish incivility.

Once again, the British Lieutenant Yolland, rather than any of the villagers, cogently articulates this clash of ideological frameworks. Perhaps this is due to his recognition that not only is he an outsider in the physical sense, but also the ideological one. In his discussions on place names with the translator Owen, Yolland struggles to articulate the sensation accompanied by his attempts to become familiar with the place itself.

YOLLAND: Do I believe in fate? The day I arrived in Ballybeg – no, Baile Beag – the moment you brought me in here, I had a curious sensation. It’s difficult to describe. It was a momentary sense of discovery; no – not quite a sense of discovery – a sense of recognition, of confirmation of something I half knew instinctively; as if I had stepped…

OWEN: Back into ancient time?

YOLLAND: No, no. It wasn’t an awareness of direction being changed but of experience being of a totally different order. I had moved into a consciousness that wasn’t striving nor agitated, but at its ease and with its own conviction and assurance (Friel 416).

Here, Yolland fumblingly articulates how Baile Beag represents not only a different physical place, but a different mental one as well. He is unable to “translate” the villagers’ mindset using his own vocabulary and concepts. Yolland recognizes the Baile Beag’s villagers’ intuitive connection to their land through simple surrender to natural rhythms. Perhaps Yolland,
who quite literally “missed the boat” to his first military duty station in India, feels a gentle tug towards communal, rural living based on deep reverence for and communion with the land fundamentally opposed to the inherently unnatural capitalist, imperial ideology (which he must propagate) of land as an exploitable resource.

A mytho-postcolonial approach recognizes the value inherent in ancient thinking systems, drawing upon theories of postcoloniality, postmodernism, and myth. As demonstrated in *Translations*, the villagers were not confused about their relationship to the land before the arrival of the Ordnance Survey team, and the difference of their value system does not signal a priori inferiority. Rather, it simply represents an alternative way of thinking to Enlightenment-based Aristotelian binarism. As Kearney points out, ancient Irish thinking on their relationship to their surroundings represents “not meaninglessness but another kind of meaning, not confusion but another kind of coherence” as “the symbolic systems of such early Irish culture testify to an alternative order and organization” rather than what the British deemed “primitivistic unrule” (10). Claude Lévi-Strauss echoes this point succinctly in *Structural Anthropology*, stating that the ‘kind of logic in mythical thought is quite as rigorous as that of modern science’’ (24). Myth theorist Wallace W. Douglas makes a similar observation that myth “is not bound by the law of contradiction but operates under the law of participation” (72). Communal life and land relationships in *Translations* demonstrate Douglas’s notion of participation in mythical narrative.

In this vein, the *dinnshenchas* tradition of myth-based place names requires a thorough, and certainly more nuanced and in-depth, understanding of local tradition and relationships beyond simple 1:1 place name signification. Mythical place names both create and enhance communal bonds through active participation in narratological ways of knowing.
Additionally, Jean-Francois Lyotard’s work in *The Postmodern Condition – A Report on Knowledge* elucidates the value of multiple ways of knowing additional to the scientific, logic-based ideas of “competence” over “customary knowledge” and emphasizes narrative as an alternative mode of knowledge. Lyotard’s contention that science classifies the narrative-dominated oral world as “savage, primitive, undeveloped” applies to the British Ordnance Survey’s categorizing of Irish place names as inscrutable and illogical (27). Science, then, opposes narrative knowledge and insists on its “right to decide what is true,” which is exactly what the Ordnance Survey accomplishes by re-defining the villagers’ relationship to their surroundings (8). According to Lyotard, in oral societies that privilege narrative, like that of the Baile Beag villagers in *Translations*, ways of knowing become legitimized through communal relationships and not upheld as a separate “objective” category held above all other categories, as in the separation and reification of science” (23). Ultimately, the Baile Beag villagers’ relationship land reflects an alternate, not inferior, approach to knowledge that defies imposed imperialist capitalist values. Thus, British views of native Irish methodology as “uncivilized” reveal a lack of cross-cultural understanding and demonstrate the imposition of supposedly improved colonial standards rather than an authentic assessment of the system’s fitness.

**Classical Languages and Homer’s Iliad in *Translations*: Postcolonial Mythology and the Trojan War in Ireland**

In *Translations*, Irish villagers perform anti-colonial resistance against the Ordnance Survey’s mapping project through dissident engagement with and mimicry of colonial discourse. The Baile Beag villagers co-opt traditional mythological frameworks originally imposed by the British to justify imperial activities. Specifically, *Translations* re-fashions the Trojan War myth to explore British territorial and land possession from mytho-postcolonial perspective. Friel’s
play shows Irish students in native-run hedge schools learning to read and write in Irish, classical Greek, and Latin. As the hedge school setting dominates the play’s action, these languages and connected mythologies, especially the Trojan War, embody postcolonial resistance to the English colonizers’ mapping and re-naming mission. As Lorna Hardwick states, “…Brian Friel’s *Translations* reclaimed classical literature from imperialist appropriation and returned it to the Irish for use as a basis for asserting their own identity as well as for building a common base of communication with the British” (110-111).

Across languages and continents, an enormous revitalization of interest in Greek tragedy has occurred in the latter part of the twentieth century, especially in the expression and exploration of diverse political and social perspectives. This contrasts imperial co-opting of classical tradition to both justify and further colonial activities, especially through imposed cultural norms and education. Scholarly attention within the wider field of postcolonial studies has explored the use of Greek tragedy as a subversive postcolonial medium to challenge and renegotiate colonial power structures and norms.

---

64 Numerous scholarly studies, such as *Dionysus Since 69: Greek Tragedy at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, have explored this phenomenon. In the introduction, Edith Hall explains that more Greek tragedy has been performed since 1969 than since the period of antiquity, with Greek tragedies being performed in a variety of languages and on every continent. Hall points to the subversive cultural potential of Greek tragedy, tracing the origin of its resurrection to “the seismic political shifts marking the end of the 1960s” as “the social forces unleashed in this period, with their focuses on race, authority, imperialism, and sexual politics, are suggestive of the reasons why Greek tragedy has proven so attractive subsequently” (1, 9).

65 According to Lorna Hardwick, the classics under imperialism often represented “oppressive constraints and exploitation” that furthered “the dictates, values, and material culture of colonial appropriators,” especially defining “colonial education” and the authority of the “governing classes” (109).

66 Collections such as *Classics and Imperialism in the British Empire* and *Classics in Postcolonial Worlds* explore the relationship between classics and imperialism, and postcolonialism. In the introduction to *Classics and Imperialism in the British Empire*, Mark Bradley states that “…one could chart the formative relationship between classical influences and imperialism, for example, in the British education system, national dramatic productions, political rhetoric, public architecture, or the activities and representation of the monarchy” (10). Among other critics, Marianne McDonald argues for the dissident potential of Greek tragedy in challenging accepted norms, stating that “classics thus can provide a literature of protest, as well as acting as a literary vehicle to ensure control by an occupying government. Since societies and governments appreciate the value of the classics, people who perceive themselves oppressed can use the classics to express their discontent” (McDonald 38). In “Refiguring Classical Texts: Aspects of the Postcolonial Condition,” Lorna Hardwick argues that “refiguration of classical drama can be an important means of escape from colonization of the mind for colonizers as well as for the colonized” and that
In the wider field of Irish Studies, the exploration and re-fashioning of Greek themes and works, especially tragedies, is a prominent topic. Historically, Irish people’s enthusiasm for and incorporation of classical learning, history, and literature does not represent acceptance of British rule and its classically influenced underlying imperial ideology. For example, Irish monks during the Middle Ages preserved many classical Greek and Latin texts that otherwise would have been lost forever. W.B. Stanford’s seminal *Ireland and the Classical Tradition* traces the longstanding relationship between the classics and Irish history, tradition, and literature, focusing especially on “the illustrious story of Irish scholarship in the early medieval period,” the numerous examples of Gaelic treatments of classical themes, and the maintenance of classical teaching in forbidden Irish “hedge schools” (to be explored further later in this chapter). Many scholars, including Declan Kiberd, J. Michael Walton, Marianne McDonald, Seamus Deane, Brian Arkins, J. Michael Walton, and Helen Vendler, have commented on the subversive use of the classics in Irish literature in a postcolonial fashion in the second half of the twentieth century. Friel’s

---

“the role of classical texts as a basis for critique and intervention has been important in twentieth-century Europe and Africa as a part of resistance against various kinds (107, 111).

67 The 2002 edited collection *Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy*, with a foreword by prominent Irish scholar Declan Kiberd, studies the restructuring of ancient Greek material by Irish writers particularly engaged with contentious Irish political and national affairs. Brian Arkins has published numerous books on classical influences in Irish literature, such as *Builders of My Soul: Greek and Roman Themes in Yeats*, an in-depth study of Yeats’s classical material and *Irish Appropriations of Greek Tragedy*. In addition to exploring Irish revisions of Greek tragedy through the theme of death and dying, Fiona Macintosh’s *Dying Acts: Death in Ancient Greek and Modern Irish Tragedy* contains a detailed account of the connections between Greek tragedy and the Irish literary tradition. Marianne McDonald, who also contributed a chapter to *Amid Our Troubles*, wrote *The Living Art of Greek Tragedy* to analyze the relevance of Greek tragedy for contemporary audiences. Florence Impens’s 2018 book *Classical Presences in Irish Poetry After 1960: The Answering Voice* synthesizes classical materials in the poetry of Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, and Eavan Boland. In addition to the numerous publications on the subject, Irish studies conferences often include panels and roundtable discussions on Irish appropriations of classical material; the subject of the University of Notre Dame’s annual Irish seminar in 2016 was “Classical Influences and included notable presenters such as playwright Marina Carr.

68 Marianne McDonald remarks that more translations and versions of Greek material have come from Ireland than any other English-speaking country and that “in many ways Ireland was and is constructing its identity through the representations offered by Greek tragedy” (37). Additionally, Fiona Macintosh states that while “the British occupiers thought that some of the classics would offer healthy examples of the governed accepting the power of government,” twentieth century Irish authors have “turned this on its head,” using this body of literature to “feed their own subversive protests” and “conceal the direct statement of their desires behind the mask of Greek tragedy” (38). In its applications in Irish literature, J. Michael Walton explains that myth “becomes personal by virtue of its
mythological interventions in postcolonial Irish conflicts, especially the Troubles, accompany those by such prominent nineteenth and twentieth century Irish authors as Seamus Heaney, Eavan Boland, Derek Mahon, Brendan Kennelly, and Michael Longley, James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, Marina Carr, and more. Such authors follow concurrent trends in world literature, especially in the genre of theater. In the wake of ongoing violence and protest in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland resulting from British colonialism, such as the three-decades-long (1960s-1990s) Troubles\(^69\), late twentieth century Irish writers have engaged with ideas of human rights, identity, personal liberties, and reclaiming of culture through revising the same texts and mythologies that have seemingly justified their colonization and conscious fashioning as a colonial “Other.”\(^70\) Marianne McDonald states that these Irish writers “have been using the very [classical Greek and Latin] texts which are considered the epitome of civilization to give literary expression to and aid their own drive for freedom and justice” (17). In doing so, these authors question undo the ideological foundations of British imperialism and its aftermath by using its own literary and mythological tools.

\(^69\) The Troubles, a three decades-long period of conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland that began in the late 1960s and ended with the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement in 1998, stemmed largely from the aftermath of the British colonial period, the British military presence in Northern Ireland, and Irish and Northern Irish land divisions and conflicts. Paramilitary organizations such as the IRA (Irish Republican Army) and the UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force) engaged in brutal acts of terrorist violence that claimed the lives of civilians as well as combatants. While the overt hostilities have ceased, tensions continue to simmer below the surface, especially in the wake of the United Kingdom’s departure from the European Union and ongoing debates about a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, a key component of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement.

\(^70\) The creation of an “Other” to legitimize colonization is a key ideological component of imperial doctrine. This has been well explored in the wider field of postcolonial studies starting with Edward Said’s *Orientalism* as well as Irish postcolonial criticism. Joseph Lennon’s essay “Irish Orientalism: An Overview” traces the commonalities between Orientalism and Celticism in British assignation of an Irish “Other.” Declan Kiberd’s argument that the English, in fact, invented Ireland in their “strenuous attempts to define an English national character, and a countervailing Irish one” echoes Said’s arguments about the West’s creation of the Orient as a constructed idea rather than an actual place (9).
Several classical authors and works have garnered intense interest from Irish authors. Due to its thematic focus on personal freedom and choice, Sophocles’ *Antigone* is extremely popular; there were four Irish versions presented in 1984 alone. Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, described by Marianne McDonald as “the greatest anti-war play ever written,” is another favorite among Irish writers, with notable versions by Brendan Kennelly in 1993 and Aidan Matthews in 2002 (106). Both plays contain great dissident potential for Irish re-imagining, as they consciously undermine power structures and highlight the effects of war and conflict upon women. Seamus Heaney’s 1991 *The Cure at Troy*, a version of Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, has received significant scholarly and popular attention, including frequent quoting by world dignitaries and key figures in the Northern Ireland peace process. In his adaptation, Heaney inserts key phrases and choral odes specifically related to the Northern Irish situation. Former classicist at Trinity College and Belfast poet Michael Longley has garnered much critical attention for his use of the classics to address Northern Irish issues. Longley draws extensively on classical sources, especially Ovid and Homer, in his collections *The Ghost Orchid, Gorse Fire*.

---

71 The first stanza of the ending chorus mourns that “human beings suffer, they torture one another” tend to “get hurt and get hard” in the aftermath of “wrong/inflicted and endured” (Heaney 80). In the next stanza, several striking images decisively leave behind the ancient setting and leaps forward into Heaney’s contemporary environment with haunting references to the suffering on both sides of the Troubles. The “innocent in gaols” and the mourning “hunger-striker’s father” represent Catholic Republicans and their families, and the “police widow in veils” who “faints at the funeral home” embodies Unionist suffering (Heaney 80). The next two stanzas present a hopeful outlook for the future, oft-quoted by politicians and dignitaries, including Bill Clinton, Gerry Adams, Al Gore, and, most recently, Joe Biden.

72 At Trinity, Longley’s Greek professor was none other than W.B. Stanford, author of the seminal *Ireland and the Classical Tradition*, cited in this chapter, which traced the development of Ireland’s relationship with classical learning. In his essay “Lapsed Classicist,” Longley himself claims that he has been “Homer-haunted for fifty years” (57).

73 The poem “The Butchers” from *Gorse Fires*, for example, portrays the brutal killing of the suitors of Odysseus’ wife, Penelope, at the end of *The Odyssey*, but locates the poem in Ireland with bog imagery: “Until they came to a bog-meadow full of bog-asphoels/Where the residents are ghosts or images of the dead” (Longley 51). The violence of the poem, the title “The Butchers,” and the bog imagery connects it to the Shankill Butchers, a loyalist gang in Belfast who murdered twenty-three people between 1975 and 1982. Rather than addressing the sectarian violence directly, Longley explores it through the lens of Homer’s Odyssey. Longley states that “Homer also empowered [him] to comment obliquely on the Northern Irish troubles” (101).
Fires, The Weather in Japan, and Angel Hill. In his wide range of classical influences, Longley chooses the *Iliad* most often when discussing Northern Irish conflicts and the peace process.\(^74\)

While many of Friel’s plays deal with postcolonial topics and engage mythological references, *Translations* is particularly suited for mytho-postcolonial analysis of the Trojan War due to the subversive classics-steeped hedge school and the characters’ quoting from the *Aeneid* at key moments of the play. Additionally, while scholarship has noted *Translations*’ emphasis on mythology, it has not recognized the anti-colonial role of the classics or, specifically, the Trojan War. Attention to the Trojan War myth as a particularly subversive form of anti-colonial expression in modern and contemporary Irish literature remains significantly under-theorized.

Tales of the Trojan War and its aftermath, particularly the epics *The Iliad* and *The Aeneid*, are well suited to address topics of imperialism, occupation, and territory. *The Iliad*, attributed to the Greek Homer, depicts the events of several weeks during the final year of the ten-year Greek siege of the walled city of Troy.\(^75\) *The Aeneid* spans a greater expanse of time, portraying the Trojan warrior Aeneas’s travels and conquests after fleeing from his homeland’s annihilation. Augustan poet Virgil composed *The Aeneid* as Rome’s national epic to solidify the emperor’s divine right by heralding the Trojan Aeneas as Rome’s fated founder and linking Rome with the ancient Trojan Empire. In *The Aeneid*, Virgil aligns Aeneas’ hostile encounters with other civilizations with numerous contemporaneous conflicts facing the Roman Empire. Famously, Virgil provides a detailed foundation for Rome’s including its famous longtime

\(^{74}\) In *The Ghost Orchid*, Longley includes a sequence of poems building up to the death of the Trojan hero Hector: “The Camp-Fires,” “The Helmet,” “The Parting,” “The Scales,” and “Ceasefire.” In each of these poems, whether through diction or allegorical references, Longley makes explicit connections with Ireland. Each poem also deconstructs the mythical epic by focusing on small, private moments between characters, including personal reflections, tender meetings, and emotional connections, reducing the epic scale to the minutely individual.

\(^{75}\) These include the famed warrior Achilles’ refusal to fight for King Agamemnon, the death of Achilles’ closest companion, Patroclus, and his killing of Trojan prince Hector in single combat. While the epic does not portray the war’s end, Troy’s destruction at the hands of the Greeks was a foregone conclusion.
enmity with the city of Carthage in *The Aeneid* Book Four. According to David Quint, “to the victors belongs epic, with its linear teleology…the victors experience history as a coherent, end-directed story told by their own power; the losers experience a contingency that they are powerless to shape to their own ends” (8-9). This linear teleology supports the Enlightenment narrative of colonialism as forward progress, and, fittingly, *The Aeneid* would provide a model for future imperial epics, such as Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*; per David Quint, the “Virgilian tradition of imperial dominance” serves as “the defining tradition of the Western epic” (8-9). However, despite the epic’s “claim to totality,” as Philip Hardie describes, this form is “forever open to new readings,” such as those by Irish postcolonial writers (1-2).

In keeping with Bhabha’s analysis of the ambivalent nature of colonial discourse due to its need for repetition and re-inscription and that the insecure colonial power splits itself over so many iterations, Philip Hardie argues that the epic is “driven obsessively to repetition and reworking, especially within “the general mechanisms of imitation and tradition in ancient literature” (85; 1-2). The epic, then, insists on its own completion yet simultaneously lends itself to numerous repetitions and re-creations, leaving it vulnerable as an absolute authoritative form of colonial discourse and ripe for dissident re-imaginings. Thus, in its multiple networks of stories, characters, mythologies, etc., spanning works such as Homer’s *Odyssey* and *Iliad* to Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* to Euripides’s *Trojan Women*, Trojan War mythology provides a view of national conflict, territorial occupation, and imperial expansion from numerous perspectives. *The Aeneid* serves dually as national master narrative and a subversive space to evaluate imperialism.

The English used the Trojan War and its surrounding mythologies to bolster its colonial endeavors since Geoffrey of Monmouth’s 1136 quasi-history *History of the Kings of Britain*, which created a seemingly authoritative national origin myth that gave British colonial activities
the air of a sacred national duty. According to Hugh A. MacDougall in *Racial Myth in English History*, Monmouth’s *History* followed from an established precedent as classical writers often claimed national origin from another great civilization (8). While English imperial efforts in Ireland increased, the strength of England’s national origin myth also grew through re-inscription upon the national consciousness in numerous subsequent works, such as Spenser’s 1590 *The Faerie Queene*, England’s national epic in the Elizabethan era. Many Renaissance scholars, such as Nicholas Canny, Heather James, Andrew Hadfield, etc., have noted that the English harnessed Trojan War myths, stemming from Rome’s use of *The Aeneid* as national epic, to justify colonial activities during the reign of Elizabeth I, which represented the escalation of full-scale British imperialism in Ireland. Under the Tudors, the Trojan War myth was perhaps most aggressively deployed in conjunction with the denigration of previous colonial attempts in favor of an aggressive legal and military campaign to subjugate Ireland finally and effectively.

While it may seem odd that the British would identify themselves with the defeated Trojans, the British were, in fact, establishing a *translatio imperii* (translation of empire) from ancient Troy to modern Britain that claimed descendants of the Trojan Aeneas founded the

---

76 Virgil’s *Aeneid* portrays Aeneas as the founder of Lavinium, Rome’s parent city. The Gallo-Romans, the Franks in Gaul, and the Normans all traced their own origins to Troy. In his appropriation of supposed Trojan ancestry, Geoffrey of Monmouth “simply exploited an existing myth which was guaranteed to sit well with the Norman masters of England” (8).

77 *The Faerie Queene* lavishes praise upon England’s government, Queen Elizabeth, and the English through numerous allegorical heroic endeavors. *The Faerie Queene* continues the *translatio imperii* from *History of the Kings of Britain*, beginning its prolonged history of England in Books II and III with the fall of Troy. Here, Spenser suggests that English history has proceeded in an unbroken line since the city of Troy.

78 For almost three hundred years prior to the rule of Henry VIII, English control in Ireland was limited to Dublin and the twenty-mile span around it known as the Pale. Nicholas Canny writes that outside of this area, the native Irish and the “Old English,” descendants of twelfth-century Anglo-Norman invaders, lived mostly peacefully as the Old English favored “conciliatory measures” rather than the forceful settlement that Edmund Spenser and others began to call for in the sixteenth century (14). The Irish and many of the Old English simply “paid lip service to the [English] government in Dublin,” retaining “traditional Celtic culture” and laws (Latimer 62). S.J. Connolly describes a new wave of settlers known as the “New English,” including Spenser, who arrived in Ireland under the Tudors, to replace Irish cultural, legal, linguistic, and religious activities with their own (256). The Irish Parliament in Dublin passed the Act of Supremacy in 1536, which declared Henry VIII head of the Church of Ireland and began the dissolution of the Irish Catholic Church (Horning 27). Parliament Statute 33 of Henry VIII passed by the 1541 Dublin Parliament reclassified the Irish as subjects of the English crown (Neill 5).
Roman Empire and later the English nation\textsuperscript{79} (Greenfield 182). English imperial activities became part of a national master narrative. National master narratives, as described by Jan Ifversen, “confer identity” by legitimizing a community and providing a narrative about “origin of creation;” they function as “a particular discourse, the purpose of which is to justify order and authority in a community” (453-455). The master narrative of Trojan origins justifies British colonialism in the name of perpetuating Troy’s legacy as continued through imperial Rome\textsuperscript{80}.

England’s aggressive imperialism under the Tudors, bolstered by Trojan War mythology, culminated in the Nine Years War between England and Ireland. Following the defeat of Irish rebel forces and the subsequent collapse of Irish power structures, the 1609 Acts of Plantation led to permanent English Protestant settlements on lands forfeited by the exiled Gaelic ruling order in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{81} Many historians claim that these events are a direct cause for both historical and current issues in Northern Ireland. The Plantation established a Protestant ruling class in Northern Ireland whose political and cultural loyalties lay with the British and, over the centuries, practiced both social and legal discrimination against the Irish Catholic population\textsuperscript{82}.

\textsuperscript{79} The \textit{History} includes an account of Brutus, Aeneas of Troy’s grandson and the great-grandson of the goddess Venus. Brutus is banished at age fifteen, blamed for his father’s accidental death. After years of wandering and heroic deeds, Brutus arrives with a small band of followers in the giant-populated land of Albion. He renames Albion Britain after himself, conquers the giants, and founds a city named Troynovant (“New Troy”) that eventually becomes London. The \textit{History} then details “the heroic exploits of a long line of kings” descended from Brutus including King Lear (immortalized by Shakespeare several centuries later) and King Arthur (MacDougall 8).

\textsuperscript{80} Imagery from the Trojan War pervaded Elizabethan and Stuart iconography, especially pertaining to the monarchy, imbuing the government and its colonial activities with “classical authority” (James 22).

\textsuperscript{81} The surrender of combined Irish and Spanish in 1603 marked the end of not only the Nine Years War but also of the last organized Irish resistance to English rule for several hundred years. After the war, the sudden exodus of over ninety of Ulster’s most influential leaders and largest landowners created a “power vacuum” that allowed England to escalate the colonization of Ireland in the now vulnerable North (Coohill 23). The English government sought to “secure the future stability and peace of Ireland for the Crown” through a “full-scale process of plantation” in Northern Ireland (Cronin 65). Consequently, the 1609 Articles of Plantation bequeathed all land forfeited by those who had fled as well as other lands forcibly taken from those who remained, totaling around 500,000 acres, to English and Scottish Protestant settlers. This forced settlement led to deep enmity between the minority land-owning Protestant ruling class and the majority native Irish Catholics.

\textsuperscript{82} Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry state that the Plantation is the “one indisputable historic cause of the current conflict” and that “without the colonial Plantation of Ulster in the seventeenth century, and its legacy, Northern Ireland would not exist” (56).
Hundreds of years later, the Troubles were, at their core, an issue of territorial occupation and a fundamental disagreement about continuing British presence in Northern Ireland.

While the military and colonizing events of the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-centuries may seem distant from twentieth-century Irish literature, it is important to note that questions of sovereign or shared territory, British occupation, and sectarian violence addressed by twentieth century Irish authors originate with these episodes. Additionally, as English imperialism in Ireland, including the Nine Years War and the Articles of Plantation, had its ideological foundations in the appropriation of the Trojan War as a national origin myth, these historical events point to Irish authors’ later use of Trojan War mythology as a form of subversive, anti-colonial resistance. By returning to British imperial Trojan War mythologies in addressing contemporary postcolonial violence and sectarian tensions, Friel, Heaney, Longley, and others destabilize their foundations. Additionally, particular attention to the Trojan War is not uncommon among non-Irish anticolonial writers. For example, in his 1990 epic poem *Omeros*, Noble Prize-winning Saint Lucian incorporates aspects of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to address colonialism and racial prejudice in the Caribbean.83

**Postcolonial Bricolage and Mimicry in the Irish Hedge School: The Classics as Anti-Colonial Resistance**

*Translations’* main setting in Baile Beag’s “hedge school” connects the Irish-English conflict over the mapping project to an anti-colonial use of Trojan War mythology. A “hedge school” is an underground educational establishment that provided continuing education in the Irish language and the classics before the establishment of the British National School System.

---

83 Walcott’s epic, in its re-fashioning of Homer, also demonstrates the “woman-as-nation” trope in both colonial and anti-colonial literature, to be explored as my next chapter. In *Omeros*, Walcott creates both a character named Helen and, at times, refers to the colonized island of St. Lucia as Helen, due to its frequent bartering between France and Britain throughout various territorial conflicts in the region.
Hedge schools, established to circumvent the 1695 penal laws outlawing Catholic schools and Catholic teachers, included reading, writing, spelling, mathematics, Greek, and Latin in their curriculum (Macintosh 2). In *Translations*’ hedge school, the Greek and Roman classics take center stage, both in character depictions and discussions of resistance to the Ordnance Survey efforts. The play’s action occurs just before the introduction of the National School System in 1831, which, along with the later devastation of the Famine in the 1840s, would effectively force the Irish language into near extinction. Baile Beag’s hedge school is populated by adult students who labor in the fields during the day and study Irish, Greek, Latin, and mathematics under the tutelage of schoolmaster Hugh and his son, Manus, for a nominal fee.

The emphasis on classical Greek and Roman mythology and philosophy in the hedge schools dated back to both Ireland’s religious and bardic traditions. In a program note for the 1986 Theatr Clwyd Company’s production of *Translations*, Mark Scantlebury notes that “during the Dark Ages, the Irish monks were famous for their love and knowledge of classical learning.” It was the fate of the poorest and most despised of Irish society to keep that tradition alive [in hedge schools].” In his introduction to the volume *Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy*, Declan Kiberd ties the dissident potential of the hedge school setting to British subjugation of classical education in Ireland, remarking that the collapse of the bardic schools after 1600 “did not mark a defeat of classical ideals in Irish writing, merely a subjugation of actual classicists” that “in no way blunted [Irish] commitment to the classics” but “on the contrary,” imbued such study with “the glamour of an outlaw activity (allied to the more usual virtue of defending ancient tradition)” (vii-viii). As a result, Kiberd argues that “analogies drawn

---

84 In “When Despair and History Rhyme: Colonialism and Greek Tragedy,” Marianne McDonald notes that “the claim has been made that the Irish saved classical civilization for the West by copying manuscripts in the Middle Ages” (58-59).
by writers with ancient Greece” contained multiple levels of “subversive implication” (vii). Kiberd notes that such an endeavor “proved a potent mix in the centuries of colonial rule which followed” and meant that, in Ireland, classics “would seldom be used to underwrite empire but more often to unpick the very idea” (vii-viii). As previously noted, Irish classical study constitutes especially rebellious intellectual activity as the British appropriated the classical tradition to reinforce and justify their imperial activities and supposed cultural superiority.

The study of Irish, Greek, and Latin in the hedge schools considers the implications of indigenous language and meaning. While the Irish language is considered indigenous and the oldest vernacular language in Western Europe, Greek and Latin are certainly acquired imports. The Irish language tends not to import foreign words at the rate of the English language, which is originally a Germanic language that has heavily borrowed from Greek, Latin, and other influences. The hedge school students study their native language, Irish, as well as Greek and Latin, undermining British linguistic colonial hegemony. This represents Ashcroft et al’s description of “polyglossic or ‘poly-dialectical’ communities in postcolonial countries “where a multitude of dialects [and languages] interweave to form a generally comprehensible linguistic continuum” (Ashcroft et al 38-39).

Hedge school student Jimmy Jack embodies Ashcroft et al’s notion of a polyglossic community and provides a complex portrayal of Bakhtin’s notion of hetereoglossia as represented in the use of vernacular and popular modes of speaking in the theatre. Friel describes

---

85 Additionally, Kiberd remarks that, due to British imperial intervention, those who defended classical ideals and education in Ireland “would also be the rebels, the anarchists, the dissidents,” rather than nostalgic backwards thinkers (xiii).

86 According to Helen Lojek, “Friel’s use of Latin and Greek, particularly Jimmy Jack’s recitations from Homer’s _Odyssey_ and Virgil’s _Georgics_, underscores the significance of ordinary people. Jimmy hints that the rough exterior concealing the nobility of the Greek hero (whom both he and Hugh refer to as ‘Ulysses’) is like his own rough exterior. Hugh’s insistence that Ireland has more in common with the classics than with the English such parallels constitute a kind of insistence that the lives of those Donegal residents are worthy of attention” (23).
the sixty-year-old bachelor Jimmy Jack Cassie, who attends evening classes at the hedge school for intellectual stimulation, as “fluent in Latin and Greek but is in no way pedantic” as “to him it is perfectly normal to speak these tongues” and “the world of the gods and the ancient myths is as real and as immediate as everyday life in the townland of Baile Beag” (384). According to Alan Peacock, in Translations, “the Classics are kept alive with a mixture of learning and innocence. This kind of effortless construing of Homeric Greek is beyond most of us now: the elderly, tramp-like ‘Infant Prodigy’ however reads his Homer with scholarly accuracy, but also with unaffected delight” (124). He gives farming tips based on Virgil’s Georgics and educational advice from the Agricola of Tacitus. The trilingualism of Jimmy Jack and the other hedge school students in Irish, Latin, and Greek complicates the notion of the local vernacular of the working people vs. the language of those in power through imperial activities. Jimmy Jack seamlessly moves between Greek and Irish mythology and languages, discussing the Irish goddess Grania in his comparison of “Zeus’s girls” Athene, Artemis, and Helen of Troy (386).

Hugh and Jimmy Jack simultaneously represent Baile Beag’s cultural and educational heritage and reveal English as a vastly limited language incapable of expressing the depth of emotion and intellect of Latin and Greek. This relates to De Certeau’s notion of bricolage as classical learning and languages, as previously pointed out, had long been associated with the project of empire. In Baile Beag, the villagers remain stubbornly resistant to learning English. In the play, English is only spoken by the Ordnance Survey team, schoolmaster Hugh, and his two sons. Notably, Owen uses his English as a colonial collaborator to assist the Ordnance Survey team in Anglicizing place names and consciously rejects Greek and Latin. Hugh inverts the colonial construction of Gaelic as substandard and uncivilized. Hugh remarks that only a few of the villagers speak English, “outside the parish of course,” only using it for “the purposes of
commerce” and quipping that “the older classical tongue and our own culture made a happier marriage” (Friel 412). In this comment, Hugh pejoratively describes English’s quantitative and linear nature, exemplified in the Ordnance Survey’s emphasis on precision in measurement at the expense of the Irish folklore of place names. When Lieutenant Yolland remarks that he used to live near the poet William Wordsworth87, Hugh states that “…we’re not familiar with your literature, Lieutenant. We feel closer to the warm Mediterranean. We tend to overlook your island” (Friel 417). In a deliberate inversion of imposed British colonial stereotypes, through classical references, the native Irish portray their “culture as ancient, central and civilized” and “categorize[s] the monolingual British, by contrast, as modern, marginal, and barbaric…Hugh and Jimmy cast their adversaries as uneducated barbarians and Persians, whilst propelling themselves into the role of sophisticated Romans and Greeks” (Saunders 135-136).

Schoolmaster Hugh bolsters the Irish language’s superiority to English by linking Irish with the classical languages he elevates. Hugh believes that classical languages are better suited than English to express the reality of life in rural Ireland. In claiming the superiority of Greek and Latin for Ireland, Hugh appropriates the classics as the defenders, rather than the destroyers, of indigenous ways. Hugh’s contentions are quite significant on several levels. Yolland remarks that “Gaelic literature” is “enormously rich and ornate” (Friel 418). Hugh agrees, describing Gaelic as “a rich language. A rich literature,” then explains that “…certain cultures expend on their vocabularies and syntax acquisitive energies and ostentations entirely lacking in their material lives,” the mark of a “spiritual people” (418). Hugh then posits that Gaelic is “…full of the mythologies of fantasy and hope and self-deception – a syntax opulent with tomorrows. It is

87 Ironically, the mention of Wordsworth here could signify a missed opportunity for the native Irish, as Wordsworth’s reverence for nature and land seemingly defies the project of the Ordnance Survey. However, Romanticism’s emphasis on the individual’s experience with nature is incongruent with the villagers’ communal land practices and relationships.
our response to mud cabins and a diet of potatoes; our only method of replying to…inevitabilities,” (Friel 418-419). Linguistically, Hugh claims that English has a limited capacity and that both the Irish language and the classical tongues are more capable of exploring the depths of the human experience. The epic storytelling tradition in both Greek and Latin aligns with the tradition of place names in the dinnshenchas; just as each mention of Ulysses, Athene, Helen of Troy, etc. cannot occur without engaging the vast networks of mythology surrounding these characters, so too is it impossible to Irish place names without calling upon their complicated histories.

In rejecting the English language and embracing the classical tongues, appropriating them as superior for Irish purposes, Hugh rejects the classical foundations of British imperialism88. The multilingual Irish engage in bricolage by appearing to uphold the classical learning emphasized by imperial projects but instead use Latin, Greek, and Irish to demonstrate the superiority of their relationship to land and communal landowning approaches. The hedge school denizens have, in effect, decolonized their minds, as wa Thiong’o describes, but they have also decolonized classical languages (16). Their process aligns with Ashcroft et al’s analysis of language as post-colonial resistance; the students observe that “the crucial function of language as a medium of power…defines itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted by the colonized place” (37). The villagers have denied “the privilege of ‘English’” and “reject[ed] the metropolitan power over the means of communication,” followed by a process of “the appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of

---

88 According to Mark Bradley, “one could chart the formative relationship between classical influences and imperialism, for example, in the British education system, national dramatic productions, political rhetoric, public architecture, or the activities and representation of the monarchy…classical scholarship has always occupied a prestigious position for negotiating the history and memory of the Western world, demanding cultural and intellectual superiority and exposing European exceptionalism, and it is little surprise to find that it has been invoked to establish legitimacy for states, societies, and individuals” (10-11).
capturing and remoulding the language to new uses, marks a separation from the site of colonial
privilege” (Ashcroft et al 37). In this sense, the hedge school students and teachers have
performed a double anti-colonial rejection and appropriation of language. First, even though
Hugh and Manus are perfectly fluent in English, they have deliberately excluded it from their
hedge school instruction and only use it when necessary. Second, they have appropriated Latin
and Greek, languages associated with the mythological and ideological foundations of English
imperialism, as markers of cultural pride that reinforce their communal relationships to land and
nature and bolster the status of Irish. In the hedge school, the classics are no longer the
foundation of an English colonial education but a bastion of anti-colonial resistance and
maintenance of cultural heritage.

However, the imposition of colonial “modernity” hangs over the interactions within the
school. Hugh and Manus discuss the new National School, where Hugh has applied to teach, that
will surely put the hedge school out of business as it will educate students for free and provide all
instruction in English. In addition to her desire to learn English over Greek and Latin, Maire
chides her would-be paramour, Manus, who has refused to apply for the job at the new school
due to his father’s application, by stating that the only opportunity left for him will be to “teach
classics to the cows” (Friel 404). This statement, while a seemingly thrown away quip, reveals a
belief in the incongruity between modernity and the existing communal way of life based on
agriculture and steeped in classical education. Maire’s comment also reflects internalized
colonial standards that establish the inferiority of her culture.

The encounters of the Baile Beag visitors with the British Ordnance Survey team that
(importantly) take place within the hedge school embody the adherence to Greek and Latin as a
process of subversive resistance to the survey’s dual land-based and linguistic imperialism. De
Certeau’s theories on power and resistance, especially on strategy vs. tactics, are particularly salient here. The Ordnance Survey’s first meeting with the villagers is preceded by the mischievous pupil Doalty’s description of his own practice of resistance tactics. Doalty’s actions represent Michel de Certeau’s characterization of tactics as constantly changing, unpredictable adaptations to the strategies of the powerful, which de Certeau describes as “making-do” or “bricolage” (29). These tactics imply both cooperation and competition, practiced by individuals living everyday lives (de Certeau 29). Doalty proudly boasts that as the “Red Coats” are dragging chains and poles, measuring the ground with a complicated machine, he shifts the poles, rendering their measurements inaccurate and finally leading them to take “the bloody machine apart” (Friel 390-391). Shortly after this conversation, Hugh’s other son, Owen, arrives from Dublin to help the British in their mapping endeavor. Communication issues ensue as soon as Owen brings the Ordnance Survey team to the hedge school, highlighting the villagers’ linguistic resistance tactics, coupled with Doalty’s physical, land-based tactics. When the officers attempt to speak English to the villagers, Jimmy Jack asks “Nonne Latine loquitur?” Tellingly, Captain Lancey reveals himself as so uneducated that he does not recognize the language and condescendingly remarks, “I do not speak Gaelic, sir” (406). In this instance, Captain Lancey unwittingly reveals the great affinity and connectedness between the classical languages and the villagers’ native Irish language. His lack of understanding also belies the connection between English and the mapping project’s imperial land claiming mission, juxtaposed against the association of native Irish plus Greek and Latin with maintaining ancient ties to the land.

---

89 My translation. Literally, “Is not Latin spoken by him?” Functionally, “Doesn’t he speak Latin?” This comment reveals Jimmy Jack’s astonishment and should arouse the thought in the reader as well that the poor agrarian community is more well versed in classical languages than British army officers.
The Irish villagers most frequently invoke the classics when their land is most directly threatened. In *Translations*’ final act, the Ordnance Survey efforts have grown awry, and the sinister nature of the occupying army is revealed. The English Lieutenant Yolland has disappeared. In retribution, Captain Lancey threatens to shoot all livestock in the town, and, taking a tragic page from Irish history, to “embark on a series of evictions and levelling of every abode” if Yolland has not appeared forty-eight hours after the soldiers shoot the livestock. In the hedge school, Bridget reports that while watching soldiers strike hay bales with bayonets and swarm the countryside while searching for Yolland, Jimmy Jack is jumping up and down, crying “Thermopylae! Thermopylae!” (Friel 436). While Bridget laughs at his seemingly inappropriate reaction, closer analysis reveals the subversive nature of Jimmy Jack’s outbursts. The 480 B.C. Battle of Thermopylae between the Persian Empire and alliance of Greek city-states, led by Sparta, has inspired western civilization for centuries, including the recent film *300*, with its “last stand” tale of how the vastly outnumbered Greeks held out against the Persian army for an entire week before succumbing. In his cries, Jimmy Jack encourages the local Irish of Baile Beag to hold onto their land, lore, and languages, despite seemingly impossible odds. This flies in the face of the recommendations of collaborators such as Owen and Maire who have welcomed the Anglicized place names, English as the primary language, and the National School System, all of which will annihilate the local culture. The play ends with this ambiguous, yet doomed, uprising, foreshadowing a bloody struggle, diaspora, and the loss of language and land. It also points to the coming Troubles and ongoing postcolonial struggles between England and Ireland. With Jimmy Jack’s “Thermopylae” reference and the indeterminate location in Ireland, Friel distances the conflict of the play from the contemporaneous Troubles and the differences between Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants, moving towards a collective idea of Irishness.
Mimicry and (Anti)Colonial Ideology: The Trojan War as Dissident Resistance

The play’s final scene, when Baile Beag’s disastrous fate is evident, occurs in the hedge school/site of localized anticolonial resistance. The drunken Hugh and Jimmy Jack re-fashion Trojan War mythology into an expression of protest. In a curious echo of the finale of Sean O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock* that depicts the inebriated musings of “Captain” Boyle and Joxer in the face of ruthlessly impending disaster, Hugh recalls when he and Jimmy Jack marched off to join the 1798 rebellion\(^9^0\), a surely familiar date to an Irish audience:

A spring morning. 1798. Going into battle. Do you remember, James? Two young gallants with pikes across their shoulders and the *Aeneid* in their pockets. Everything seemed to find definition that spring – a congruence, a miraculous matching of hope and past and present and possibility. Striding across the fresh, green land. The rhythms of perception heightened. The whole enterprise of consciousness accelerated. We were gods that morning, James; and I had recently married my goddess, Caitlin Dubh Nic Reactainn, may she rest in peace. And to leave her and my infant son in his cradle – that was heroic, too. By God, sir, we were magnificent (Friel 445).

Far from an insignificant detail, Hugh’s and Jimmy Jack carrying *The Aeneid* to join a revolution indicates a desire to undo British imperialism at its foundations. *The Aeneid* is the very epic which the English used to legitimize their colonial activities. Rather than cede this epic to the English, Hugh and Jimmy Jack refashion it as a reclamation of classical heritage for indigenous purposes. Additionally, when he describes the heroism of leaving his wife and infant son, Hugh references the many classical heroes who bid farewell to wives and children before

---

\(^9^0\) In 1798, the United Irishmen, inspired by the recent revolutions in America and France and led by famous Irish patriot Wolfe Tone, rebelled against British rule, joined by a French army that landed in County Mayo. The uprising was swiftly put down with a hefty death toll between 10,000 and 30,000.
embarking on dangerous journeys or off to war, such as Odysseus, Hector, Agamemnon, etc. As rebels, Hugh and Jimmy Jack reject the ideological framework of British imperialism and insist upon their own divine lineage, calling themselves “gods” (Friel 445). By using *The Aeneid* to bolster their courage, the “two young gallants” mimic and wrest away the foundation of British imperialism in their efforts to gain self-determination and preserve their heritage from further cultural and linguistic encroachment.

Hugh’s closing speech at the end of the play incorporates *The Aeneid* as a form of resistance against British colonialism. He stumblingly recites the opening of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, which foreshadows Rome’s destruction of Carthage in the Third Punic War, a historical event by the time of *The Aeneid*’s writing. Hugh’s choice to recite these lines here is a lament, noting the inevitability of conquest and the erasure of a civilization, comparing Carthage’s destruction to that of Baile Beag. Much like the failed 1798 rebellion, Baile Beag cannot escape impending doom. While *The Aeneid* celebrates “the triumph of Roman civilization,” Hugh’s recitation is tragic (McGrath 193). Here, “Friel clearly draws a parallel in the passage to England’s erosion of the Irish language and civilization, the terrible intimation of which makes Hugh stumble over his translation of it…in Hugh’s quote and in *Translations* as a whole, there is a fatalistic inevitability about the domination of the conqueror’s language, as fatalistic as the destiny of Aeneas to found Rome and of the Romans to destroy Carthage” (McGrath 193-194). Many critics, including Maureen S.G. Hawkins, have noted parallels between “Irish speaking Ireland” with Carthage and the British with the Romans in *Translations* and other adaptations of Greek tragedy by Irish authors (32). According to Patrick Maley, “Friel actually omits several lines from the *Aeneid*, about both Carthage’s geography and the extent of Juno’s love for it from Hugh’s speech,

---

91 Curiously, Hugh’s self-styling of himself and Jimmy Jack recalls the title of James Joyce’s short story “Two Gallants” from *Dubliners*, in which the main characters are anything but gallant.
concentrating the parallelism of a disastrous union between the two nations. The analogy
between the imperial powers of Rome and England and between fledgling Carthage and Baile
Beag is clear” (118). A review of the 2000 Abbey production of Translations in Caractatus
Magazine notes that, “…Hugh’s closing speech breathes a new life into the ‘irrelevant’ Latin
passage that he quotes. It seems to foresee the inevitability of the Irish language being besieged
by translation” (2-3). The prologue of the Aeneid represents the doubling of a translatio imperii.
Just as the British referred to the Aeneid and Trojan War myths to bolster its claim to imperial
activities through a link to the Roman Empire, the Aeneid creates a mythological justification for
Rome’s ultimate utter annihilation of Carthage, preceded by numerous conflicts.92

Additionally, Hugh’s recitation decries the total loss of culture caused by the severing of
the linguistic link between the Irish and their land, mirroring the inevitability of Carthage’s
destruction by Rome. In an undated radio interview regarding the 1982 production of
Translations, Irish author and theater critic Tom Paulin, a contemporary of Brian Friel, explains
the use of The Aeneid as anticolonial resistance against cultural hegemony:

And I think also the way in which Brian Friel’s hinted at this epic dimension there
towards Virgil, towards THE AENEID. In other words, if this is a play about how one
culture replaces or diminishes another, it hints too at the foundation of a culture which is
after all what THE AENEID is about, and that that waits in the future. And that parallel is
made very, very deliberately in the great speech of the school-teacher where he describes
going off to fight in the 1798 Rebellion with a copy of THE AENEID in his pocket and

92 Despite Rome’s success in the first two Punic Wars against Carthage, certain leadership powers within
Rome felt threatened by Carthage’s influence and prosperity. Senators in favor of further war with Carthage ended
their speeches with the now-famous phrase “Carthago delenda est” (Carthage must be destroyed). In 146 B.C.,
Roman armies razed Carthage to the ground and sold its entire population into slavery.
carrying a pile. That, I think, is a very, very important metaphor really for the establishment finally of a true cultural identity.

While Hugh recognizes the impossible odds against the Irish language and culture, he does not cede without resistance. He thus uses The Aeneid, as Paulin describes, to establish a cultural identity that maintains the ancient Irish connections to the land and express an affinity with the classics that not only celebrates Irish cultural identity but also harnesses them to decry British imperialism and territorial dispossession.

Here, Bhabha’s theories regarding mimicry and colonial discourse provide a valuable framework. Per Bhabha’s argument, mimicry represents a rebellious commandeering of the discourse of the oppressor in which the very conceptual foundation of this discourse is not only mocked but also turned against its original master, ultimately showing its fallibility. In Hugh and Jimmy Jack’s adherence to classical Greco-Roman mythology as a key part of their heritage, especially in their references and recitations of the Aeneid, Hugh and Jimmy Jack reclaim the ideological weapons of the colonizer and attack the foundations of imperialism. Their mimicry ultimately becomes a performance that destabilizes the symbolic expressions of power (Roman and British mythological foundations/justifications for imperial activities) by revealing their artificiality, but it does not win them their land. Bhabha states:

To the extent to which discourse is a form of defensive warfare, mimicry marks those moments of civil disobedience within the discipline of civility: signs of spectacular resistance. When the words of the master become the site of hybridity – the warlike sign of the native – then we may not only read between the lines but even seek to change the often coercive reality that they so lucidly contain (162).
In *Translations*, Hugh’s recitation of the prologue of the *Aeneid* indeed represents a moment in which the “words of the master become…the warlike sign of the native” and “even seek to change the often coercive reality” of British colonialism and cultural, linguistic, and territorial hegemony. In Hugh and Jimmy Jack’s numerous reclamations of classical references, the imperial discourse, per Bhabha, becomes reconstituted, opened, and appropriated by the colonial subject as resistance, additionally revealing the instability and ambiguity of colonial discourse that must be perpetually reinforced to bolster its authority (127). Their performances of the discourse belie its insecurity, as the numerous repetitions of colonial authority split its power with each iteration (Bhabha 155). Rather than allow Greco-Roman mythologies to justify their subjugation, Hugh and Jimmy Jack, in the location of the subversive hedge school, advocate for their own humanity and authority by transforming imperial tools into their own weapons.

However, in keeping with Bhabha’s contention that all mimicry contains inherent ambivalence and “slippage,” Irish use of the classical tradition also represents the complexity of desires experienced by the colonial subject. Many postcolonial theorists argue that the colonial subject’s dreams of independence are inherently shaped by the colonizer’s influence. This notion is especially evident in the Irish re-imagining of the classical tradition. While subversive in nature, this approach embodies Chatterjee’s analysis that the colonized must defeat the colonizer “by his own standards” as it represents Irish engagement with imposed British standards rather than a strict emphasis on the recovery of their own indigenous traditions (21). Additionally, it also reveals the colonized subject’s ambivalent desire to either be accepted by or take the place of the conqueror. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin argue that the colonial other’s mimicry of the center of power proceeds from “a desire not only to be accepted but to be adopted or absorbed” (4). The Baile Beag villagers resented British
colonial activities of remapping and Anglicizing their land, erasing their place names and lore, while insisting on the rejection of Gaelic in favor of learning English. This ambivalence is reflected in both Hugh and Manus’s desire to work in the very National School System that will destroy the hedge school.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon points out that the native’s dreams of “action and aggression” against the colonial settler which are simultaneously accompanied by the native’s jealousy of the settler (52, 56). According to Fanon, the natives despise the “settler elite” but wish to take his place, including his status and possessions (60). This can lead to the reinforcement of imposed colonial hierarchies in a postcolonial society; as Fanon points out, leaders in a newly de-colonized nation often become an elite “national bourgeois” who “step[] into the shoes of the former European settlement” after the colonizer’s departure (155). In this case, the “new” society “perpetuates the previous systematic disadvantages as this new (but still old) system is created using the capitalist standards of the departed administration” (Fanon 160)\(^93\). Therefore, Fanon warns that postcolonial liberation must come with total societal reform, lest the independent nation perpetuate imposed colonial hegemonies. The Baile Beag visitors must not seek material and social security through the focus on material land ownership and modernization imposed by their colonial oppressors.

Additionally, the play’s references to *The Aeneid* and Hugh’s fumbling quotations of its prologue, which forecast the destruction of Carthage, further implicate Owen as a harbinger of destruction, on behalf of the British, by pejoratively implicating him as an Aeneas figure. Patrick Maley describes Owen as an embodiment of “all the conflicts and tensions of the play” and

---

\(^93\) This notion will be expanded upon in further detail in the following chapters, especially as related to the neocolonial bourgeois’s obsession with land ownership as conferring status and social respectability in Marina Carr’s *By the Bog of Cats*, W.B. Yeats’s and Lady Augusta Gregory’s *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, and Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. 

75
“places himself in an exempt sphere in the liminal space between the distinct populations inhabiting Baile Beag” (112). In his “attempts to remove himself entirely from such responsibility,” Owen represents the “proto-Roman” Trojan Aeneas (112). Owen constantly downplays his own importance to the project and the overall implications of the land survey for the Ordnance, which is apparent in his often wildly misleading translations. In *Translations*, Owen “allow[s] the fragile union [between the villagers and the Ordnance Survey team] that relies on his support to collapse” through his own failure to both realize and perform the “extent of his own responsibility” in the delicate situation” (Maley 112). In complete deference to the British and refusal to make any waves, Owen allows the Ordnance Survey team to call him Rolland, only privately correcting Captain Lancey once they have established a relationship.

Similarly, Aeneas “invested himself thoroughly in the political and social sphere of Carthage,” becoming indispensable in the new order that he helps to build. In *The Aeneid* Book IV, Dido comes to rely upon both his knowledge and his leadership skills, and (not in accurately) assumes that Aeneas’s attentions to her, including a sexual encounter while they take shelter from a storm in a cave, will lead to their marriage and the joining of their two civilizations. Only a direct divine edict from Jupiter via his messenger Mercury extracts Aeneas from Carthage to fulfill his fated destiny in Italy. Aeneas’s sudden exit brings destruction to Dido, her city, and future generations of Romans and Carthaginians. Thus, according to Maley, “Hugh’s allusion [to the opening lines of *The Aeneid*] suggests that the downfall of Baile Beag is precipitated by the absence of a central pillar. Owen arrives and makes himself that pillar; yet, by never taking the responsibility necessary for supporting his actions, he ushers in the village’s destruction” (112-113). Likewise, Aeneas’s flight from Carthage becomes its death knell; the systems in which Aeneas became a key part collapse upon his departure.
In his role as an Aeneas figure, Owen embodies the same well-intentioned yet poorly resulting actions of the errant Trojan warrior as well as the conflicted role of the colonial civil servant. In his attempt to secure a career for himself by harnessing his skills in translating between Irish and English (both linguistically and culturally), Owen has returned to the village from Dublin as an employee of the Ordnance Survey. In his internalization of imperial logical standards, Owen believes that he is truly helping the “backwards” villagers embrace the modern world and participate in the mapping project. Desiring nothing more than to be incorporated into the colonial center, Owen embodies Ashcroft et al.’s analysis that those from the periphery tend to “immerse themselves in the imported culture, denying their origins in an attempt to become ‘more English than the English’” (3-4). In his zeal to conform to the imperial mission, Owen scoffingly rejects any suggestions by villagers, such as his brother, Manus, that the Ordnance Survey may have ulterior purposes. Even when Lieutenant Yolland points out the nefarious effects of erasing place names and local history, Owen repeats colonial beliefs by insisting that the local histories are of no consequence and an impediment to modern progress. This echoes Aeneas’s role in revitalizing Carthaginian governmental and social systems. However, both characters abdicate responsibility at key times; Aeneas does so by suddenly leaving Carthage, and Owen denies his role in the survey.

Conclusion

In this chapter, my argument has been twofold. *Translations*, largely read as a play strictly about language, must also be understood as a critique of British colonialism’s ongoing land ownership and territorial dispossession. The British Ordnance Survey’s mission to “standardize” (anglicize) place names in Baile Beag does not just represent linguistic oppression; rather, due to the Irish tradition of the *dinnshenchas*, a complex methodology of signification in
which place names refer to local mythology, folklore, genealogy etc., place names connect the native Irish with their land and communal ways of living, starkly juxtaposed against alien imperial philosophies of land commodification, measurement, and quantification. Also, classical Greco-Roman mythology, particularly the Trojan War and its associated narratives, subverts the ideological foundations of British imperialism, founded upon a supposed continuation of the Trojan and Roman empires. In *Translations*, British colonial activities not only separate the indigenous population from their home and land-based ways of living but also sow conflict between the villagers themselves as their rapidly changing linguistic and cultural landscape forces them to adapt to the violence of modernity for their very survival.

British establishment of a *translatio imperii* through a supposed genealogy to Troy and Rome points out the ambivalence of imperial discourse, especially justifications for colonial activities. The supposed necessity for a mythological foundation reveals colonialist insecurity. By tracing its founding to a supposed descendant of Trojan exiles, as discussed previously in this chapter, England ties its power to imperial Troy and Rome, portraying empire building as a sacred duty. Additionally, in its harnessing of references to Roman imperial discipline to characterize its own efforts, England built its model of colonialism upon a pre-existing framework.

However, this is where its imperial foundation reveals itself as built upon sand. Rome’s imperialism, especially its ongoing conflict with Carthage, received justification in the form of Virgil’s grand national epic, the *Aeneid*, whose prologue and Book IV supposedly traces Roman-Carthaginian enmity to divine conflicts between gods, goddesses, and epic heroes. Much like Derridean theories on the chain of signification in which meaning is deferred inherently breaks down as all signifiers must point to others, imperial ideology deconstructs itself through its chain
of justification. If British imperialism is predicated upon Trojan and Roman empire building, which is then supposedly built traced to mythological conflicts, then there is nothing essential, no true or “pure” foundation for these dependent imperial ideologies. This also represents Bhabha’s illustrations of the ambivalence and “slippage” inherent in imperial discourse.

Here is the opportunity for Irish subversion. Authors such as Friel who re-fashion mythologies to address Irish issues disrupt and co-opt this already ephemeral, never ending trail of imperial signification/justification. The weapons of the colonizer become those of the colonized, revealing their instability and fickleness. Revealing the falsehood of colonial doctrine, for Irish authors, is especially key in addressing the ongoing ramifications of centuries of (and still continuing in Northern Ireland) settler colonialism on the island of Ireland, providing an invitation to consider the shockwaves of territorial dispossession, especially cultural alienation, destruction of indigenous ways of being as related to land-based identity, and sectarian conflict.
CHAPTER TWO

"Gendering the Land: The Irish Sovereignty Goddess and the Myth of Landowning Security in

*Kathleen ni Houlihan* and *By the Bog of Cats*

Using mytho-postcolonial and feminist strategies, W.B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory’s 1902 play *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and Marina Carr’s 1990 play *By the Bog of Cats*, which both debuted at the Abbey Theatre94, show how Irish patriarchal power systems of land ownership and political domination are carried out through feminine figures. I trace the characters of Mother Ireland (*Kathleen ni Houlihan*) and the bad Traveler Mother (*By the Bog of Cats*) to a similar inspirational Irish mythological source: the sovereignty goddess. *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and *By the Bog of Cats*... connect imposed imperial, patriarchal, and capitalist notions of land as for-profit property, the system of bartering women and land ownership, and women’s subjugation in Ireland through the sovereignty goddess myth. In *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, Yeats and Gregory’s modernist, re-fashioned sovereignty figure of an eerie, militant Mother Ireland exposes the false promise of its characters’ bourgeois aspiration towards land ownership and promises a revolution that not only throws off Ireland’s colonial oppressor but also entirely undoes imposed colonial standards to provides collective liberation. In *By the Bog of Cats*..., Carr’s fragmented, liminal, postmodern goddess, represented in the figure of Hester Swane, reveals the failure of independent Ireland to heed *Kathleen ni Houlihan*’s call for a truly anti-colonial, anti-materialist revolution by embracing a neocolonial obsession with bourgeois land ownership values and forsaking the most vulnerable members of society. While *Kathleen ni Houlihan*....

---

94 *By the Bog of Cats*...debuted as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival, which is the longest running and perhaps most prestigious in Ireland.
Houlihan envisions a revolution that rejects patriarchal materialist values, *By the Bog of Cats*... acts as a successor by unforgivingly assessing postcolonial Ireland’s doubling down upon its embrace of imposed colonial standards in its status-, money-, and land-obsessed society with no place for perceived outsiders, such as the ethnic minority Traveller population and women.

Additionally, this chapter adds to critical efforts to recover a female Irish theatre genealogy in its comparative reading of *By the Bog of Cats*... and *Kathleen ni Houlihan*. Such a recovery of women’s voices within Irish theatre must center Lady Augusta Gregory, co-author of *Kathleen ni Houlihan* along with W.B. Yeats, and one of the founders and visionaries behind the Abbey Theatre project. Noted Irish theatre scholar Melissa Sihra in her 2018 book *Marina Carr: Pastures of the Unknown* “locates the theatre of Marina Carr within a female genealogy that revises the patriarchal sweep of modern Irish drama,” ensuring that “the creative vision of Lady Augusta Gregory...underpins [her] analysis of Carr’s dramatic vision...in order to resituate the woman artist as central to Irish theatre” and “…identify resonances between the two playwrights to illuminate a matriarchal lineage in a tradition which has historically ‘shunted’ women from the dominant spaces” (1). *By the Bog of Cats*... succeeds *Kathleen ni Houlihan* in its unflinching condemnation of postcolonial Irish society to live up to the promise of the revolution in the latter play, furthering a female theatre genealogy from Lady Gregory. This

---

95 In a forthcoming digital project, I am exploring theories of authorship regarding Yeats and Gregory’s *Cathleen ni Houlihan* using the statistical textual analysis software R Studio. I have postulated that Lady Gregory, in fact, was a far more prominent contributor than Yeats allowed. (In)famously, Yeats failed to acknowledge Gregory’s contribution to the play for many years, and once he finally admitted that Gregory was a co-author, minimized her contribution.

96 The Abbey Theatre represented the intentional creation of a national theatre for Ireland by staging Irish plays by Irish authors. Throughout its formation and continuation, the Abbey has exerted an enormous influence upon Irish identity and art.

97 In her article titled “Women Writers Finally Take Centre Stage,” on the 1998 debut of *By the Bog of Cats* at the Abbey Theatre, Victoria White describes the Abbey stage: while there was no shortage of women on the stage, it “had no place for women” and functioned “as a symbolic space which had no place for the symbolism of women” (21). She lauds Carr’s *By the Bog of Cats* for featuring “women’s rituals and psychological dynamics sketched for the first time on the national stage” and “has recreated the Abbey stage as a national space and fearlessly put women at the centre of it” (21).
chapter, then, seeks to engage with this current scholarly approach within Irish theatre studies that assigns women playwrights and women’s issues within theatrical works a central rather than tokenized role within theatre tradition and scholarship.

**The Sovereignty Goddess Figure in Irish Myth, Literature, and Nationalism: Internalized Patriarchal and Bourgeois Values**

Carr, Yeats, and Gregory are far from the only Irish writers to incorporate the sovereignty goddess figure and invoke the traditional personification of Ireland as female. The sovereignty goddess makes several notable appearances in Irish plays as a pliable figure whose mythical authority playwrights harnessed for various artistic and political goals. An increasingly nationalistic and patriarchal figure emerged through a chaste and submissive “Mother Ireland” in various musical and poetic traditions throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and inevitably manifested in Irish drama since the earliest days of the Irish national theater.

The appropriated maternal, nationalist “Mother Ireland” pejoratively reinvents an early Irish Celtic mythical belief in a more empowered and sexual goddess.\(^{98}\) Ancient Irish myth associated specific landforms with local female deities\(^{99}\) and identified Irish goddesses with the land, specifically its fertility. The sovereignty granted prosperity to the land and authority to a local king through sexual union (Aldhouse-Green 73). This granting of authority coincided with a ritual known as a *feis*, or feast\(^{100}\), conceived of as a sacral/ritual marriage of the king to the

---

\(^{98}\) In the Celtic *Book of Invasion*, rival goddesses vied for control of Ireland as the Gaels invaded and fought against the Tuatha Dé Danann. Each goddess “personified the land” and demanded allegiance from the would-be conquerors, pledging their assistance if they would become the new country’s namesake (Aldhouse-Green 76). The goddess Ériu emerged as the winner, and Ireland is still referred to as Érin today. She was the original goddess of sovereignty and sacral kingship (Aldhouse-Green 76).

\(^{99}\) Pairs of hills were known variously as “the breasts of the Mórrigan” or “the Paps of Anu” (or Danu) (Aldhouse-Green 165)

\(^{100}\) Surprisingly, the pagan originated *feis* survived into the early Christian period along with its characteristics of the granting of the rod of sovereignty, the holding of a race, a procession symbolizing the regions under the king’s rule, the singing of praise poetry, and drinking liquor (Byrnes 279).
goddess of the land (Byrnes 278). The goddess represented the land and people in addition to the territory’s judicial and spiritual realm, and marriage to the goddess confirmed a local king as the temporal ruler of the goddess’s territory (Byrnes 278). This was a necessary ritual. According to Proinsas Mac Cana, “it was only through union with the territorial goddess of Ireland or her provinces that legal title to the kingship might be won” (60). Belief in the sovereignty goddess reflected ancient Irish community-based land ownership practices, such as tanistry and gavelkind, that did not follow the later system of primogeniture and land-as-profit. Although they had different names and attributes, sovereignty goddesses shared key characteristics: ability to grant (and rescind) authority over the land, an association with the land and its fertility, and the power to transform, especially into an old woman, a young maiden, and a sexually powerful siren (MacLeod 159).

The fifth century AD tale of Niall of the Nine Hostages, the founder of the Ui Neill dynasty, is perhaps the most famous version of the sovereignty myth. While hunting, Niall and his brothers became thirsty and encountered a “grotesque old crone” who offered water in

---

101 James Doan points out that the *banfheis rígi*, or “marriage of sovereignty,” was celebrated at Tara, the “sacral center of Ireland,” as late as the mid-sixth century, despite Catholic clergy’s pressures against it. The king participated in a ritual union with the goddess involving the use of the phallic Lia Fáil, or “Stone of Destiny,” and also took a mortal wife to secure his claim to the kingship (88).

102 Tanistry, from the Irish perspective, ensured that the most qualified individual and not necessarily the “next of kin” inherited positions of authority (Cavanagh 27). Gavelkind allowed for periodic redistribution of the land and, in theory, kept the same groups from continually monopolizing certain desirable properties (Cavanagh 27). Under gavelkind, a clan’s land was reapportioned when a new chief assumed command. Land titles were held for a limited time rather than “in perpetuity,” which enabled members with “poor allotments” to maintain hope for a better share for their descendants (Cavanagh 27). These customs complicated English efforts to control the region. Under these customs, the English were unable to easily predict the outcome of electoral proceedings and could not know in advance how land was likely to be reapportioned after these elections. As a result, they were “were hindered in their ability to plan useful alliances” (Cavanagh 27).

103 In the entry “Echtrai” in *Medieval Ireland: An Encyclopedia*, Tomás Ó Cathasaigh expands upon this tale as an explanatory episode and effective propaganda for the Úi Néill dynasty, located in the Middle Irish tale *Echtrae mac n-Echach Muigmedóin* (The Expedition of the Sons of Echu Mugmedón). In the hunting expedition, Niall’s brother Fiachra gives the crone a short kiss but receives no water. After Niall kisses and makes love to her, she declares that Niall and his descendants will be kings of Ireland forever. To explain the later historical events of Niall’s succession by Fiachra’s son Dath Í and grandson Ailill Molt, the Sovereignty mentions that two descendants of Fiachra will receive the kingship as a reward for Fiachra’s kiss (236).
exchange for a kiss (Aldhouse-Green 148). Although Niall’s disgusted brothers refused, Niall kissed her and then had sex with her. The old crone transformed into a beautiful maiden, revealed her name as Sovereignty, and made Niall a king through a “marriage with the land of Ireland itself” (Aldhouse-Green 148). In this and so many other ancient Irish tales, the sovereignty goddess bestowed power upon a male leader only if the candidate became worthy by “recogniz[ing] her divine presence and respect her authority” as Niall did (MacLeod 159).

Thus, Irish tribal kings’ power depended on a community’s belief in the mythical power of a female authority, a variation of European beliefs in the divine right of kings and male ruling lineage. As ancient Ireland consisted mainly of smaller kingdoms ruled mostly by men, the sovereignty goddess myth does not represent a matriarchal lineage or matrifocal ruling power of pre-colonial Irish society. However, the sovereignty goddess myth does represent some ancient Irish communities’ acknowledgement of a higher, female, spiritual authority that must be honored for leadership to succeed.

Many female figures in Irish mythology, including Medbh, Macha, and the Mórrigan, exercised the power of sovereignty over the land and its inhabitants, especially in their power to grant fertility and prosperity. The sovereignty goddess also invoked a destructive aspect if the land was in danger (Clark 113). Early Irish people believed this goddess could destroy the tribe’s enemies, either through fighting against them herself or ensuring their destruction by turning others against them (122). Also, if a king failed in his duties to care for the land and its people and the sovereignty goddess, she could take away his kingship. The sovereignty goddess’s true

---

104 Medbh, the protagonist of the Irish epic Táin Bó Cúailnge, was the elected leader of Connacht. Her male consort, Ailill, played almost no role in exercising governance. Medbh performed the roles of the deity especially in her exercise of sexuality, war, and safeguarding territory (Aldhouse-Green 141).

105 She would also act as a “death goddess” against an unfavorable tribal king by “provok[ing] the downfall and death of the unjust king when the union between him and his realm has been irreparably damaged by his actions and when, thereby, his reign has ceased to be productive” (Clark 124). In this way, the sovereignty, “even in her most menacing aspect, acts for the well-being of the land” (Clark 125).
loyalty was not to the king or his people; rather, her highest mission was protecting the land. Belief in the sovereignty goddess corresponded with an expectation for leaders to function as caretakers of the land.

The same ancient Irish society that celebrated the divine feminine authority over and personification of the land afforded greater, though not completely equal, legal rights for woman than Irish society at the time of both *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and *By the Bog of Cats*.... This is reflected in the contrast between the 1937 Irish constitution and ancient Brehon laws. As Melissa Sihra points out, the 1937 constitution assigned “severely confining roles for women” as the role of women as mothers “became enshrined” within Irish law (2). In contrast, women enjoyed greater sexual, social, and physical protections under Brehon law, which was enforced by the community rather than the central authority under English law. Ancient Brehon laws, as Elizabeth Cullingford points out, “demonstrate unusual concern for the rights and even the happiness of women in marriage,” (55). Women retained, for example, rights to all property and goods they brought into a marriage. Women also had the right to divorce their husbands (McAuslan 340). Women in ancient Ireland also had considerably greater political power than

106 Maureen Concannon points out that, in ancient Irish society, women “enjoyed power over their own bodies, over birthing and creativity of all kinds” and that the culture of Ireland was similar to early matrifocal cultures of old Europe. Concannon also states that, rather than a patriarchal society, “…in Ireland, as in other early cultures, life was centred around the mother and the mother’s family, the entire blood group related to the mother, though descent was sometimes through the male line. In pre-Celtic times, when a man married he went to live with his wife and her people, except in the case of the ruling families” (28). After the advent of Christianity in Ireland, marriage became a key component of women’s subjugation, an arrangement often conducted by families to exchange property and money that turned women into pawns with no agency of their own.

107 According to Patricia Monaghan, “specialists called brehons memorized and recited law and precedent, but they neither judged cases nor assigned penalties. There was no police force, no imprisonment, no capital punishment; anyone guilty of a crime paid fines to the victim or, in cases of murder, to the bereaved. The only crime as iniquitous as murder was rape, whether by violence or by assault on an intoxicated or sleeping woman; enormous fines were due the victim. If a raped woman conceived her rapist bore all financial responsibility for the child. Woe to a man whose victim died in childbirth; fines could bankrupt his family. And rape was not the only sexual crime; penalties were levied for inappropriate touching…for verbal harassment; for mocking a woman’s appearance…” (Monaghan 213-214).

108 Joseph Valente writes that “the shift from Irish Brehon law…to British common law had one of its more conspicuous effects a deterioration in the status of espoused women from joint stockholders in the marital estate to the virtual chattel of their husbands” (194-195).
their later counterparts. In early Ireland, several women held the title of “queen” rather than simply being the king’s wife, and numerous historical and literary records showed that the counsel of royal women considerably influenced male rulers (Connon 653).

Over the centuries, the depreciation of the sovereignty goddess figure’s authority and sexuality coincided with a decline in women’s position in Irish society, especially within Irish nationalism. According to Melissa Sihra, the nation’s personification as female became intertwined with Irish nationalism following the institution of the late seventeenth century anti-Catholic Penal Codes, which forbade direct references to Ireland in songs and engendered indirect references to the nation of Ireland through a female figure. In keeping with Eric Hobsbawm’s notion of the “invented tradition,” Irish nationalists appropriated the sovereignty goddess for their anti-colonial messages to establish an ancient continuity for nationalist ideology. According to Hobsbawm, “new traditions could be readily grafted on old ones,” explaining nationalist re-fashioning of the familiar ancient sovereignty goddess myth. As Hobsbawm explains that “inventing traditions…is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization,” the “new” Mother Ireland figure became ingrained in the national consciousness through frequent cultural and artistic depictions (4). Eighteenth-century aising poetry, in which

109 James Doan argues that “the theme of the woman as the bearer of sovereignty, which predominates in much of medieval Irish and Welsh literature, did have an historical reflex in a very real political sense” (97).

110 The loss of the sovereignty goddess’s honored status began with the institution of Christianity in Ireland, which stripped away her authority as a religious figure in favor of patriarchal monotheism (Clark 148-149). In medieval lore, she became an allegory rather than a divine personification of Ireland (Clark 148).

111 According to Hobsbawm, “‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past” (2). Hobsbawm explains that there have been three “overlapping types” of invented traditions since the industrial revolution: “a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority, and c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behavior” (9). The nationalist Mother Ireland figure seems to fit the second type in its legitimization of a hypermasculinized form of Irish nationalism.
a poet had a vision of Ireland personified as a beautiful woman awaiting the help of a king, further reduced the sovereignty goddess’s authority (Clark 6). Nineteenth-century nationalist ballads followed suit, embodying Ireland as the “Shan Van Vocht,” or the “Poor Old Woman” who would complain about Ireland’s plight and beg for help from anyone who would listen. This version of the sovereignty goddess maintained the old woman aspect of the original myth but jettisoned her transformation into a young maiden through sexuality.

Such modifications to the sovereignty figure caused women to inherit an “iconographically” (but not realistically) central place within Irish nationalism that led them to be “subjectively disempowered, reduced to the passive, metaphorical emblem of the nation” (Sihra 119). Woman became a figurehead, the embodiment of the land of Ireland, but a passive one with no real authority. In this way, the sanitizing of the sovereignty goddess, especially the effacement of her sexuality and destructive power, coincided with the centrality of patriarchy in Irish nationalism. In both nationalist ballads and aisling literary traditions, Rosalind Clark argues that “the power of the goddess is diminished” and changed from a “powerful or practical goddess” into a “weak melancholy maiden, romanticized and unreal” (Clark 6). According to Maria Kurdi, the goddess has been “deprived of agency” and has turned into a mere “fantasy

112 In aisling poetry, the poet is asleep when a spéirbhéan, a beautiful maiden and “queenly figure from another world” appears to him in “grievous distress. When asked why she is weeping, the maiden tearfully responds “that she is the true spouse of the ancient kings, and she sorrow for her rightful prince who is in exile across the sea” (Breathnach 322). The spéirbhéan is “an idealized female abstraction symbolizing Ireland” and “the Stuart, her mate, is no more than the male symbol of her deliverance: the ”spéir-fhear,” the deus ex machina, the Hero, who, like his counterpart in the fairy-tale, shall with his kiss awaken her from her enchanted sleep of misery” (Breathnach 322). In aisling poetry, the implicit motif is that the “hoped-for marriage of the Spéirbhéan with the King is thereby to effect a change from a condition of misery to one of happiness” (Breathnach 323).

113 Kurdi states: “The trope of woman representing Ireland in victimized deprivation, distress and need of salvation was haunting late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Irish literary production under the ubiquitous influence of nationalism, to be paralleled by stylized images of male courage, sacrifice and readiness to embrace patriotic martyrdom…the ideological practice of transforming the woman into an icon, distorting as it was on the whole, warded off attention from actualities and differences related to class, ethnicity and the individualized psychological effects of the social and cultural environment on women” (Kurdi 4).
object” as she “must wait for male assistance” (2, 4). Unlike the ancient goddesses, these figures retained no authority; rather, the land became pejoratively gendered as female, modeled after the old woman or crone figure, requiring male control and guidance.

Such excessive patriarchy within the nationalist movement, apparent in the 1937 Constitution and the operations of the Irish Free State, shows an internalization of England’s phallocentric imperialist values rather than an attempt to reclaim an Irish tradition beyond imposed colonial hierarchies. English imperial discourse derogatively feminized the land and people of Ireland, characterizing Ireland as weak and in need of control. According to Joseph Valente, Ireland was “long nicknamed the Sister Isle” and “increasingly imaged in wifely terms” to represent its inequality with Britain in a hierarchical gendered relationship which prized male supremacy (189-190). This relationship also corresponded with images of sexual violence. As David Alderson and Fiona Becket observe, “From the perspective of the colonial centre…Ireland has been sexualized as a territory awaiting – even inviting – invasion and penetration, an act which from the nationalist perspective counts as rape” (61).

Irish nationalist leaders responded vigorously to this pejorative gendering not by reclaiming ancient traditions but by working within England’s imposed value system; they modified Ireland’s traditional mythology to “produce the codes and institutions of a native patriarchy” that stripped power from the mythical sovereignty goddess and Irish women (Valente 193). What Valente terms as “the rhetorical development of Irish literary nationalism” created by writers and activists insisted upon “the normative code of gender hierarchy” and highlighted “the virility of the Irish warrior tradition” (193). Ireland’s patriarchal leadership reduced women to a

---

114 Valente adds that, in addition to constructing gendered notions of the land and nation of Ireland, the English constructed the Irish people themselves as feminine against “the supposedly virile efficiency of the Teutonic races” and thus “constitutionally ill-equipped for the dispassionate pursuit of state and social policy” (190).
nationalist symbol in the form of Kathleen ni Houlihan to enhance their own “masculinity” according to imposed patriarchal standards. According to Declan Kiberd, “Irishmen had been told that when they protested their voices rose to an unflattering female screech: and so they were off loading the vestigial femininity of the Celtic male onto icons like Kathleen ní Houlihan or Mother Ireland” (Kiberd 183). This corresponds with Kiberd’s characterizing of nationalism as a “covert desire to mimic the extirpated power while disowning its own influences” (184).

Maria Kurdi remarks that “the discourses of nationalism showed disturbing resemblance with the binaries and fixities of the Victorian value system, the very system it had been striving to resist and counteract” (4). Nationalism, in essence, lost the opportunity to reclaim and recreate a uniquely Irish philosophy of gender and instead, according to Maria Kurdi, “appropriated the gender binaries of the colonial discourses and contested the imperial stereotype of femininity by redefining and emphasizing the masculine values and gendered self-worth of Irishmen” and “engaged in downgrading of the feminine, at least in its everyday occurrences” (3). The weakened sovereignty goddess reflects this internalization of imperial gender hierarchies.

**Imposed Imperial Bourgeois Land Ownership Values in Kathleen ni Houlihan and By the Bog of Cats…**

In addition to demonstrating Irish nationalism’s embrace of patriarchal imperialist hegemonies, the loss of the sovereignty goddess’s authority over the land reflects Ireland’s internalization of colonial values regarding land as income-generating property. In Ireland, the idea of land as profitable commodity largely did not exist until English colonization and the onset of capitalism. Ania Loomba observes that colonialism is “the forcible takeover of land and economy, and, in the case of European colonialism, a restructuring of non-capitalist economies in order to fuel European capitalism,” categorizing “modern European colonialism not as some
trans-historical impulse to conquer but as an integral part of capitalist development” (Loomba 40). Under capitalist colonial practices, land was exploited for profit rather than protected and used to sustain a local community. For example, the English plundered Ireland’s land for various saleable products such as wood, cattle, and grain (which would infamously continue being shipped to England during the Famine). This shift from honoring the land and caring for it as a community to exploiting it for foreign investors and markets also accompanied the subsequent destructive change to waged capitalism. Along with the wage system that saw Irish peasants serving as day laborers and renters on a landowner’s property, landowners (often absentee English or local Anglo-Protestants and a smaller number of Irish Catholics) began earning profits, and property was designated as an agricultural resource (Monaghan 177). This system erases traditional Irish values embodied in the sovereignty goddess myth that honored the land through communal ownership and caretaking practices.

Both Kathleen ni Houlihan and By the Bog of Cats portray bourgeois standards of land landownership that contemporary Irish audiences would recognize, especially since the farm and its rural setting have long symbolized supposed Irish values of authentic identity (which can be a problematic notion of concretizing identity). Bourgeois land ownership standards of land ownership originated in a colonizing system that persists in post/neocolonial Ireland, descended from England’s imposition of capitalist land ownership as a method of imperial control through

---

115 “Much of Ireland’s forest literally sailed away as the tall masts for England’s imperial navy. But sufficient forests – called ‘fastnesses’ in Ireland – remained, and rebels used them as citadels, so Elizabeth the First ordered all Irish woodlands destroyed…soon treeless Ireland was importing wood for building, and only a fraction of Irish land remained in Irish hands” (Monaghan 123).

116 Before English colonization, the Irish largely relied upon a bartering system largely unquantified, save the measure of cumhals, which represent the value of three milking cows (Monaghan 192). The native Irish stubbornly resisted English quantification of trade until the thirteenth century, when the English coin replaced the system of barter and the aptly named Poor Laws forced the Irish into the wage system by prohibiting gathering, hunting, and fishing “with threats of amputation of limbs and even execution against those who refused” (Monaghan 177).
plantations, land seizures, and evictions. These primary methods of English imperial expansion in Ireland began in earnest under the Tudor and Stuart monarchs. Throughout English imperial rule in Ireland, fraught landlord-tenant relationships constituted a gross abuse of power, characterized by absentee landlords who doled out random increases in rent and frequent evictions, especially during the Famine, when thousands of people died on the side of the road during evictions (Bourke 11-12). Centuries of these land-based oppression inextricably tied the land question into Irish nationalist issues, exploding into the Land War conflicts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Although the 1903 Wyndham Land Purchase Act paved the way for rural tenants to own lands in place of absentee landlords, land issues undoubtedly remained branded into the Irish psyche for decades. For rural Irish people, land ownership, in theory, guaranteed protection from the whims of uncaring landlords and provided social standing in their communities. Additionally, since the Irish had adopted the English system of primogeniture, land could remain in a family for generations and thus ensure the future of one’s family, in theory, through passing down land

---

117 According to Patrick McAuslan, “the origins of English land law lie in conquest, confiscations, plantations of foreigners… and overall, the duties owed by all those holding land, by whatever tenure, to the king from whom all land was held” (340).

118 While Norman invaders landed in Ireland in 1169, the English settlers and Irish lived mostly peacefully together for several hundred years with English influence in Ireland limited to Dublin and the surrounding areas, known as The Pale. While Henry VIII and Elizabeth I attempted to expand English control in Ireland by enacting legal statutes to strengthen the crown’s authority, English control over Irish affairs remained tenuous at best. This changed with the 1609 Articles of Plantation, which bequeathed all land forfeited by exiled Irish rebel leaders and other forcibly lands, totaling around 500,000 acres, to English and Scottish Protestant settlers, mostly in Ulster (Cronin 65). These Articles represent the enactment of a more aggressive and coherent program of colonization through land ownership and plantation. With the Articles of Plantation, the English government sought to prevent future rebellions and “secure the future stability and peace of Ireland for the Crown” through a “full-scale process of plantation” in Northern Ireland (Cronin 65). This policy of domination through control over land was one of the main ways in which the English maintained control over the frequently rebellious Irish throughout their colonization.

119 Evictions only became a widespread problem in Ireland under English colonialism. According to Kolbert and O’Brien, it was “exceedingly difficult to disturb any tenant in the occupation of his share of the clan lands” (7). The “freedom from eviction” allowed for the “remarkable tenacity of the Brehon laws and for their survival, in the face of great official [English] hostility, until the seventeenth century” (Kolbert and O’Brien 7).
ownership to a first-born son of the family. With the advent of suffrage, this system also amounted to political rights as the first voters were male landowners \(^{120}\).

Yeats and Gregory’s *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and Carr’s *By the Bog of Cats*... demonstrate modern Irish conformity to imposed capitalist and patriarchal standards of land ownership and material success. The characters in these plays have embraced the postcolonial “liberal bargain,” described by Amalia Sa’ar as a process through which “members of marginalized groups internalize liberal epistemology to maximize security and optimize their life options” and “strategize to materialize whatever limited benefits they may extract from their disadvantaged position in the liberal order” (681). The characters in both plays have “become identified with the hegemonic order” in their dogged pursuit of land ownership and material security (681). Rather than imagining a society consciously created to liberate all oppressed people, such as the Traveller figure Hester Swane, these characters have instead bought into colonial liberalism’s “promise” of a secure and prosperous life according to universalizing progress narratives.

The plays also depict Fanon’s “nationalist bourgeois” class which “steps into the shoes of the former European settlement” after the colonizer’s departure,” especially the scheming parents in *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and the settled landowners in *By the Bog of Cats* (155). This indigenous class despises the colonial “settler elite” but wishes to take their place \(^{121}\), including status and possessions, rather than reform the system to benefit all marginalized under imperialism (155). As a result, the same systematic disadvantages are perpetuated as the new (but still old) system

---

120 Representatives voting on Irish governance of Ireland were largely comprised of absentee English landlords whose best interests depended on the continued subjugation of the Irish peasantry through land ownership dispossession and portraying the Irish as uncivilized and thus unworthy of self-governance.

121 Victor Merriman applies Fanon’s theories to modern Ireland, explaining that “…[anti-colonial] struggles tend to result in the replacement of one elite by another, as the departing colonizers give way to a nascent indigenous bourgeois class.” Merriman argues that “this outcome thwarts the achievement of a decolonized social order. As a result of this process, in the case of Ireland, Merriman categorizes Independent Ireland is merely a “successor state to a colonial province of long standing” and “establish[es] the explicitly neocolonial nature of a state that has systematically postponed decolonization, and denied space to any alternative proposed.”
continues the capitalist standards of the departed colonial administration (16). Fanon describes that claims “neo-liberal universalism” underpin this retention of advantages, contending that neocolonial elites fashion nationalist progress as a “claim to universalism” based, in reality, upon imposed imperialist hegemonies (148). In attempts to undo these foreign colonial hierarchies, both plays depict re-fashioned sovereignty goddess figure that posit alternative models of land relations to neocolonial bourgeois values.

**Landed Security and the Sovereignty Goddess Myth in *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and *By the Bog of Cats***

While the incorporation of sovereignty goddess figure to address land and gender is the main thread between *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and *By the Bog of Cats*..., it is also important to note their wider mytho-postcolonial contexts. *Kathleen ni Houlihan*’s title invokes a centuries old myth of an eponymous Mother Ireland figure. In addition to its framework within Greco-Roman mythology as a loose adaptation of Euripides’s *Medea,*122 *By the Bog of Cats* includes mythical and supernatural elements, such as talking ghosts, omens, fulfilled premonitions, and a Grim Reaper-like Ghost Fancier. The play also incorporates animals from Irish mythological traditions

---

122 Contemporary theatre critics position *By the Bog of Cats* in a uniquely Irish framework within Greco-Roman mythology. In the program to the October 1998 revival of *By the Bog of Cats,* Derek Mahon’s translation of the 18th century Irish-language poem “An Bonnan Bui Cathal Bui MacGiolla Ghunna” includes specifically Irish references that also are quite relevant in *By the Bog of Cats* to the “bog and river,” “a pale patch of watery sunlight/out on the mud,” the “star-glimmering bog drain,” and also “a thought more wrenching than the fall of Troy” (5).
such as cats\textsuperscript{123} and swans\textsuperscript{124}. Additionally, \textit{By the Bog of Cats}... protagonist Hester Swane’s surname aligns her with swans.

In \textit{Kathleen ni Houlihan} and \textit{By the Bog of Cats}, Yeats, Gregory, and Carr engage the sovereignty to question the colonial values of individualism and for-profit land ownership and the ideological and societal alternatives towards land ownership. In \textit{Kathleen ni Houlihan}, the sovereignty allegory is the most direct, more closely resembling the Shan Van Vocht from nineteenth century nationalist ballads than the original myths. The one-act \textit{Kathleen ni Houlihan} takes place in a farmhouse kitchen where the Gillane family eagerly awaits the marriage of their eldest son, Michael, to Delia Cahel, the daughter of a neighboring farmer. The 1798 Killala setting squarely aligns it with a famous failed uprising by Irish rebels and French forces against the British. Michael’s parents, Peter and Bridget, focus on how Delia’s dowry will enable them to make a long-awaited land acquisition, increasing their purported security. Michael, disinterested in their conversations, becomes entranced at the arrival of the Poor Old Woman, who embodies Ireland. Through songs and stories about her plight, especially her hypnotic tales of the men who have sacrificed themselves for her, the Poor Old Woman lures Michael away from his home and convinces him to join the gathering rebels. At the end of the play, the Poor

\textsuperscript{123} According to Tudor Balinisteanu, “The Catwoman character shares several features with cats represented in traditional Irish folktales” (281). In Ireland, cats were regarded as fairies who contained mythical powers (Balinisteanu 281). Balinisteanu sees the echo of this power in the Catwoman, who speaks like a “spirit of the land” when she says that she knows everything that happens on the Bog and that she is the Keeper (Balinisteanu 281). In \textit{By the Bog of Cats}, the mysterious Catwoman, whom Mary Trotter identifies as the play’s Tiresias figure due to their shared blindness and prophetic abilities, bridges the human and animal worlds with her strange behaviors, such as eating mice. (Trotter 189).

\textsuperscript{124} Miranda Aldhouse-Green points out that swans “possessed powerful symbolism in Celtic myths because they are at home in all elements: water, air, and land” (72). Additionally, swans’ “monogamous habit of pairing for life made them icons of faithful and enduring devotion, highly appropriate for divine lovers” (Aldhouse-Green 72). Due to this, many love stories in Irish myths, including those of Oenghus and Caer and Midhir and Étain, include transformation into swans (Aldhouse-Green 72). Hester’s last name, Swane, is a verbal play on swan, and her life is tied to that of a giant black swan whose bloody corpse she is dragging across the ice at the start of the play and upon whose death she was foretold to die (which indeed she does).
Old Woman transforms into a young girl, while Peter and Bridget despair at the loss of their son and his upcoming marriage.

In harnessing both the revolutionary time frame and foregrounding bourgeois aspirations, Yeats and Gregory connect both anticolonial and anti-materialist sentiments with the opportunities available to Irish peasants at that time. Yeats and Gregory’s choice of the 1798 rebellion setting coincides with the early 1900s rise in Irish cultural nationalism. The intertwining of land issues with Irish nationalism makes it no accident that the Gillanes are discussing security and land ownership when Kathleen ni Houlihan enters their home. The sovereignty goddess’s entrance into this family’s space disrupts the environment of the would-be bourgeois home and destroys the upward mobility narrative in progress. However, the Gillanes’ social climbing aspirations are not altogether unsympathetic. As the play was staged in an Ireland haunted by centuries of evictions by distant landlords and the devastation of the all-too-recent Famine, the audience could understand the Gillanes’ desire to secure their homestead. As Barbara Suess explains, Peter and Bridget “are concerned with issues of land and family, both of which are of central importance to the tradition, lifestyle, and economic maintenance of the peasant” (75). According to Susan Cannon Harris, Delia’s dowry “…will allow the family to do two things that in post-Famine Ireland became increasingly difficult: extend the size of the farm, and find living situations for all of the family’s grown children. Both issues relate to land-use problems, arising from the colonial tenant system and exacerbated by the Famine, that had serious implications for sexual and reproductive behavior in Ireland” (53). While the play is pre-

125 In 1902, Irish nationalists watching this play, set in 1798 during a failed joint French-Irish rebellion, would have been well aware of the political implications of rural farmers’ plans for land ownership security. Centuries of land issues, including the sixteenth century plantations in Northern Ireland, the creation of a landed elite in seventeenth century Ireland and the exacerbation of the inequalities of the Irish land system during the Famine, according to Ciara Boylan, “did much to fuse the land question into nationalist politics” (408).
famine, nevertheless, *Kathleen ni Houlihan* depicts these land use and fertility issues. The Gillanes, then, represent a practical, survivalist mentality. However, the play should not necessarily be viewed as a realist drama as most Irish pre-Famine peasants could only rent from landlords and not aspire to land ownership.

*Kathleen ni Houlihan*, at first glance, can appear as an overly simplistic, nakedly nationalistic, and, in some senses, borderline farcical, revolutionary call to action in the pre-Easter Rising days. As Victor Merriman states, “it is tempting to read this play as it presents itself, as an explicit endorsement of militant nationalist insurrection.” The casting of famous Irish nationalist (and Yeats’s hoped-for but never in actuality paramour) Maude Gonne in the play’s debut performance signaled *Kathleen ni Houlihan*’s revolutionary potential to audiences. However, such readings elide careful attention to the dramatic action of the play itself, a close analysis of character relationships and motivations, and a thematic focus on money, land, and middle-class aspirations. While the revisions embodied in Yeats and Gregory’s protagonist echo the pejorative shift in the place of women within nationalist traditions and the misogynist appropriation of the sovereignty myth, their use of the Poor Old Woman does not entirely conform to imposed patriarchal standards as it destabilizes bourgeois land ownership values. Merriman states that “…in performance, *Kathleen ni Houlihan* has the potential radically to problematize the relationship of the emergent petit-bourgeois class to the project of cultural nationalism itself.” Yeats and Gregory’s image of the Poor Old Woman reflects modernist re-imagining of myths to serve a particular purpose, that of the nation, concurrent with a modernist trend to use myth to “discover an underlying metaphysic in an increasingly fragmented world” (Bell 10). In the chaos of the modern world, Yeats and Gregory employ the sovereignty myth to provide a reductive, if effective, foundational Irish nationalist mythology.
Yeats and Gregory revise the Poor Old Woman in *Kathleen ni Houlihan* in several key ways. She is a far cry from the lusty, powerful ancient sovereignty goddess with many lovers. The Poor Old Woman announces her chastity to the family, claiming that while she has had many “lovers that brought [her] their love,” she has “never set the bed out for any” (Yeats and Gregory 8). This hyperbolic purity contrasts the earthly union between Michael Gillane and Delia Cahel, Yeats and Gregory also modify the sovereignty goddess’s sexual union-induced transformation from old crone to young maiden. The Poor Old Woman indeed turns into a young maiden in *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, but she is rejuvenated by martyrdom for an anti-colonial cause, not sexual activity. Her transformation to a young maiden “with the walk of a queen” is still, nonetheless, erotic, especially in Michael’s trancelike devotion to her and willingness to sacrifice himself (Yeats and Gregory 11). In these revisions, the Poor Old Woman, per Elizabeth Cullingford is “like the Queen of Heaven” in that she is a “Virgin Mother” who demands “virgin martyrs” (67). Thus, *Kathleen ni Houlihan* shows the differing nature of the male hero’s union with the goddess. The play suggests a form of nationalism that requires solemn and conscious sacrifice. In *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, Michael Gillane is an appropriate sacrificial victim as not

---

126 According to Rosalind Clark, "This change is one of the most important in the image of sovereignty in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In pagan days it was desirable for a goddess such as Medb to have as many lovers as possible: it proved her power as a fertility goddess and, by extension, gave fertility to the land...by the eighteenth century it is customary for the poet to rebuke Ireland for her harlotry...In the nineteenth century there is a new tone in dealing with women and sexual matters. It is no longer acceptable to mention Ireland as a harlot...if the Sovereignty figure is to be an ideal, she cannot be a harlot, even under duress. Cathleen's sexuality is no longer a primary concern of the poets, simply because her morality is now assumed...if we return to the earliest manifestations of sovereignty, their morality is not called in question either, but for a very different reason. For the primitive sovereignty goddess, the rules of human morality were irrelevant...In the primitive myths, this meant that she was expected to have many lovers. The modern Cathleen also is above human standards, but by virtue of her perfect purity" (Clark 170-171).

127 Rosalind Clark points out, “The idea of marriage is still present in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, but it is a peasant, not a royal marriage. Michael is to marry Delia Cahel, and she is to bring one hundred pounds to his parents and a greyhound to his brother. Delia is like the gracious and giving Sovereignty of the Middle Ages who comes bearing gifts, and Michael is the modern equivalent of the King, or in the *aisling* tradition, the Poet. It is significant that while the medieval Sovereignty chose one king, and the *spéir-bhean* of the *aisling* singled out the privileged poet, the twentieth-century Cathleen appears to all Irish patriots. The Sovereignty has become more democratic and more closely connected to the Irish people.” (Clark 175-176).
only a willing participant in the uprising but also as a purported virgin on the eve of his wedding. Michael chooses to fight for the collective land of Ireland and rejects the individualist bourgeois land ownership values embodied by his parents and their emphasis on material security.

While Yeats and Gregory’s postcolonial myth of the sovereignty goddess may harness her weakened nineteenth-century portrayals, the Poor Old Woman’s dismantling of bourgeois societal standards, especially in her admonition to Michael to reject his wedding and refuse to secure his family’s materialist aspirations, creates a subversive rather than subordinate figure. This character’s similarity to nineteenth-century nationalist “Mother Ireland” ballads functions to cue the audience to home in on this popular figure. However, her role in the play is anything but traditional. Rather, Yeats and Gregory’s modernist adaptation of the sovereignty figure permeates the aspired-to bourgeois space and invites Michael to an anti-materialist revolution squarely opposed to imperialist bourgeois lifestyles. Despite its use of the now-familiar Abbey Theatre set of the rural kitchen and characters based on the struggling yet heroic Irish peasant, *Kathleen ni Houlihan* does not celebrate the peasant as an emblem of an authentic, pre-colonial Irish lifestyle. Rather, it uses the sovereignty figure to pejoratively highlight the Gillane family’s social climbing ambitions. In this way, the farming family embodies a different sort of peasant, representing what Barbara Suess terms as Yeats’s “bourgeois peasant” figure (61). According to Suess, Yeats’s early plays reflect his “disdain for and literary critique of the middle classes” and his “early attempts to redefine for his generation the meaning of progress, a definition that had been strongly yoked to English, middle-class concerns” (Suess 58). Following this description, the groom’s parents talk more about their future land ownership prospects from the bride’s dowry than welcoming their new daughter-in-law. Peter, father of the groom, brags that he has “made the bargain well” for Delia’s dowry and that he haggled with Delia’s father about keeping
half the money until the first boy is born\(^\text{128}\) (Yeats and Gregory 4). Peter’s comment reflects bourgeois acquisitive individualism rather than a dedication to community. According to Victor Merriman, this remark “positions grudging acquisitiveness as a dominant force in communal life,” which is “clearly a recipe for division and hierarchy rather than unity and community.”

Yeats’s anti-colonialism, then, in *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, negatively depicts the bourgeois peasant figure to criticize imposed colonial bourgeois aspirations. In the Fanonian sense, Peter and Bridget Gillane do wish for revolution; rather, they simply desire the same advantages as the colonial bourgeois settler/landowner class. Suess states that “Yeats saw, decidedly negatively, as a problematic movement of the rural populace away from spiritual (traditional) values and toward those of (bourgeois) moralism, materialism, and philistinism” and argues that Yeats’s plays include “a social critique of class” through his figure of the “turn-of-the-century, long-suffering Irish farmer who more and more frequently seemed to be setting his eyes on the prizes accrued by materialist aims” (62). Yeats and Gregory’s peasants have fully embraced the “liberal bargain” and measure their status and security by property and financial acquisition. They do not consider that their position remains precarious under colonization.

From the start of the play, material possessions and money literally take center stage. Within the first few lines, Bridget and Peter are discussing Michael’s wedding clothes, placed in the center of the room, and termed by Peter as “grand clothes” (Yeats and Gregory 155). Bridget’s lament that Peter “hadn’t clothes like that when you married me” and Peter’s response that “We never thought a son of our own would be wearing a suit of that sort for his wedding, or

\(^{128}\) This “dowry-obsessed patriarch” was by no means an unfamiliar personage; this “almost stock figure in Ireland’s agrarian communities” sought to protect their families from “widespread poverty and limited farm acreage” through making advantageous marriage connections with neighboring families (Doggett 44). According to Rob Doggett, “Peter’s remarks, though perhaps harsh to our ears, would likely have served initially to confirm his status as a ‘real’ Irish peasant” (44). The dowry and wedding clothes laid upon the kitchen table during the family’s discussion of the upcoming nuptials, “…symboliz[e] the economic transaction underpinning the marriage” (22).
have so good a place to bring a wife to” foreground their overly materialistic goals for their son’s wedding (Yeats and Gregory 155-156). When Michael returns with Delia’s dowry, Peter immediately asks “Have you got the fortune, Michael?” The next set of stage directions, while seemingly inconsequential, establishes the literal centrality of the dowry money in the home: “Michael puts bag on the table and goes and leans against chimney-jamb. Bridget, who has been all this time examining the clothes, pulling the seams and trying the lining of the pockets, etc., puts the clothes on the dresser. Peter [getting up and taking the bag in his hand and turning out the money]” (Yeats and Gregory 156-157). While Michael physically de-centres himself away from the money, foreshadowing his future rejection of his bourgeois values-laden marriage, Peter pours it out for display and handling, his eagerness bordering on idolatry. Additionally, Bridget removes the wedding clothes from the table to make room for the money, displacing the clothes as physical embodiment of union between two people to create space for bourgeois materialism. As Peter fondles the money, he marvels: “I never thought to see so much money within my four walls. We can do great things now we have it. We can take the ten acres of land we have the chance of since Jamsie Dempsey died, and stock it” (Yeats and Gregory 157). While the Old Woman will later hypnotize Michael, the dowry hypnotizes Peter.

The sovereignty figure, the Old Woman, enters the Gillanes’ home after they have noticed her walking outside on the path (not incidentally, Michael hides the money just before her entrance). Michael is enthralled by the Old Woman. He first, according to the stage directions, “watches her curiously from the door” and later “sits down beside her on the hearth” as she describes how “many a man has died for love of me” (Yeats and Gregory 163). The Poor Old Woman signals her awareness of the family’s property aspirations when she observes that they “have good shelter here,” (Yeats and Gregory 6). While recounting her difficulties, the Poor
Old Woman reminds the family that their security is illusory under colonialism. She states that she has had “trouble indeed” and that her “four beautiful green fields” have been taken away from the “many strangers in the house” (Yeats and Gregory 8). These comments are a veiled warning to the Gillanes that the “liberal bargain” will not protect them from dispossession under continued colonial rule. Until Ireland is free, no landowner is safe, and the belief that land will bring financial security and independence is a misguided fantasy. This revised figure of sovereignty disrupts the equation of material security with freedom and aligns the Gillanes’ acquisitiveness with Fanon’s neocolonial landed bourgeois.

The Old Woman’s pleas signal that the upcoming revolution must reject bourgeois materialism. When she states, “it is not a man going to his marriage that I look to for help,” it is easy to read the Old Woman’s comment as searching for men not bound by earthly loyalties. Rather than sacrifice his body through marriage to his parents’ land ownership ambitions, Michael sacrifices himself for Ireland, rejecting all physical and material bonds. The revolution that the Old Woman envisions counters the Gillanes’ goals of material acquisition by rejecting individual capitalist aspirations and requiring a total sacrifice. Thus, Kathleen ni Houlihan’s ‘s re-envisioning of the sovereignty goddess implicitly argues against bourgeois land ownership values and points out the precariousness of material security under colonialism.

*By the Bog of Cats*... employs the sovereignty figure in a searingly negative portrayal of an independent Ireland that has fully embraced imposed imperial capitalist patriarchal values and acts as a sort of sequel to *Kathleen ni Houlihan*. While the Old Woman in *Kathleen ni Houlihan* insists that Michael (and all would-be revolutionaries) must reject materialism, the postcolonial society in *By the Bog of Cats*... has rejected this revolutionary promise. When examining the relationship between *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and *By the Bog of Cats*..., the neocolonial aspects of
post-Independence Irish society become apparent through the latter play’s depiction of land- and status-obsessed townspeople who reject all perceived outsiders, especially the protagonist Hester and her daughter, Josie.\(^{129}\)

Outsider Hester Swane has largely been rejected by the settled community and her own family in *By the Bog of Cats*... She was abandoned on the bog by her own mother at a young age, and she has resolved to remain there until her mother’s promised return. Hester engages in decentering behaviors such as staying in a Traveller (“tinker”)\(^{130}\) caravan, wandering the bog at night, and perceptibly existing between the physical and spirit realms (bolstered by her sighting of the Ghost Fancier and references to witchery by the Catwoman). As the play’s action approaches the upcoming wedding of Hester’s former lover, Carthage, to the childlike Caroline Cassidy, the townspeople’s veneer of tolerance for her rapidly wears off. Carthage’s marriage will grant him control over wealthy landowner Xavier Cassidy’s farm, and he wishes to consolidate his landholding by forcing Hester from the land and home they bought together. While Carthage pressures Hester to leave the Bog of Cats for a home in town, numerous individuals attempt, with varying degrees of severity, to convince her to acquiesce to Carthage. In complicating Carthage’s land ownership ambitions, Hester threatens the stable operation of

\(^{129}\)In *Because We are Poor: Irish Theatre in the 1990s*, Victor Merriman argues for viewing Irish dramas of the 1990s, including *By the Bog of Cats*... through a postcolonial lens to examine their function as “sites of dissent, resistance and aspiration to transformation, which exemplify the playing out, in one small place, of a dynamic between modernity’s delusion of universality and the multiple and different social imaginaries at work in colonized cultures” (21).

\(^{130}\) A “tinker” is a pejorative ethnic slur for a member of the indigenous Irish Traveller people. While their lifestyle is similarly to that of English Gypsies or Roma, the Travellers are native to Ireland, one of many indigenous nomadic groups, including the Scottish Travelers, Norwegian Taters, and Dutch Woonwagonbewoners (Gmelch 1). According to Sharon Gmelch, “The Travelling People have, for generations, stood on the bottom rung of Ireland’s social and economic ladder, a poor and stigmatized minority group. Until the 1960s most traveled through the countryside, at first on foot and later in horse-drawn carts and wagons, performing a variety of trades and services. Despite the value of the services they provided, they were regarded as inferior and regularly discriminated against, especially once they began migrating to urban areas in search of work” (1).
the community. After the wedding of Carthage and Caroline, Hester, pushed to the brink by Carthage’s threats to remove her from her home and take away her daughter, Hester destroys her land and property, slaughters all livestock, and kills her daughter to prevent her from suffering Hester’s own fate of a motherless existence.

Marina Carr’s *By the Bog of Cats* undermines the societal myth of landed security and bourgeois materialism through the destructive aspect of a re-invented sovereignty goddess figure in the character of Hester Swane. While Hester does, indeed, exhibit many sovereignty goddess characteristics, Carr creates a fragmented, problematic, contradictory sovereignty figure that illustrates the damaging effects of postcolonial Ireland’s embrace of imposed imperialist standards. Hester represents a postmodern adaptation of the traditional sovereignty myth in its embrace of “discontinuity, disruption, dislocation, decentering, indeterminacy, and antitotalization” (Hutcheon 3). She appears as a postmodern figure through her identity as a Traveller woman (“tinker”) and illegitimate child living on the bog with her own illegitimate daughter, occupying a liminal place in society. Melissa Sihra posits Hester as a “potent personification of the double outsider in Irish society” as a woman and ethnic minority who “holds up a lens to the moral shortcomings of the local community” (121). As a warped sovereignty goddess, Hester illustrates the pejorative effects of materialist land ownership standards through her own struggle to both embrace and reject these values to feel a part of a community that despises her.

While numerous critics, such as Mary Trotter, Susan Cannon Harris, Declan Kiberd, Maria Kurdi, and Melissa Sihra, overwhelmingly identify the Poor Old Woman in *Kathleen ni

---

131 Maria Kurdi observes that Hester is “regarded as an abject threatening the integrity of the social body itself” and that she has been “further marginalized by Carthage and the Cassidys, influential members of the community who treat her in an objectifying, debasingly stereotypical way; they offer her money to have her move out of their way” (60).
Houlihan as a clear sovereignty figure, far fewer scholars have linked Hester to the sovereignty goddess. Scholarly discussion tends to center on the play’s basis in Euripides’ *Medea*[^132], in which the scorned sorceress Medea murders the children she shares with the hero Jason in revenge for his betraying her for another woman. While based on a Greek myth, Hester ironically embodies a far greater number of the sovereignty goddess’s aspects than Yeats and Gregory’s blatantly mythical Irish protagonist. Hester displays the sovereignty’s ability to grant power and land, her rapacious sexuality, and a deep connection to the land, though Carr problematizes each of these aspects.

Hester’s strongest resemblance to the sovereignty goddess is her ability to grant land and authority to a local “king.” In *By the Bog of Cats*..., this is her former lover turned greedy social climber Carthage Kilbride. However, Hester’s land and authority granting power is warped by her own erstwhile embrace of bourgeois standards and her jealousy towards her brother, spurred on by her abandonment by her mother at a young age. In this capacity, Hester represents the “willfully contradictory” nature of postmodern discourse that “cannot escape implication in the economic (late capitalist) and ideological (liberal humanist) dominants of its time” through her own paradoxical attempts to participate in liberal bourgeois society while simultaneously rejecting its constraints (Hutcheon ix). Hester thus “question[s] from within” the standards of the

[^132]: See Atkins, Balinisteanu, Dedebas, Jordan, Kurdi, Maresh, McDonald. A note by Frank McGuinness in the debut program for *By the Bog of Cats* titled “Writing in Greek” establishes this as a critical focus: “I wonder what Marina Carr believes? I think it might be the Greek gods – Zeus and Hera, Pallas Athena. She knows what the Greeks know. Death is a big country. And hers is a big imagination, crossing the border between the living and the dead…No coward’s soul is hers. In confrontation with terror, she is without fear. Her theatre is, in the most brutal sense, heroic. Her brave women look into the face of those that have gone before them – Medea, Hedda Gabler, Miss Julie – and they can hold their own in that tough company who took on their world and tore it to ribbons, for that was their destiny…*By the Bog of Cats* is a play about sorrow. Therefore it must be funny. A play about death, so a wedding shall be at the centre of it. A play about saying things that need to be said, so there will be silence at the end of it. A play about hatred, so love is at its heart. A play whose philosophy is that Carthage must be destroyed, but what happens to the destroyers?…I wonder what Marina Carr believes? I can’t say for certain, but I am certain in this play she writes in Greek.”
settled community (Hutcheon ix). Hester seizes upon Carthage’s land ownership aims to bolster her own precarious position. When Hester’s brother, Joseph, comes to the Bog of Cats to give Hester part of their father’s inheritance, she slits his throat out of jealousy that he had more time with their mother. She and Carthage then hide Joseph’s body in the bog, first taking the inheritance money. Murder has purchased a respectable, yet precarious, place in society. Mary King states that “with Carthage’s connivance, [Hester] used this to buy, with him, into a life of precarious, borderline, extramarital respectability: the respectability of property ownership” (56).

Corrupted by bourgeois materialism, Hester does not exercise the sovereignty’s benevolent power and authority over the land. Rather, as she sought to gain material and social success from land acquisition, murder taints her authority. This murder becomes the great secret of the play and shows the violence inherent in materialist aspirations.

The association of land and blood sacrifice here inverts the same relationship in *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and highlights the failure of the society in *By the Bog of Cats*... to achieve the former plays’ revolutionary goals. The Poor Old Woman convinces young men, dispossessed from land ownership security under English imperialism, to die for Ireland. Their willing blood sacrifice, while it empowers and rejuvenates her, gives them eternal remembrance and the knowledge that they are sacrificing themselves for their country. In *By the Bog of Cats*..., Hester’s brother’s unwilling sacrifice provides financial power to Hester through the money she robs from him, which she then bestows upon Carthage. Carthage, in turn, uses this money-as-power to purchase his first acres of land and begin his climb up the bourgeois societal ladder. Additionally, Hester’s murder of her brother upsets the rules of primogeniture in which a first-born son would inherit the land where Hester has been living and awaiting her mother’s return. While both plays modify the figure to reveal societal bourgeois land ownership standards as
damaging imperial constructions, using blood sacrifice as the key component, *By the Bog of Cats*... viscerally portrays the violence inherent in bourgeois materialism. Whereas Michael Gillane offers himself as a willing sacrifice in the anti-materialist cause for the land and fertility of Ireland, Hester’s brother is sacrificed on the altar of materialist aspirations.

As bourgeois land ownership values are based in patriarchy, only Carthage’s authority over the land is recognized, and the other characters in the play refuse to acknowledge Hester’s role in Carthage’s success. Caroline Cassidy, Carthage’s new bride, approaches Hester before the wedding and tries to convince Hester that, in fact, Carthage improved her life, stating: “he only took pity on ya, took ya out of that auld caravan on the bog, gave ya a home, built ya up from nothin’” (Carr 21). This incenses Hester, who savagely retorts: “Let’s get wan thing straight, it was me built Carthage Kilbride up from nothin’, him a labourer’s son…it was me who tould him he could do better. It was my money that bought his fine acres” (Carr 20). When Carthage visits Hester soon after Caroline’s visits, Hester unleashes her rage upon him and reminds him that he would not have anything without her assistance: “And still ya took the money and bought the land, the Kilbridges who never owned anythin’ till I came along, tinker and all” (Carr 23-24). Hester’s social and ethnic inferiority leads to Carthage using her for his own gain.

After her numerous failed attempts at incorporation into the settled community, Hester ultimately disavows patriarchal bourgeois land ownership values. When Carthage wishes to evict her from her home and land to make way for his legitimate marriage, Hester at first agrees, then refuses to leave for a home in town. She rejects the bourgeois notion that legal documents confer land ownership and refuses to comply with Carthage’s edict that she sell her home, even after the transaction is technically complete by legal standards. In these rejections, Mary King states, Hester “openly defies the male mores and conventions of bourgeois property ownership” (56).
When Caroline Cassidy reminds her that she has signed over her house, Hester claims that the document is only “Bits of paper, writin’ means nothin’, can be aisy as unsigned” (Carr 20). Hester’s attitude manifests a postmodern view of institutions that “refuses to posit any structure” as permanent and stable, and that while “such systems are indeed attractive…this does not make them any the less illusory” (Hutcheon 6). Additionally, Hester’s experience shows that patriarchal oppression is the foundation of the legality of land ownership. She tells Carthage that when she signed the documents under duress: “I wasn’t thinkin’ right then, was bein’ coerced and bullied from all sides, but I have regained me pride and it tells me I’m stayin’” (Carr 27).

Here, Hester questions the authority of documents signed by unwilling, coerced participants and demonstrates the patriarchal capitalist oppression of bourgeois materialism.

Hester’s attitude towards land ownership and her daughter’s supposed “illegitimacy” further reveals the patriarchal construction of the system of land acquisition and inheritance. These modern conservative Irish social structures are squarely at odds with precolonial Irish society which did not consider any child to be “‘illegitimate’ or a ‘bastard’” (which Josie Swane’s grandmother often calls her); according to Maureen Concannon, a child’s paternity was “often not known, nor did it matter, because every child belonged to his or her mother’s family,” and notions of paternal lineage would not enter into the culture until medieval times under Christianity (45). Here, Carr pushes for the audience’s empathy in children’s innocence and advocates for freedom from definitions of legitimacy, which plagued post-independence Ireland for decades in the horrors experienced by unwed mothers and their children. Additionally, Carthage’s supposed landowning security and bourgeois materialist aspirations are built upon women’s exploitation and murder. Once he has benefited from her influence through purchasing land, he sets her aside. Carthage’s place in society, then, is dependent on postcolonial Irish
patriarchal oppression. This squarely defies the ancient sovereignty goddess’s authority, which was only bestowed and maintained by those deemed worthy of it by acting as benevolent protectors of the land.

Along with questioning the legitimacy of land ownership and inheritance structures, Hester simultaneously exhibits and problematizes the sovereignty goddess’s rapacious sexual appetite.133 The Poor Old Woman in Kathleen ni Houlihan claims that she has not allowed any men into her bed yet also displays a hint of eroticism in her ability to hypnotize Michael into becoming her virginal, martyred lover whose blood sustains her. On the contrary, Hester boasts of her sexual prowess and seems aware of its transformative power. Before Caroline’s wedding to Carthage, Hester chides Caroline that, “It was in my bed he slowly turned from a slavish pup to a man and no frigid little Daddy’s girl is goin’ to take him from me” (Carr 20). Hester also scolds Carthage’s mother with this same sentiment, saying that Carthage was a “sissy boy” that she “tried to make a man of” (Carr 40). In these statements, Hester claims that Carthage gained not only material wealth but also strength and manhood from their relationship. This echoes the power of the sovereignty goddess in her sexual union with the tribal kings, such as in the tale of Niall and the Nine Hostages. Carthage attempts to assert his sexual prestige independent of Hester, stating “Never heard ya complainin’ when I was in your bed” (Carr 23). Hester sneers at

133 According to Helen Lojek, “it is Hester’s sexuality that disturbs the surrounding community. She is not promiscuous, as Traveller stereotype suggests she will be, but she is certainly enthusiastically and openly sexual, and (like women in many minority groups) she has been exoticized, so that other characters find her simultaneously seductive and threatening. Her lustiness is revealed not only by her unwed motherhood but also by the openness with which she discusses sex, bragging about what she has taught Carthage and about their mutual sexual pleasure. Dialogue regularly emphasizes Hester’s warmth and ‘toughness’ in contrast to the coldness and softness of Caroline, her ultimately successful rival for Carthage. Caroline’s father uses a stereotypically emblematic gun not only to insist on his power to control land and family but also to threaten Hester’s life (holding the gun to her throat) and to threaten her sexually (using it to look down her dress). He would not behave this way with a woman in his own community – not only because none of them would defy him, but also because he would regard such behavior as unacceptable in the settled community and because he finds the women in his world less sexually exciting” (73).
this notion and insults Carthage’s sexual prowess: “Ya done the job, I suppose, in a kindergarten
sourt of way…You were nothin’ before I put me stamp on ya and ya’ll be nothin’ again when
I’m finished with ya” (Carr 23). This quote belies the sovereignty goddess’s power over her
lover and her ability to withdraw her favor at any time. At the same time, Hester employed her
sexual power over Carthage to ensnare him helping her to hide her brother’s body after the
murder and use her brother’s money to buy into respectable society.

Hester’s deep ties to the land, particularly the bog, further align her with the sovereignty
goddess. No character identifies with the bog more than Hester. Even as an itinerant Traveller,
Hester has remained on the Bog of Cats since the age of seven when her mother Josie abandoned
her there and promised to return one day. Hester’s very life force is tied to the bog through the
black swan, into whose lair on the bog Big Josie placed Hester on the night she was born and
predicted that they would die on the same day (Carr 14). Despite her neighbors’ and friends’
urgings, Hester claims that she would rather die than leave the bog (Carr 6). In her association of
the bog as both her home and her family, the bog has become “a symbol of identification for
Hester” (Dedebas 264). The bog, much like Hester, evokes wildness, mystery, and
unpredictability; unlike for-profit farmland, it cannot be tamed or subdued. Her lifestyle and
beliefs related to the land are squarely at odds with those of the settled community, which Luke
Clancy, in a review of the 1998 Abbey Theatre production of By the Bog of Cats, describes as “a
churning, bigoted society for which land and money are all that really matter, a society in which
anyone dim enough to put their faith in other values is likely to receive brutal treatment” (12).
Just like her mother, Big Josie, Hester struggles with her desire to be integrated into the settled
community while simultaneously rejecting them. When Hester was growing up, she and Big
Josie were only allowed to polite society if Big Josie was singing her songs and using her hypnotic charm to entertain.

However, Carr also complicates the sovereignty goddess aspect of Hester’s connection to the bog as this relationship is not benevolent. Firstly, the bog hides the secret of Hester’s brother’s murder. Rather than the sovereignty figure protecting the land, the bog protects Hester from her dark past by hiding her brother’s body. In *By the Bog of Cats*..., the bog embodies liminality and functions as a porous boundary between the settled community and the “othered” bog dwellers such as Catwoman, Hester, Josie, and previously Big Josie, whose presence at community events goes from barely tolerated to coolly welcomed, depending on the occasion. As Maria Kurdi states, the bog “functions as a storehouse of relations between locations, character and place and character and character” while “constitute[ing] a realm of otherness manifesting powerful conjunctions between the living and the dead, present and past” (203-204). In addition to hiding Hester’s brother’s body and the secret of his murder, the bog imprisons Hester. Her overreliance on the bog prevents her from pursuing a possibly better life in a different community. While she still keeps a caravan and wanders the bog at night, Hester refuses to leave the bog and does not participate in traditional Traveller nomadic practices out of fear of missing her mother’s possible arrival. Also, at the end of the play, Hester destroys her home and livestock, which is not the action of a traditional sovereignty goddess acting as caretaker over the land and its fertility.

Carr sets up a postcolonial critique of Irish women as subaltern through Hester’s recognition that the townspeople have ulterior motives in banishing her from her home and land at Carthage’s behest. His unbridled appetite for land ownership has led him into a marriage alliance with the wealthy Cassidy family at the expense of his relationship with Hester and his
daughter. According to Tudor Balinisteanu, the settled community, represented by Carthage and Xavier Cassidy, wishes to “appropriate the Bog of Cats for its market value as farm land” (284). Hester’s spurning of Carthage’s attempts to eject her from the bog echoes the sovereignty goddess’s fierce protection of the land and the removal of favor from an unjust king whose reign had ceased to be productive for the land. Carthage’s “reign” will indeed not be environmentally sustainable for the bog as it will undoubtedly bring exploitative commercial development that will disregard the land’s natural power, emphasized by Carr’s seamless infusion of magical allusions and supernatural characters such as the Catwoman and the Ghost Fancier.

Due to Hester’s subaltern status, the townspeople feel both justified and empowered in their attempts to eject her, and she is powerless to advocate for herself. As an ethnic minority and woman, Hester is “doubly in shadow,” per Gayatri Spivak (81). She lacks the language and agency to self-advocate and fully articulate her situation, as women under colonial and neocolonial oppression “have been forced to articulate their experiences in the language of their oppressors” (Ashcroft et al 73). Even when Hester attempts to follow the settled community’s bourgeois values, she never fully earns entry into their midst. Any tenuous grip on respectability is severed when Carthage decides to discard Hester to buoy his own ambitions. Although she attempts to appropriate the language and practices of the oppressor, Hester’s “othering” by gender and Traveller ethnicity precludes her entry into polite society. She represents the “silent, silenced center,” oppressed by “epistemic violence” who is denied the right to speak and exist even after attempting “solidary through alliance politics” (Spivak 78). In addition to her Traveller ethnicity, for Hester, “the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced” as “the ideological construction keeps the male dominant” (Spivak 82-83). This is the case for both Hester and her mother, Big Josie, who, while she did not commit the same overtly violent actions
as Hester, nevertheless committed violence against her daughter and the community by abandoning them. In both cases, the Swane women occupied precarious positions within society with no voice of their own, and, as Davies explains, could only “be spoken into existence within the terms of available discourses” allowed by the settled community (42). For example, Big Josie could only attend community functions and bring her illegitimate daughter, Hester, when she provided entertainment through her singing and storytelling. She also functioned as an object of sexual desire, but never potential marriage material, for Xavier Cassidy due to her marginalized position. The discourses of bourgeois values, then, severely limit Big Josie’s and Hester’s engagement with the settled community, shuttling them into limited and limiting roles and effectively silencing their voices.

Forced into marginality and oppressed based on both gender and ethnicity, Hester’s rampage at the end of the play embodies the sovereignty goddess’s dangerous power and is the almost inevitable result of her poor treatment. Carr uses this sovereignty goddess aspect to dismantle bourgeois materialism and show the utter failure of the anti-colonial, anti-material revolution promised in *Kathleen ni Houlihan*. After Caroline’s and Carthage’s wedding, which, incidentally, is an example of another tenuous contract, Hester burns her house and all its livestock. Signed legal documents that nominally transfer land ownership cannot prevent the sovereignty goddess from enacting her revenge. Carthage cannot increase his wealth through destroyed land and livestock. Additionally, any stability that he may have gained through this transaction is shattered; his association with the unstable Hester will undoubtedly make him a laughingstock in the community as he has been unable to control her and prevent her from ruining his holdings. Hester ends her rampage by killing her daughter, Josie, and herself. In his embrace of bourgeois legitimacy narratives, Carthage has hoped to legitimize Josie, a “bastard”
born out of wedlock, with his new marriage and her removal from Hester. However, the Ghost Fancier’s appearance at the beginning of the play reveals that Hester has been fated to die. Thus, Hester kills Josie to prevent the child from living a life without her mother as Hester had done. In this tragic yet poignant sequence, the systems holding up with the social order are revealed as weak bargains with liberalism that have failed to create a society that liberates all its members. According to Maria Kurdi, “Hester’s violent, destructive deeds are not just shocking on stage but also have a highly subversive effect” as “they prove the inability of the system of power to operate by stigmatizing and excluding the gendered and marginal Other and to keep the body politic intact and unharmed at the same time” (62). In their pursuit of bourgeois materialist security and social standing through land ownership, the settled community rejected outsiders such as Hester and Big Josie, which proved destructive not just to the marginalized but to the entire community. In this way, Hester’s shocking actions indict neocolonial Irish society’s failure to decolonize through the rejection of imposed imperialist hegemonies.

Bronwyn Davies’s feminist poststructuralist analysis of female agency is particularly salient in analyzing Hester’s subjectivity and destructive behavior in *By the Bog of Cats*.... Davies argues that women’s “choices are understood as more akin to ‘forced choices,’ since the subject’s positioning within particular discourses makes the ‘chosen’ line of action the only possible action, not because there are no other lines of action but because one has been subjectively constituted through one’s placement within that discourse” (46). Hester’s destructive rampage can be viewed as such a “forced choice” because of the societal violence that she has experienced her entire life. Although she has attempted to violently enter bourgeois society by murdering her brother, she ultimately cannot abide the settled community’s patriarchal and materialist rules. Hester has attempted to work within these structures to provide
Carthage with a promising future, only to be spurned by him and the entire community. For Carthage, she murders her brother and purchases land that, while technically co-owned, is owned by Carthage within patriarchal land rules. Within the oppressive discourse that shapes her subjectivity, characterized by the community’s repeated rejection of Hester and ignoring of her pleas to live on the bog in peace, Hester’s actions stem from extreme desperation and despair. She uses the only power left available to her, that of the sovereignty goddess, to punish those who insist on sacrificing her to their dreams of societal recognition and protection through land ownership. Hester’s forced destruction highlights the failure of the revolution to liberate her and similar outsiders, indicting forward progress narratives of bourgeois land ownership standards. Additionally, through Hester, Carr embodies women’s anger in postcolonial Ireland; as noted Irish actress Olwen Fouéré, who created the role of Hester in the play’s debut, states: “Articulating that kind of rage is a huge part of Marina’s work. I don’t know if any other writer in Ireland has confronted it with the same authenticity. At times I feel that she is actually articulating the female rage of the nation” (qtd. in Sihra 121). Perhaps the rage of which Fouéré speaks stems in no small part to the failure of Ireland’s nationalist revolution to provide women with any substantial national role besides functioning symbolically and helplessly.

Hester, then, is both ancient and postmodern. As a complicated embodiment of the traditional sovereignty goddess figure, she nonetheless represents the “fundamentally contradictory” nature of postmodern discourse. She also epitomizes the postcolonial hybrid in her embrace of societal structures as well as her attempts to cling to her native Traveller culture. Hester signifies the possibility of competing discourses of self. As Bronwyn Davies contends, “Just as there are multiple readings of any text, so there are multiple readings of ourselves. We

\[134\quad \text{According to Mary King, “she will take the girl child Josie with her into the Bog of Cats rather than have her repeat her own tormented quest for a denied identity and a missing mother in a male-dominated society” (King 58).}\]
are constituted through multiple discourses at any one point in time, and while we may regard a move we make as correct within one game or discourse, it may be equally rejected within another” (47). This is especially true for Hester. Her deep relationship to and authority over the land signal her sovereignty goddess persona, and she uses this power to contest bourgeois ideology. At the same time, she embraces cultural norms in the hopes of acceptance from the settled community. Additionally, as a member of the Traveler people, she desperately wishes to keep her freedom of movement on the bog, maintaining a caravan in addition to her house. However, contrary to Traveler movement patterns, she also has waited stalwartly in one location for her mother Big Josie’s long-awaited and never-to-be-seen return. She also has refused to enter conventional relationships to land and marriage; she never married her partner of ten years, Carthage, with whom she shares a daughter, and even when she purchased land and built a home with him, she refused to give up the caravan or participate fully in the materialist life of the settled people. These contradictions strengthen, rather than weaken, her questioning of “the master narratives of bourgeois liberalism” (6). As a postmodern sovereignty goddess figure, Hester rejects patriarchal dictates and land ownership systems and “contests [them] from within [their] own assumptions,” especially in the tragic revelation that cooperation with bourgeois materialism ultimately does not protect her or other gendered and ethnic minorities.

When examined together, Kathleen ni Houlihan and By the Bog of Cats... use a modified sovereignty figure to depict the promise and failure of the revolution in Ireland. In Kathleen ni Houlihan, the Old Woman, a re-fashioned, modernist sovereignty goddess, invites Michael, and, consequently, revolutionary-minded Irish citizens, to participate in a vision of independence that squarely rejects imposed colonial bourgeois, materialistic pretensions. In By the Bog of Cats..., the fractured, fragmented, postmodern sovereignty figure, Hester Swane, eviscerates modern
Irish society’s failure to enact the revolutionary potential illustrated in Kathleen ni Houlihan through its enthusiastically wholesale internalization of bourgeois social and financial standards, especially its obsession with land ownership. The townspeople in By the Bog of Cats... have embraced capitalist patriarchal standards imposed by British colonialism, snobbishly rejecting all perceived outsiders, including Hester, and positioning individual aspirations towards land and financial status above community solidarity and collective liberation. By the Bog of Cats... proceeds logically from Kathleen ni Houlihan in its recognition of the early play’s revolutionary potential and echoes the real-life failure of Irish independence to deliver on its revolutionary promises. While the Easter Rising participants were largely socialist proponents of equal rights for men and women, embodied especially through women’s participation in the movement and the Easter Proclamation calling for women’s suffrage, the rigidly conservative 1937 Constitution, discussed earlier in this chapter, codified women’s societal roles as in the home and did not provide a vision for economic reform that would benefit the lower classes. Thus, the sovereignty goddess figures in both plays reveal the promised trajectory and the failure of the revolution in Ireland.

Kathleen ni Houlihan’s and By the Bog of Cats’ Portrayal of Internalized Imperialist and Neocolonial Commodification of Land and Women

The refashioning of the traditional sovereignty myth in Kathleen ni Houlihan and By the Bog of Cats...investigates the intersections of land and gender from a mytho-postcolonial perspective. In these postcolonial plays, the acquisitive approach towards land involves bartering women as commodities in subservient marriage. For the playwrights, land ownership is the key issue in both dramas, and in their exploration of this issue, they create marriage exchanges that trade women for land and property. However, the traditional brides in the plays
are overshadowed by modernist and postmodernist versions of the Irish sovereignty goddess, as women in excess. In *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and *By the Bog of Cats*... the denigration of women through marriage exchange accompanies imposed bourgeois neocolonial attitudes towards land ownership. Both plays show how the imperial concept of privately held land ownership and inheritance accompanies patriarchal exploitation of women through bartering and rejects societal standards and relationships represented by the sovereignty goddess figure.

*Kathleen ni Houlihan* and *By the Bog of Cats*... use the sovereignty goddess figure to question the patriarchal imperialist system of land-based marriage exchanges. In these plays, the sovereignty goddess functions largely outside of kinship and land exchange systems. She invites both the characters and the audience to consider a different, non-profit based relationship to the land than that presented by the women-for-land exchange practices. Irish exchange of women and land for profit and bourgeois social gain aligns with British colonization, incommensurate with communal land relationships and greater opportunities for women represented by the ancient sovereignty myth.

In *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and *By the Bog of Cats*, the exchange of women for land and its accompanying social status and material security operates at the very origin of their subjugation. Within a mytho-postcolonial critical lens, application of Marxist critique is insufficient in addressing gender oppression in imposed imperialist hegemonies. As Ania Loomba contends, “Although Marxist thought had paid a great deal of attention to the oppression of women, it failed to theorize the *specificity* of gender oppression” (43). In “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex,” Gayle Rubin notes that although “no theory accounts for the oppression of women – in its endless variety and monotonous similarity, cross-culturally and throughout history – with anything like the explanatory power of the Marxist theory of class
oppression,” patriarchal exploitation of women has occurred in numerous societies with
economic systems that do not even vaguely resemble capitalism (35). Rubin then argues that we
must “look for the ultimate locus of women’s oppression within the traffic in women” and looks
to the establishment of kinship systems that exchange women between male partners, “plac[ing]
the oppression of women within social systems, rather than biology” and that (45). Rubin
explains that previous work by Sigmund Freud and Claude Lévi-Strauss presents “a sense of a
systematic social apparatus which takes up females as raw materials,” but neither critic “turns a
critical glance upon the processes he describes” (34). As a result, she argues, the identification of
a “sex/gender system” as the “locus of the oppression of women, of sexual minorities, and of
certain aspects of human personality within individuals” must be theorized as originating within
women’s exchange (34). Rubin’s theory especially applies to Kathleen ni Houlihan and By the
Bog of Cats… as women’s oppression in both plays emerges through these bartering systems
that involve women as the “gifts” and men as the “exchange partners;” in the plays, women are
“transacted” and act as “a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner of it” (Rubin 45). Rubin
notes these systems as a foundational basis of society as they “exchange sexual access,
genealogical statuses, lineage names and ancestors, rights, and people – men, women, and
children – in concrete systems of social relationships” (Rubin 46-47).

Both plays demonstrate women’s exchange as both the basis of society itself and
women’s subjugation within society. In Kathleen ni Houlihan and By the Bog of Cats..., women
are exchanged for land, in keeping with Rubin’s analysis that “there is an equivalent for women”
in the form of “bridewealth” (63). In Kathleen ni Houlihan, the Gillane family eagerly plans to
expand their meager homestead with their new daughter-in-law’s dowry, hoping to ensure their
future financial security. By the Bog of Cats... shows Carthage Kilbride’s rise to land ownership
and social status through an advantageous marriage to Caroline Cassidy, daughter of rich
landowner Xavier Cassidy, whose farm Carthage will acquire. Both plays also demonstrate the
exploitation of land as for-profit commodity through bourgeois materialism functioning
interdependently with women’s oppression through functional marriage exchange.

*Kathleen ni Houlihan* demonstrates that bartering women to achieve security through
land ownership both disenfranchises women in Irish society and dishonors the land as a saleable
commodity. Delia’s body and fertility are items for sale whose worth depends upon delivering
the desired “product” of a male child. Peter Gillane and Delia’s father are merchants. The play
emphasizes the practice of marriage as a contract and a system of exchange, a common global
practice and long-standing element in British literature, complicated by the loved-based
“marriage plots” of nineteenth century British novels. As Claude Lévi-Strauss notes, “the
inclusion of women in the number of reciprocal prestations…is such a general custom that a
whole volume would not be sufficient to enumerate the instances of it…marriage is regarded
everywhere as a particularly favourable occasion for the initiation or development of a cycle of
exchanges” (63). What is particularly salient in the marriage exchange in *Kathleen ni Houlihan*
is that there is no mention of the kinship structures or the creating of family alliances that Lévi-
Strauss describes; the Gillanes are solely focused on the monetary and land-based gains from
Michael’s marriage to Delia Cahel. In the exclusive emphasis on exchanging women for money
and land, *Kathleen ni Houihan* reveals the oppression of women and the complicity of patriarchy
with bourgeois imperialist bourgeois land ownership values.

A brief exchange between Peter and Bridget Gillane reveals the deleterious effects of
bartering women through marriage and measuring their worth in money and land. Peter
expresses his preference for money (and the land it can buy) over his hard-working self-
sacrificing wife. Annoyed, Bridget quips to Peter that he is “well pleased to be handling the dowry money,” and Peter snappily retorts that he wishes that he “had had the luck to get a hundred pounds, or twenty pounds itself, with the wife [he] married” (Yeats and Gregory 4). Peter verbalizes the transactional system in which women are mere trading chattel and insinuates that Bridget is worth far less than Delia Cahel. Bridget is clearly angry at this comment, revealed in the stage directions that “she is vexed and bangs a jug on the dresser” (Yeats and Gregory 4). Bridget represents “the woman’s position within rural Ireland as a commodity, as a transactional object whose worth can be quantified by a bag of gold and...functions as an object of exchange” with “limited access to economic agency” (Doggett 44). In her husband’s characterization, Bridget, as a wife, has been reduced to her use value and deemed lacking. Bridget also identifies with the longstanding tradition within early twentieth century Irish drama of “self-sacrificing mothers, whose needs and desires are always secondary to those of their children and any male characters” who are “depicted as suffering martyrs” (Maresh 179). She reminds Peter of the unpaid and unappreciated labor expected of women, stating that “If I brought no fortune I worked it out in my bones...and never asking big dresses or anything but to be working” (Yeats and Gregory 4). In her appeal for her labor’s value, Bridget challenges Peter to expand his notion of a woman’s worth. Unfortunately, she is unsuccessful. After Bridget’s speech, Peter patronizingly pats her arm and says: “You are the best woman in Ireland, but money is good, too. I never thought to see so much money within my four walls. We can do great things now we have it” (Yeats and Gregory 5). With this remark, Peter disregards Bridget’s contributions to the family, overtly preferring money over her service.

Even in a system that barters women for land and money, women are still worth less than that for which they are traded. Kathleen ni Houlihan illustrates Irish society’s simultaneous
valorization of motherhood and depriving mothers of agency and respect. Peter’s sentiments reflect what Melissa Sihra calls a “patriarchal meta-narrative” which “glorified the role of motherhood” while not highly regarding the contributions of mothers and respecting them as people (2). Bridget’s strenuous efforts on behalf of her family were, in this vision of the family, expected to be performed as part of her duties as a mother without complaint or reward. In this way, Bridget’s unhappiness with her husband’s overt greed reflects women’s devaluation in a system that barters women for land. Bridget becomes doubly oppressed, both by her husband and the colonial oppression which has turned women into material commodities, and she has little recourse for her situation.

However, while Bridget does at first glance appear to fit the stereotypical character of the long-suffering Irish mother and assume her role as a “saintly” martyr figure, Yeats and Gregory nuance her characterization in a profoundly ambivalent manner as Bridget does not quietly acquiesce to her circumstances. In verbally sparring with her husband, Bridget reveals her dissatisfaction with her treatment and discontent with transactional marriage. According to Rob Doggett, while “critics have rightfully called attention to the play’s pedagogical function, its deployment of the woman as the symbol of the nation and its valorization of the woman as silent guardian of the domestic sphere,” the play is “fraught with gender-based tensions that…are never fully reconciled” and “is marked by points of rupture and excess meaning that expose the fundamental inability of nationalist drama to erase difference, to represent the gendered Other as Same, and to account for the possibility of female self-will and desire” (43). Yeats and Gregory’s portrayal of Bridget is particularly dissident as they first establish her as “‘natural’ and a ‘fit overseer of the hearth’” who nonetheless does not submit quietly to her commodification (Doggett 45). Like Yeats and Gregory’s use of the pitiful Shan Van Vocht aspect of the
traditional sovereignty figure, Bridget’s seemingly traditional characterization prevents nationalist audiences from dismissing her more radical sentiments out of hand as overly strident or aggressive, as they would treat other outspoken women like suffragists, activists, or the numerous free-thinking women in J.M. Synge’s plays. Bridget seemingly conforms to an uncontroversial position within her home yet simultaneously rejects her subjugation. This forces the audience to confront women’s position as commodities within the valorized peasant home.

Despite her protestations in the bargain for Delia, Bridget embraces and internalizes imposed patriarchal bourgeois standards. Bridget’s ultimate complicity in her husband’s acquisitiveness represents what postcolonial feminist theorist Deniz Kandiyoti terms a “patriarchal bargain” (275). Kandiyoti describes the “patriarchal bargain” as a set of women’s strategies “within a set of concrete constraints” and “specific forms of women’s active or passive resistance in the face of their oppression” (275). Kandiyoti provides the example within “classic patriarchy” as a young girl’s marrying into her husband’s household at a young age in which she is subordinate to the men and the more senior women, especially her mother-in-law (279). Kandiyoti identifies the “patriarchal bargain” as a young bride’s acceptance of the “deprivation and hardship” for the future “control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters in law,” making “subordination to men…offset by the control older women attain over younger women” (279). Bridget Gillane anticipates exercising her earned authority over Delia Cahel and participates in the same marriage exchange system that oppresses her. Delia Cahel’s arrival promises not only a subservient daughter-in-law but also the opportunity for additional material security through her dowry and, with it, the purchase of land, which represents Amalia Sa’ar’s liberal bargain through the internalization of bourgeois forward-progress narratives.

Wayward matriarch Nora Burke in Synge’s 1903 play In the Shadow of the Glen “chooses, much to the dismay of nationalist audiences, to depart from a marriage based exclusively upon financial security” (Doggett 45).
However, the Old Woman’s arrival destroys the promise of both patriarchal and liberal bargains in progress and lures Michael away from bourgeois values-embracing marriage. The Old Woman shows here that, under colonization, the supposed security and rewards promised from bargaining with patriarchy and liberalism are unstable and unsustainable. It is no accident that the Old Woman’s revolution involves Michael’s complete rejection of his exchange-based marriage and his parents’ bourgeois aspirations for land ownership and acquisition. The Old Woman, a re-imagined sovereignty goddess figure, has invited Michael into an ancient sacred marriage with the land of Ireland that breaks his earthly materialist bonds and obligation to land-based marriage exchange.

Trading women for land within a materialist bourgeois value framework is not restricted to colonized societies. By the Bog of Cats depicts the establishment of the patriarchal system of land ownership in modern postcolonial times that barters women for land. As in Kathleen ni Houlihan, the primary vehicle for trading women for land is marriage. On his wedding day to Caroline Cassidy, Carthage informs Hester that Caroline’s father Xavier will sign over his farm to Carthage after the wedding (Carr 24). This marriage will “make Carthage respectable and the pillar of the community” (Atkins 80). Caroline, like Delia Cahel in Kathleen ni Houlihan, becomes chattel exchanged for land between men. Melissa Sihra describes Caroline as a “corporeal commodity that will notionally ensure the maintenance of the privileged legitimate patriarchal economy” (126). This marriage is clearly detrimental to Caroline; she does not appear to hold any romantic illusions regarding her upcoming nuptials. She vacillates between tepid excitement and deep regret. Caroline also displays an “increasing sense of solidarity with Hester” which “derives from realizing the disturbingly precarious nature of her position in the patriarchal economy” (Kurdi 165). Additionally, she is not emotionally or mentally prepared for marriage.
Caroline’s timid, immature behavior throughout the play, which Mary King describes as “childlike,” demonstrates her victimhood in the transactional system (56).

Much like pre-Independence Peter Gillane, post-independence Xavier Cassidy plays the role of merchant with Carthage rather than proud father-in-law. Per Gayle Rubin’s theory, the exchange system in By the Bog of Cats... connects men as the “exchange partners” and the women as “a conduit of a relationship” (44). Xavier is even more nakedly opportunistic than Peter in his motivations for the transaction. In a heated exchange with Hester, Xavier openly admits his distaste for his daughter, his disrespect for Carthage, and his view of both as pawns in his scheme to protect his farm. Xavier cannot bequeath his land directly to his daughter due to patrilineal inheritance laws. However, through Caroline’s marriage to Carthage, Xavier ensures that although the Cassidy name will not continue, the farm will be saved (Carr 53). The true reasons for Caroline’s marriage to Carthage are all too obvious to the jilted Hester who, accuses Xavier of “wheedlin’ and cajolin’ Carthage” to marry his daughter with “promises of land and money” (Carr 52). According to Xavier, Carthage was “aisy wheedled” because he “loves the land” and would rather “die than part with it wance he gets his greedy hands on it” (Carr 53). Carthage believes that social institutions like legitimate marriage and land ownership will bring him lasting financial and social stability.

In emphasizing this transaction, Carr demonstrates the oppression of women within this bourgeois society. Xavier is eager to protect his deal, realizing that his daughter’s value as a saleable commodity diminishes without the promise of the farm. He calls his daughter a “whiny little rip” and says “she’s all I’ve got”, which can very well be completed by adding: “to sell”

136 Prior to the play’s action, Xavier’s son has died under mysterious circumstances after digging up his dead dog laced with strychnine, and many (especially Hester) believe that Carthage murdered his son for being too “soft” and feminine.
Xavier judges his daughter’s worth poorly and sees Carthage as the best “bargain” that he can make. As a result, Xavier fights to protect the deal from falling through. He begs the meddlesome Hester to leave the new couple alone, saying that he doesn’t want “Carthage changin’ his mind after a while” (Carr 54). If the marriage were to fail, Caroline’s “market price” would further depreciate.

Both the Poor Old Woman and Hester Swane, as modified sovereignty goddesses, disrupt the marriage exchange system. While characters like Bridget Gillane, Delia Cahel, and Caroline Cassidy have either been or are in the process of being exchanged for land and status, the Old Woman and Hester are not and, presumably, cannot, be given in exchange. In kinship networks systems, Claude Lévi-Strauss notes that “it is considered a humiliation” for a woman not to be given in exchange in many societies which practice exchange and that “it is a primitive and indivisible act of awareness which sees the daughter or sister as a valuable which is offered, and vice versa the daughter and sister of someone else as a valuable which may be demanded” (Lévi-Strauss 140). In enticing Michael away from his marriage to a sacrificial marriage with the land and fertility of Ireland itself, the Old Woman is not given in exchange, nor does she act as a “conduit of a relationship [between men] rather than a partner of it” (Rubin 44). Instead, she fractures the entire system by refusing to participate and removing Michael and Delia’s marriage from the network. Hester also operates outside of the exchange system. Her relationship with Carthage, a marriage in practice, does not function as an exchange between families, and the orphaned Hester would not even be able to offer entry into a kinship network. While the partnership does allow Carthage to begin his social climb through the murdering and robbing of Hester’s brother, Hester is not a bride exchanged for another woman or what Rubin terms “bridewealth” (62). In their roles entirely outside of the marriage exchange system, the Old
Woman and Hester exercise their power as ancient sovereignty goddesses and dismantle the capitalist patriarchal system of exchanging women for land. This system reflects internalized imperialist standards, especially bourgeois materialist values. By existing outside of and ultimately disrupting the system of women’s exchange, the sovereignty goddess figures posit an indigenous alternative that rejects the patriarchal intertwining of land and women’s bodies.

**Woman’s Disenfranchisement Through Embodying Ireland**

With these questions of women’s agency and power, we can once again turn to woman as icon of the nation and land of Ireland. The effacing of the ancient sovereignty goddess’s power turned women into symbols with no real power in society. Women have gone from powerful agents to complete disenfranchisement as the sovereignty goddess myth has been effaced through English colonial rule and restrictive gender roles prescribed by Christianity. Poet Eavan Boland, in *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time*, describes women’s marginalization in patriotic activities. Boland claims that she was “ready to weep or sing or recite in the cause of Ireland,” but when she looked for a female heroine to identify with, she realized that there was none (Boland 67). Boland mourns this effacing of female power into a nominal symbol in mainstream Irish culture after centuries of Christianity and imposed patriarchal imperial standards:

> 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. Or she was a nineteenth-century image of girlhood, on a frontispiece or in a book of engravings. She was invoked, addressed, remembered, loved, regretted. And, most important, died for. She was a mother or a virgin. Her hair was swept or tied back, like the prow of a
ship. Her flesh was wood or ink or marble. And she had no speaking part. Her identity was an image. Or was it a fiction? (66)

Boland contends that nationalist iconography devoted to women does not grant actual women social power or agency. The pejorative feminine gendering of land points towards imposed English imperial patriarchal, capitalist notions of land ownership that were subsequently internalized and vigorously reinforced in postcolonial Ireland. Land ownership, or male control over the feminized space of land, was built upon the trade of women as material commodities through marriage alliances and the exploitation of women.

However, the incorporation of the sovereignty goddess figures in Kathleen ni Houlihan and By the Bog of Cats does not represent women’s appropriation as flat, unempowered national iconography. Rather, these figures act in particularly subversive ways to show that the feminine gendering of the land appropriated by imperialism and later nationalist movements degrades women and keeps the entire population beholden to colonialist mores. Land ownership cannot bring stability in the colonial society of Kathleen ni Houlihan or in the postcolonial society in By the Bog of Cats. Both societies are patriarchal, capitalist, and exploitative. This view of the sovereignty goddess-inspired “Mother Ireland” figures in the plays follows Gerry Kearns’s analysis in “Mother Ireland and the Revolutionary Sisters” that women read representations of women as icons of nationhood “very much against the grain of the passive interpretations favoured by later historians” (443). Kearns urges us to “consider the political ideals and practices that animate or ridicule these images,” pointing out that “these relations between bodies, space, and nationalism are both contestable and ambivalent” and “…are available both to represent patriarchal relations and as resources for people who want to challenge those relations” (444). Pointing to women’s active participation in the nationalist movement through such early
twentieth-century exemplars as Countess Markievicz and Maude Gonne, Kearns explains, “[such] symbolic representations of Ireland...can make the status of women the measure of national progress” and that “living women can also themselves become symbols either by embodying or challenging the exemplars (444). In light of these feminist reflections, Kathleen ni Houlihan and By the Bog of Cats do not simply reproduce the passive, sanitized Mother Ireland figure. Rather, these plays attack Irish colonial and postcolonial land ownership value systems, showing how Irish women are commodified through marriage emphasize the failure of revolution and independence in Ireland to create a truly anti-colonial society that rejects imposed imperial capitalist and patriarchal values.
CHAPTER THREE

The Black Prometheus and the Irish Demeter: Mythologies of Race, Gender, and Urban Tenantry in Sean O’Casey’s Juno and the Paycock and Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun

This chapter examines urban property ownership from the viewpoint of disenfranchised classes of Irish workers in 1922 Dublin and aspirational African Americans of post-World War II segregated Chicago in Sean O’Casey’s 1924 play Juno and the Paycock and Lorraine Hansberry’s 1959 play A Raisin in the Sun. Both plays reveal the societal mythologies of Irish nationalism and the American Dream, respectively, as beneficial only to the existing social order and failing to liberate those most vulnerable. O’Casey and Hansberry foreground space and property to show how racial, socioeconomic, and religious discrimination imprisons poor Irish tenant dwellers and inner-city working-class African Americans in cramped conditions and denies them property ownership, economic advancement, generational wealth, and full societal integration. Using a mytho-postcolonial theoretical framework, I examine how both Juno and the Paycock and A Raisin in the Sun harness traditional mythologies, including a gender-conscious reading of the myth of Demeter, goddess of the harvest and fertility, and her daughter, Persephone; the myth of Prometheus, the bringer of fire; and the Irish sovereignty figure Kathleen ni Houlihan to undo the imperialist ideological foundations of Irish nationalism and the American Dream. Additionally, both authors use the figures of the long-suffering Irish mother and the strong Black mother to reveal the patriarchy endemic in Irish nationalism and the American Dream. In their creation of ultimately political theatre, O’Casey and Hansberry draw on upon their experience as socialist activists. This analysis aims to contribute to the following
small but growing areas of scholarship: the complex relationship between the Irish and African Americans, Black literary classicism, and the ties between Lorraine Hansberry and Sean O’Casey, which first inspired this comparison.

The political, emotional, and artistic affinity between Sean O’Casey and Lorraine Hansberry was first established by Lorraine Hansberry herself, long before writing *A Raisin in the Sun*. In *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*, Hansberry describes her first experience with O’Casey’s work, a performance of *Juno and the Paycock* at the University of Wisconsin at seventeen. Hansberry was immediately moved with compassion for the characters’ pain and suffering; she states:

“...The woman’s voice, the howl, the shriek of misery fitted to a wail of poetry that consumed all my sense and all my awareness of human pain, endurance, and the futility of it...the wail rose and hummed through the tenement, through Dublin, through Ireland itself and then mingled with seas and became something born of the Irish wail that was all of us. I remember sitting there stunned with a melody that I thought might have been sung in a different meter...the melody was one that I had known for a very long while. I was seventeen and I did not think then of writing the melody as *I* knew it – in a different key; but I believe it entered my consciousness and stayed there” (65).

Throughout her tragically brief life, Hansberry continuously expressed her admiration for O’Casey and identified the parallels of human suffering, despair at injustice in the world, and affective appeals to the audience in his works to African American life in personal correspondence, interviews, speeches, etc. In perhaps her most telling comment in a *New York*

---

137 At the beginning of her speech “The Negro Writer and His Roots: Towards a New Romanticism,” at a major Black writers conference convened by the American Society of African Culture in 1959, Hansberry quotes key lines from O’Casey’s autobiography *Sunset and Evening Star*, dubbing O’Casey “warrior against despair and lover of humankind” (2). Later in the essay, in a discussion on the American Dream and the famed anti-hero Willy
Times Mail Bag article, Hansberry states: “I am the first to say that my play [A Raisin in the Sun] and all plays I shall ever write owe deeply to the great O’Casey.” In a radio interview with Studs Terkel during Raisin’s Broadway run, Hansberry praises O’Casey as a part of a tradition of fine writing in English, stating “…for 200 years the only writers in English literature we’ve had to boast about have been the Irish, who come from an oppressed culture, you know? Shaw, O’Casey…from Jonathan Swift to James Joyce and so forth and so on. You name them in the last two hundred years and they’ve been Irishmen.” In this interview, Hansberry describes Irish writers, while writing in English, as coming from an oppressed people, and sees the value in their ideas for her own writing about African Americans dispossessed by institutionalized racism and poverty. Hansberry’s fellow contemporary African American playwright, Samuel Boyea, drew direct parallels between O’Casey’s Juno and the Paycock and Black inner-city slum life in an artistic project. Boyea, a British Guiana-born playwright, director, and newspaper editor, corresponded with Sean O’Casey and various others throughout the 1950s regarding his desire to adapt Juno and the Paycock into a “Negro Life play.” Many later African American theater
companies and artists, including playwright Alice Childress and singer, songwriter, and playwright Harry Belafonte shared Hansberry’s enthusiasm for O’Casey.\textsuperscript{140}

thumping sum of $300,000 – without either you or me getting a penny. This doesn’t surprise me, because one reason I had to drop the agent I had – like a fool I had recommended her to you – was her refusal to follow my specific instructions and cut you in at 50 percent…Now I don’t know whether she had anything to do with ‘leaking’ my MS to the author of the current Broadway play, but I do know that at least four people connected with the production of this play saw and read my manuscript which is even closer to the current play than the original Juno and the Paycock. Naturally.” In this letter, Boyea recounts meeting with O’Casey’s literary agent regarding the adaptation and claims that he has written six drafts. In an effort to appeal to O’Casey’s class consciousness, in a hand-written addendum at the bottom of his typed letter, Boyea writes: “Why I, too am Negro – though not middle class by a long shot than God! Boyea also states within the letter: “…I may refer to the fact that the author makes much of her being a Negro – her husband is white. Now I think neither fact is pertinent to the situation, except that this author comes from a family just fined $19,000 for slumlordism (their own fellow-Negroes the victims).” In this attack against Hansberry, who remains unnamed, Boyea attempts to invoke O’Casey’s long-standing sympathy with urban tenant dwellers. To add to the confusion, a 1956 letter from O’Casey to Boyea shows that O’Casey did not, in fact, remember granting permission for Boyea to adapt Juno as a “Negro Life” play, despite correspondence with literary agents dating back to 1953 regarding his adaptation of Juno. In his 1959 letter to O’Casey, Boyea references this episode, claiming that O’Casey stated that he was too busy with his own work to remember this correspondence, which was “much to [Boyea’s] surprise.” Boyea also asks if O’Casey can trace down the original letter, saying “I think it will solve – to our satisfaction – the mystery of the origin of the play [A Raisin in the Sun] discussed in the enclosed letters appearing in the New York Times.” Without access to Boyea’s manuscript, which additional archival research might uncover, it is impossible to evaluate the extent of his claims. However, even without Boyea’s claims, it is important to note that A Raisin in the Sun is a unique play in its own right and does not qualify as an “adaptation,” which Boyea calls it. Boyea, in his letters, exaggerates the parallels within the plays to the point where he seems to suggest that Hansberry owes her entire play to Sean O’Casey. While there certainly are structural and thematic similarities between the play, any comparison should not discount Hansberry’s achievement. While the question of A Raisin in the Sun as the first African-American play inspired by Sean O’Casey may be a literary mystery (surely in need of future research), this incident serves as proof of concept that African American playwrights beyond Lorraine Hansberry found fruitful artistic parallels between poor Irish and African American slum dwellers.

\textsuperscript{140} According to Martha Bower, African-American playwright Alice Childress also admired O’Casey and “…like Hansberry, equated the oppression of the Irish Catholics by the British with the oppression of Blacks by whites” (Bower 89). Numerous African American theater companies dedicated to the promotion of plays by and about African Americans also staged O’Casey’s plays on several occasions. The American Negro Theater, an outgrowth of the Negro Unit of the Federal Theatre Project in Harlem, active between 1940 and the mid-1950s, put on a performance of Juno and the Paycock in July 1946 (Hill and Barnett 17). The Free Southern Theater, whose objectives were to establish a “legitimate theater in the Deep South” and “to produce political, social, and economic changes in the lives of Southern Blacks” staged several O’Casey and Beckett Plays (Hill and Barnett 188). Additionally, Harry Belafonte has recounted his admiration for O’Casey as well as his recognition of parallels between the Black and Irish experiences. Belafonte writes “Sean O’Casey had a huge influences on me…O’Casey led me to looking at the theater of my main center of expression…the play that we did…Juno and the Paycock, we did it as a West Indian cast living in America…we never changed a word in the play. Everything fit perfectly” (qtd. in Dooley 5-6). Belafonte also describes his elation and artistic inspiration as a result of starring as Captain Boyle, the “Paycock,” in Juno, his first lead role, in July 1946 with the American Negro Theatre. Belafonte states: “That the play was about white characters, written by a white playwright, bothered us not at all. We easily identified with the Irish peasants resisting their British oppressors; we knew exactly how it felt to live in a society where those in power deprived the conquered of their civil rights…at the end, as all of us took our bows, I felt, for the first time in my life, part of something grand and wonderful. I’d never felt so happy. All I wanted was more” (Belafonte 62).
British Imperialism, Irish Dispossession, and Postcolonial Readings of African American Discrimination

In its mytho-postcolonial comparative reading of *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Juno and the Paycock*, this chapter establishes British imperialism as the foundational oppression for the Irish urban poor in the 1920s and for African Americans in the United States through the legacy of the slave trade and institutionalized racism. Both O’Casey and Hansberry used the key theatrical venues of the Abbey Theatre and Broadway, respectively, to launch a national conversation about the inequalities and injustices facing the dispossessed groups in their works. I engage with and build upon the growing yet still limited extant scholarship on the complex relationship between African Americans and the Irish, both in America and abroad, whose (albeit vastly different) experiences of oppression alternately created both political allegiances and disdain between these groups. O’Casey’s early 1920s Irish tenement dwellers and Hansberry’s 1950s African Americans of Chicago’s South Side experienced either religious or racial prejudice, socioeconomic dispossession, and institutionalized discrimination. Works such as Noel Ignatiev’s 1995 *How the Irish Became White* and Brian Dooley’s 1998 *Black and Green: The Fight for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland and Black America* explore this fraught association through the lenses of politics and socioeconomic issues.

A mytho-postcolonial lens is appropriate as both authors harness traditional mythologies to reveal the inadequacy and colonial basis of the national and societal mythologies of Irish nationalism and the American Dream. The application of postcolonial scholarship, though still heavily debated, to the Irish situation is well-documented. While postcolonial theory has been far less frequently applied to the ongoing plight of African Americans, I argue for its application as the slave trade and colonial racist ideologies essential for imperialist expansion continue to
reverberate throughout modern society in anti-Black systemic racism and institutional discrimination. This view also has growing scholarly precedent. As Ania Loomba states, the “legacies of colonialism” include “people geographically displaced by colonialism such as African-Americans or people of Asian or Caribbean origin in Britain as ‘postcolonial’ subjects although they live within metropolitan cultures” (32-33). As Loomba argues, postcolonialism must consider “people whose lives have been restructured by colonial rule,” which applies to the descendants of enslaved persons brought to the United States from Africa (36). Vilashini Cooppan argues for the application of postcolonial theory to the American and, specifically, the African American experience as slavery is a function of colonialism (5). Christine MacLeod acknowledges that postcolonial critics have “tended to steer well clear of African-American cultural politics” due to “questions of terminology” and the fact that “with neither a territorial identity nor the usual element of physical separation from the metropolitan centre, black America cannot strictly be said to fit any standard model of the colonial or postcolonial experience” (53). However, she also argues for the inclusion of African-Americans within postcolonial criticism due to their shared “historical experiences of rupture, exile, subjugation, social marginality, and linguistic and cultural dispossession” with other colonized groups (54-55). Tim Lake cautions against “the false reading of the Western imperialist impulse as distinct from Black chattel slavery in America and Jim and Jane Crowism,” and connects “the content of modern Western discourse, with its rhetoric of nation-state, constitution, law, and national sovereignty…to American manifestations of White supremacist ideology to European imperialist projects” (81, 86). Thus, in performing a comparative reading of the dispossessed groups in Juno and the Paycock and A Raisin in the Sun, a postcolonial lens reveals the locus of their oppression in British colonialism.
Imperialism led to some similarities between the oppression of poor Irish people and African Americans. British colonial ideology promulgated disparaging views of both the Irish and Africans and simultaneously justified the colonial occupation of Ireland and the African slave trade. 141 In the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, white British and Americans alike considered the Irish and African Americans racially inferior. Popular culture, including mainstream news, depicted both groups as bestial, savage, and simian. White employers viewed poor Irish immigrants and enslaved Africans as cheap, disposable sources of labor, especially in the 19th century, with some employers preferring to use Irish workers for more dangerous tasks rather than risk the life and price value of an enslaved person. 142 Additionally, both groups share common aspects of the ongoing postcolonial experience, especially artistic representation and identity formation. These continue to be key issues for Irish and African Americans and have inspired comparative scholarly analysis. For example, Maria Pramaggiore’s book Irish and African American Cinema: Identifying Others and Performing Identities, 1980-2000 examines characters in twenty-five Irish and African-American films created between 1980 and 2000, focusing on their portrayal of identity formation and performance and their relationship to dynamics of colonialism, race, gender, and class, issues relevant to Irish and African Americans. 143 Pramaggiore points to W.E.B. DuBois’s theory of double consciousness as

141 As Brian Dooley states, “in Victorian Britain, it was common to regard Africans and Irish people as subhuman.” Additionally, in 1862, the American magazine Punch “suggested that scientists looking for the missing link in evolution…between the ‘Gorilla and the Negro’ would find it in the Irish race” (Dooley 1). After Oliver Cromwell’s invasion of Ireland, Irish peasants during the 1850s were sent as indentured servants to work in the Caribbean with African slaves.

142 “American employers in the middle of the nineteenth century often had their pick of Irish or Black labour. In his study of the American slave system in the 1850s, Frederick Law Olmsted recorded that some preferred Irish workers, others Black. One Virginia landowner claimed Irish workers would perform over 50 per cent more work in a day than Black slaves; another tobacco farmer from the same state explained to Olmsted that he employed Irish labourers over Blacks not because they were more productive (‘he thought a negro could do twice as much work, in a day, as an Irishman’) but because the work could be dangerous, and ‘a negro’s life’ is too valuable to be risked at it. If a negro dies, it’s a considerable loss, you know,’ Olmsted was told” (Dooley 70).

143 She argues that in these films, “…character identification functions as a politically charged act that ruptures the boundary between self and other…as screen characters explore otherness, they explicitly question
depicted in these films, arguing that they show the perception of the characters’ self “as subject and object that is derived from experiences of racialization and internal colonization” (1-2).

Importantly, she does not claim to equate the histories of Irish and African Americans or their film cultures; rather, she considers these film traditions “in terms of their common metaphor for addressing the dilemma of postmodern but not-yet-postcolonial identities” (2). She points to the films’ embedding of postmodern debates about identity, especially the relinquishing of the notion of a permanent self or a fixed essence in the renouncing of “traditional ontological notions of national, gender, and racial identity” (3). In Pramaggiore’s analysis, then, we can find a helpful scholarly paradigm for approaching the literatures of these two cultures in a sensitively nuanced way that does not propose erase their differing circumstances.

While correspondences between African Americans and the Irish regarding postcolonial status, political movements, socioeconomic issues, and shared strategies underpin comparative literary analysis, such analysis should not equate their experiences. Even though colonized Irish, Irish-American immigrants, and African Americans endured some commensurate imperialist-based dispossession, such as lack of access to land ownership, racial discrimination, and social exclusion, the legacy of the slave trade, the forced migration of Africans to the Americas, and the virulent racism of many Irish Americans to secure their own place in white society creates considerable disparities between the groups. Although many Irish, especially Famine immigrants, came to the Americas due to British colonial oppression and indentured servitude, paradigms of identity founded upon exclusion and hierarchy. In contemporary African American and Irish films, these paradigms are associated with colonialist and racist power dynamics that are based on essentialist notions of identity. Yet the same essentialist frameworks are shown to underlie anti-colonial nationalisms that can mirror the colonizer-native binary and merely reverse its terms. Thus, in these films, acts of identification reflect a profound skepticism toward monolithic identities and emphasize the diversity that disrupts national, racial, and gender identities. They also reveal an interest in exploring Irishness and Blackness as performances rather than ontological imperatives” (1).
they did not experience the forced displacement and lifelong bondage of chattel slavery that systematically destroyed African culture, family structures, languages, etc. Additionally, while disenfranchised within American society, Irish immigrants were not systematically exploited to the extent of African enslaved persons and their descendants, Native Americans, Asians, or Hispanics. The rise of the American nation itself, especially its economic and territorial expansion, relied both upon slavery and the continued dispossession of indigenous populations, as did the previous imperial system upon which it was built, as Lisa Lowe describes in *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (23). Also, while they certainly bore the brunt of a virulent strand of nativist, anti-Catholic discrimination that also categorized them as an inferior race, Irish Americans widely engaged in racist activities and attitudes against African Americans to improve their own status while Black Americans remained oppressed by Jim Crow laws and institutionalized discrimination. Comparative postcolonial literary readings between Black and Irish authors should not in any way attempt to claim that, while many parallels do exist, these groups’ experiences mirror one another.

**Irish Nationalism and the American Dream: Derivative Imperialist Ideologies**

Sean O’Casey and Lorraine Hansberry, in their respective works, re-imagine traditional mythological figures to reveal the inability of Irish nationalism and the American Dream as

---

144 As Noel Ignatiev points out in *How the Irish Became White*, Irish Americans constructed themselves as white against African Americans by practicing racial discrimination, especially in their violence against free Blacks and support of slavery. One of the ways that the Irish entered “white” society was by adopting Anglo-American racist beliefs and practices. Even Daniel O’Connell, the Liberator himself, could not rally Irish Americans to the abolitionist cause, due to their regarding of freed Blacks as “economic rivals and competitors in the job market” and their view of abolition as a “Protestant cause” (Dooley 10, 12).

145 It has been suggested that the Irish-Americans’ struggle for sociopolitical respectability left them unsympathetic towards Black efforts for advancement. According to this theory, the Irish knew they had not been responsible for the slave trade, had nothing to feel guilty about in terms of the position of Blacks in American society, and believed that Blacks ought to raise themselves up, as the Irish had done, without any special favours. Some Black leaders appeared to advocate the Irish example for Blacks” (Dooley 71).
imposed imperialist ideologies that fail to liberate those most vulnerable. I refer to these ideologies as societal and national mythologies as they function as “master narratives” per Jan Ifversen’s definition within the Irish and American consciousness and represent a controlling idea that can, simultaneously, outline future goals, explain social phenomena, and function as benchmark against which to measure all individual and collective efforts (452). Thus, communities coalesce through common narratives that shape a shared identity. In *Juno and the Paycock* and *A Raisin in the Sun*, both Irish nationalism and the American Dream function as master narratives that replicate oppressive colonial hierarchies, especially in property ownership. While both Irish nationalism and the American Dream are touted as panacea for systemic oppressions, they are largely bourgeois, middle-class, capitalist phenomena that fail to deliver upon improved circumstances for all citizens due to their origin in imperialist hegemonies, such as patriarchy, socioeconomic discrimination, and racism.

O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock* engages with the master narrative of Irish nationalism in progress as the play depicts poor tenant dwellers in the aftermath of the 1919-1921 Irish War of Independence and in the throes of the following 1921-1922 Irish Civil War. The cultural nationalism of the Irish Literary Revival, largely embodied in the works of W.B. Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory and the Abbey Theatre, harnessed ancient Irish mythology, created nostalgia for pre-colonial Gaelic culture, and propelled Irish efforts for Home Rule and an independent nation. At this point, according to Declan Kiberd, “two kinds of freedom were available to the Irish: the return to a past, pre-colonial Gaelic identity, still yearning for expression if long-denied, or the reconstruction of a national identity, beginning from first principles all over again” (Kiberd 286). However, as David Lloyd argues in *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment*, Irish anti-colonial nationalism was largely predicated on European imperial
models and represented a “backward movement of grafting upon a non-existent, purely Gaelic past (45). In fact, the imperialist concept of the singular independent nation itself was alien to ancient Irish society (and many other indigenous societies), which consisted of local kingdoms. The notion of Ireland as a separate and cohesive entity emerged in nineteenth and twentieth century nationalist ideology, based upon a Mother Ireland figure disempowered by British colonialism. This illustrates Colin Graham’s contention that “the very idea of nationality which was used by decolonizing peoples to coalesce themselves into a coherent political force was itself transferred to the colonies by imperialist ideology” as “imperialism justified itself by an ideology of hegemonic nationalism” (30). Additionally, as discussed in previous chapters, British imperialism restructured the Irish economy and society through capitalism and patriarchy, especially by imposing materialist land ownership values to reinscribe pre-colonial communal land ownership practices. Thus, while postcolonial Ireland had a choice to create a society that undid imperialist restructuring, as Declan Kiberd states, nationalism reflects a “covert desire to mimic the extirpated power while disowning its own influence” (300).

In *Juno and the Paycock*, the newly independent Irish state simply reinforces imposed imperial standards and the existing social hierarchy through exacerbating the plight of the urban poor, caught in the crossfires of the Irish Civil War. In the play, Irish nationalism has, as Fanon points out, transferred the benefits accorded to the ruling colonial class to the “newly landed and monied bourgeois” who “refuses to take risks for the economy” and liberate those “that have already been excluded from the nationalist movement” (155). In decolonizing, then, Declan Kiberd remarks that the Ireland “played at building a not-England, but now they were playing at being not-Irish” in their embrace of imperial standards (289). By centering the concept of the nation, rather than the liberation of all people, Irish nationalism adopted imposed imperial
ideology that also upheld the sanctity of the nation to justify its “duty to civilize” (Graham 30). Thus, as an avowed socialist and frequent participant in workers’ movements, O’Casey used *Juno and the Paycock* to reveal nationalism as an imposed bourgeois ideology that fails the people by idealizing the nation and does not reform the economy or society. In his article “Saving O’Casey from the ‘Stage Irishman’” on the 1988 Gate Theatre production of *Juno*, James W. Flannery points out that O’Casey is a “social realist” who “stressed the impact of unemployment, poverty, and social deprivation on the characters” (122). Additionally, Flannery interviewed director Joe Dowling, who encapsulates the failure of the postcolonial Irish nation to enact systemic reform in his comment that “You can have revolutions and new governments. But unless you change the economic order of things you change nothing” (122). O’Casey especially targets bourgeois property ownership; as Peter Thompson states in a review of the 1986 Gate Theatre production of *Juno*, his plays “are tragedies which discuss the ways in which ordinary people of no property are caught up in events over which their propertyless condition allows them no control (134). In O’Casey’s works, nationalist revolution did not correct the

---

146 O’Casey’s rejection of nationalism on the basis that it does not enact sufficient societal reform is a recurrent theme of literary criticism, contemporaneous reviews of his play’s productions, and related programs and materials. Mary Trotter states that O’Casey’s tenement setting “expose[s] the playwright’s opinion of the rift between the ideals of nationalism and the pragmatics of need” (76). According to Christopher Murray, “Whereas Yeats saw the role of the dramatist, in the period before 1922, as a celebrator from an aristocratic point of view of heroic endeavor and creator of opposition to materialism, O’Casey saw the role of the dramatist from a popular point of view as a demythologizer, satirist and exposer of ideology as delusory. In that sense O’Casey refounded the modern Irish drama, which has continued, through Brendan Behan, Brian Friel, Tom Murphy and others, to provide a critique of official ideology” (Murray 21). Diane Stubbings writes that “the revolution [O’Casey] sought was not born of violence but through a restructuring of the social order that would be effected by the reconstitution of the symbolic” (120). In a review of a 1997 Abbey Theatre production of *Juno and the Paycock*, Basil Miller writes: “Sean O’Casey had no time for nationalism; it was a middle-class outlook with no percentage in it for the urban working class. He resigned from his position as secretary of the Irish Citizen Army for this reason, opposing James Connolly’s policy of taking his independent, working class militia into what O’Casey saw as an unholy alliance with the bourgeois nationalists of the IRB and Sinn Fein” (1). A program note for the 1980 Abbey Theatre production of *Juno and the Paycock* reproduced Jack Lindsay’s 1966 comment that O’Casey “bitterly criticized the middle-class take-over of the [nationalist] movement (9). Peter Thompson, in his review for the 1986 Gate Theatre production of *Juno*, credits O’Casey with “extreme skepticism where the purely nationalistic interpretation of Irish freedom is concerned” and states that “his three early plays represent as strong an indictment as there has ever been made of the kind of conservative nationalism which triumphed in Ireland in 1921” (134).
dispossession of the urban poor; rather, it simply reinforced the imperial hierarchy that
dispossessed them in the first place.

The American Dream, along with its corresponding national and societal myths of
American exceptionalism and the self-made man, remains the dominant master narrative in the
American psyche\textsuperscript{147}. First coined in James Truslow Adams’s 1931 book \textit{The Epic of America},
the American Dream’s emphasis upon a “land of opportunity” in which everyone can pull
themselves up “by their bootstraps” and enjoy a life of freedom and potential remains a beacon
of hope for countless individuals (Jay Gatsby’s reaching out towards the green light across the
water comes to mind here). Conflated with an Anglo-Protestant notion of individualism and
capitalist work ethic, this mythology has taken on a quasi-religious significance\textsuperscript{148}. Additionally,
the supposedly “American” nature of the myth of the self-made man belies its roots in imperialist
ideology. As numerous postcolonial theorists such as Franz Fanon, Partha Chatterjee, and Dipesh
Chakrabarty have pointed out, a postcolonial society rejects the imperial power by replicating its

\textsuperscript{147} In the introduction to the 2009 collection \textit{The American Dream}, Harold Bloom states: “Like so many
potent social myths, the American Dream is devoid of clear meanings, whether in journalistic accounts or in
academic analyses. The major American writers who have engaged the dream – Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, Mark
Twain, Henry James, Willa Cather, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Ernest Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald, Hart Crane
– have been aware of this haziness and of attendant ironies. And yet they have affirmed, however ambivalently, that
it must be possible to have a nation in which all of us are free to develop our singularities into health, prosperity, and
some measure of happiness in self-development and personal achievement” (Bloom xv).

\textsuperscript{148} In “The American Dreams: A Brief Historical Outline,” Ricardo Miguez states that the American
Dream represents a national (quasi-official) faith in the US superiority…which overlaps established religious
discourses: the so-called ‘American Creed,’ which Americans are taught to respect as their most important civic
duty since they are very young. It has become the country’s national nondenominational faith” (Miguez 5).
According to Miguez, its components are: Components of the American Creed: “liberty, egalitarianism (in its
American definition: meaning equality of opportunity or respect, not of result), individualism, populism, and laissez-
faire” (Miguez 18). This “American Creed” has simultaneously been deployed as an inspirational tale and a
barometer; one’s success at achieving this promise is solely dependent on effort. “The American Creed is supported
by a very interesting narrative which skillfully obscures historical wrongdoings and stresses (sometimes artificially)
American achievements at home and abroad. At the same time such narrative promotes, it also blurs the distinction
between collective and individual achievements: it is, after all, the Land of Opportunity. A Land grounded on
material wealth and private entrepreneurship. If one succeeds, s/he owes it to the country, but if s/he fails, it is
his/her fault. It is the public culture of accomplished winners versus laiedback losers. The Promised Land, the Garden
of Eden, the American Creed, as far as religious metaphors may be found in them, are the American Dream. It
represents the unlikely accomplishment of all collective and individual enterprises in a single society” (Miguez 5).
same standards. In the case of the United States, the aggressive individualism encapsulated in the myth of the self-made man, the myth of American exceptionalism, and the American Dream, while “used to contrast the US to European societies with rigidly stratified social hierarchies, and to support the claim that the American economic system leads to a higher standard of living in general as well as to a higher degree of individual agency and economic opportunity,” simply recreated the same societal stratification in its de facto upholding of social hierarchies based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, immigration status, sexuality, etc (Heike 367). The myth of the America Dream assumes a color-blind meritocracy, when it is a creation of a white patriarchal class-based society, described by Claudia Cristina Mendes Giesel as “a utopia that only serves to alienate and oppress the African American community in the United States” and “full of white ideology” (86). The “land of opportunity” is also built upon imperialist systems and colonial hegemonies of chattel slavery and its legacy, ongoing settler colonialism, and gender discrimination, further maintaining societal hierarchies.

In particular, the construction of “The American Dream” has been largely tied into property ownership, material acquisition, and social respectability, which has remained unattainable for African Americans. In hopes of achieving middle-class security and social mobility, African Americans developed their own societal structures, such as banks and mortgages, to have affordable access to property without the barriers at white male elite-controlled banks. In The Souls of Black Folks, W.E.B. DuBois identifies this disconnect with the American Dream as a double consciousness, resulting in an unequal experience of African American life. Also, considerable barriers to land and property ownership for African Americans were bolstered by the legal precedents of slavery, which failed to recognize the rights of African Americans of ownership for their own person, leading African Americans into unfair systems of
sharecropping and contingent tenancy once slavery was abolished. Toward the end of the
nineteenth century, former Confederate states passed laws restricting voter registration,
establishing poll taxes, and instituting strict residency and record keeping laws which
disenfranchised the Black vote. In turn, these states passed discriminatory laws that continued to
depth inequality, such as Jim Crow laws. Land and property ownership discrimination has
blocked African Americans from obtaining mortgages, experiencing housing security, and
building generational wealth (Hanks et al). Such issues also tie in with a lack of economic and
educational opportunities. These experiences are embodied in the Younger family dramatized in
Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*. These characters seek the American Dream of middle-
class social mobility and security through land and property ownership, facing seemingly
insurmountable racial obstacles.

**Literary Similarities between *Juno and the Paycock* and *A Raisin in the Sun***

The numerous structural, character-driven, thematic, and author-based similarities
between the two plays, widely acknowledged in contemporaneous reviews of and commentaries
on *Raisin*[^149], remain underexplored in scholarly literature. *Juno and the Paycock* depicts the

[^149]: On Hansberry’s 1959 production, Henry T. Murdock of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* states, “In listening
to some of Miss Hansberry’s poignant and bitter lines, one hears overtones of a Sean O’Casey’s ‘Juno and the
Paycock.’” In a 1959 clipping from the *New York Times* Mailbag, A. Doyle writes “I finally saw *Raisin in the Sun*,
and it is so clear to me – now – that, although it finally departs from the great man’s spirit, the Lorraine Hansberry
play ‘owes’ so much to Sean O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock* that it should at least say it was ‘suggested’ by the
latter…I remember when *The Skin of Our Teeth* appeared, Wilder was clobbered by James Joyce fans for ‘owing’
much less to Joyce than Miss Hansberry apparently does to O’Casey – a reading of both plays will reveal even more
similarities (the Junoesque mother, and her God-fearing, for instance).” Personal correspondence from Richard Fein
to Lorraine Hansberry dated June 8th, 1959 exclaims: “My God, these are Negroes, human beings, we are seeing, not
figments of the white man’s need to be entertained, to be mystified, to be excited…Negroes like Jews and Italians,
this was new, a mark in American literary history, and finally, maybe, we could see these people as we look at
O’Neill’s Irish and Chekhov’s Russians. Yes, maybe for this, one could get choked up.” In his 1979 article “Bench
Marks,” John Donohue remarked that “What O’Casey had done for the Dublin poor could be done, Lorraine
Hansberry sensed, for the Blacks of the South side…[when] Miss Hansberry was in New Haven for the tryout of ‘A
Raisin in the Sun…’ an Irish-born chambermaid in the old Hotel Taft told Lorraine that ‘Raisin reminded her of the
best Irish writers’ (31). In a 1988 article for the *Daily News* by Nancy Mills, Robert Nemiroff, Lorraine Hansberry’s
former husband, remarks that “Until recently, Lorraine has been pigeonholed as a Black writer. But people are
beginning now to recognize the size of her work and her vision. ‘A Raisin in the Sun’ is done all over the world.
Last summer I got a batch of clippings from Ireland, and one review noted how much the play had to say about the
tragedy of the Boyles, a poor family living in the Dublin tenements. Johnny Boyle, the son of Juno and “Captain” Jack Boyle, suffers mentally and physically from his participation in the Easter Rising and the Irish Civil War. “Captain” Boyle refuses to work, parading around the neighborhood like a “paycock,” forcing his wife to support the family emotionally and financially. After a legal wording error in a cousin’s will fools Boyle into believing he has inherited money, his profligate spending puts family in deep debt. His wife Juno and daughter Mary leave him, following the murder of his son Johnny by Civil War combatants, and he is left alone, with only his parasitic drinking buddy, Joxer Daley. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry depicts the struggles of a poor Black family living in the South Side of Chicago who tries to improve its lives by moving to a white suburb, only to face racist attempts by white neighbors to block this move. Family patriarch Walter’s singular obsession with the American Dream and material accumulation alienates his family, who try to discourage him from spending his father’s inheritance money on a liquor store scheme. As in *Juno and the Paycock*, the inheritance money vanishes, in this case due to Walter’s deceptive business partner (another bad influence “sidekick” figure like Juno’s Joxer). Like *Juno and the Paycock’s* case for the disenfranchised Irish underclass, Hansberry’s *Raisin* points to the inadequacy of social mythologies, particularly the American Dream, to liberate the oppressed African American community when the conditions facilitating their subjugation have not been mitigated.

O’Casey’s plays reveal ongoing imperialist influences in postcolonial Ireland and criticizing the newly liberated Irish for internalizing colonial practices and values. O’Casey (1880-1964), a laborer since childhood, taught himself to read and write at thirteen and later blossomed into a dramatist under Yeats’s encouragement to write what O’Casey knew directly:

---

Irish people” (30). An undated *Boston Herald* clipping on performances of *A Raisin in the Sun* at the Wilbur Theater claims that *Raisin* “has something of the quality of Sean O’Casey’s tenement dramas.”
tenement life in the city, the life of the subaltern, and those participating in factional warfare leading to Ireland’s independence. In setting *Juno and the Paycock* and other plays amid the Irish Civil War and showing the devastating effects of the hostilities upon a tenant home and family, O’Casey addresses Irish nationalism’s failure to manifest concrete improvement in the circumstances of Ireland’s poorest citizens. Like Sean O’Casey, Hansberry engaged her life experiences in her drama. She was a social and politically-committed African American writer connected to a network of artists and activists engaged in numerous causes such as workers’ rights, Black nationalism, and women’s rights. She also draws upon her own family’s experience of enduring violent white supremacist challenges to their relocation to the suburbs. In defiance of the current law, Hansberry’s father moved the family into an all-white neighborhood in 1938 (Bower 89). In a letter to the editor of the New York Times regarding African American civil disobedience, Hansberry states that her father’s attitude “was typical of a generation of Negroes who believed that the ‘American way’ could be successfully made to work to democratize the United States” and led his family to “occupy the disputed property in a hellishly hostile ‘white neighborhood’ in which, literally, howling mobs surrounded [their] house. In this letter, she also quotes Langston Hughes’s famous poem “A Dream Deferred,” from which her play takes his title, and points the editor’s attention to the last line: “Or does it explode?”

Both O’Casey and Hansberry stage their plays in cramped inner-city conditions, using the tenement dwellings as the material outcomes of ongoing colonial ideologies and hegemonies. *Juno and the Paycock* takes place in the Dublin tenements during the 1922-1923 Irish Civil War, and *A Raisin in the Sun* is set in the South Side of Chicago slums after World War II, presumably in the 1950s Jim Crow era. Both locations were notorious for their crowded, unsanitary
conditions, and both housed members from the lowest societal strata, namely, poor Irish Catholics under colonial rule, caught in the crossfire of a deadly Civil War that turned their streets into shooting galleries, and African Americans from Southern farms searching for a better future in the North still displaced by institutionalized racism and housing discrimination. Both O’Casey and Hansberry deploy the urban tenement setting to depict suffering families ensnared in a hopeless cycle of poverty, discrimination, disease, and lack of socioeconomic advancement. The realist settings present the middle-class aspirations of their dwellers and focus on the disempowered by keeping the actual property owners off stage; only the perpetual tenants occupy the audience’s attention. This setting also includes the social milieu at their respective times; Juno shows the suffering of ordinary people in a newly independent Ireland in the deadly throes of national determination after the end of British rule, and Raisin shows African Americans in a pre-Civil Rights era struggling to achieve a level of financial security and dignity in the face of segregation and racial discrimination.

The plays also share the plot device of the inheritance with its specious promise of class mobility. The inheritance leads to poor decisions and obsessive behavior from the male heads of household in both plays. In Juno, the Boyle family anticipates a sizeable inheritance from a

---

150 The Dublin tenements were a cruel reminder of imperialist class-based inequality in Ireland. According to Kevin Kearns, the abandoned aristocratic dwellings of Georgian Dublin had declined from “elegant abodes of the aristocracy to ‘human piggeries,’” creating a “paradoxical scene” in which “impoverished families were huddled together thick as cockroaches amidst bestial squalor in the same ornate chambers where upper-crust society had once dressed in silken finery, dined lavishly, and danced the minuet in carefree manner” (4). Kearns describes “commonly hellish” living conditions that squashed sometimes a hundred people in one house and fifteen or more family members in one room, creating “a hard world of hunger, congestion, illness, disease, unemployment, lack of clothing, heavy drinking, abusive husbands, evictions, fear of landlords, fear of the future itself” (4). Like O’Casey, Hansberry’s early life experiences took place in this crowded, dangerous setting. According to Imani Perry, the Black South Side residents, including the Hansberrys, “were squished into far too small a terrain,” and “the South Side was bursting at the seams.” While Hansberry and her family enjoyed some middle class success, they, too, “were shuttered into the ghetto” as “the Great Depression had cast an already poor community into desperation…the Hansberrys were knitted within a fabric of migrants [from the South]…many of the adults worked in the stockyards of the smoky industrial city that was once a center of global exchange and a site of intense segregation…the Black migrants from Southern farms traded terror and cotton fields for crowded units with hallway toilets and a slightly greater taste of freedom” (10).
cousin; after learning of the incoming money, “Captain” Boyle commences buying expensive décor, furnishings, clothing, and luxury items on credit, including an ostentatious gramophone. Once the Boyles have spent most of their inheritance on credit, they learn that due to a legal wording error, they will likely never see a penny, and their new acquisitions are repossessed. In *Raisin*, Walter loses his father’s insurance money in a failed liquor store investment scheme. In doing so, he also forfeits his sister Beneatha’s medical school fund. The failed promise of the inheritance in both plays highlights the materialist foundation of class respectability and social mobility for those who remain oppressed under colonialism and racial discrimination.

Both authors also incorporate a family as the central focus of their plays; the families themselves function as the protagonists. While one could argue that Juno Boyle is the protagonist of her eponymous play, the dominance of the other Boyle family members aligns *Juno’s* character focus with that of *Raisin*, whose lack of a central character in the traditional sense was Hansberry’s criticism of her own play.^{151} Within the dramatic structures that center the family, both *Juno* and *Raisin* contain strikingly similar individual characters. Both *Juno* and *Raisin*, in a feminist postcolonial style, contemplate the female heads of the household within their patriarchal societies. As Peter L. Hays states in the sole critical (and brief) comparative analysis between these plays, “in both works, strong women support their families psychologically and monetarily” in the absence of a traditional patriarchal structure with a male provider. Both O’Casey’s *Juno* and Hansberry’s *Mother Younger* show tremendous strength and survival instincts rooted in shared societal oppression noted by Hansberry herself.^{152} The mythical

---

^{151} Hansberry felt that the lack of a central character or protagonist was a weakness, but “the dual protagonists and the conflict centered on their differing ways of looking at the world are what give the play dramatic tension as well as intellectual and emotional appeal.

^{152} In her radio interview with Studs Terkel, Hansberry states, “There’s a relationship between Mother Younger in this play and Juno which is very strong and obvious. I think there’s always a relationship, perhaps. I don’t know that much about Irish history but there was probably a necessity why, among oppressed peoples, the
qualities of these characters, which will be discussed later in this chapter, blend with their realist qualities that connect them to a specific time, place, and societal group (Juno to the urban Irish poor, Lena Younger to the African American working class).

The counterparts to the hard-working Juno and Younger women are their feckless husbands, “Captain” Jack Boyle and Walter Younger. The Captain prefers to idle away his time drinking and reliving the “glory days” of his sole marine voyage, which he has expanded into a self-deluding mythology with the faux title of “Captain,” rather than pursue any form of employment. When neighbors present Boyle with job opportunities, mysterious leg pains magically handicap him. While Walter Younger works as a chauffeur and dreams of a better life (which will also be explored later in this chapter), his foolish decisions and pompous performance of his manhood leave his family frustrated and destitute. Both men also complain about their wives and mothers (in Walter’s case), namely bemoaning their emasculation and supposed limitation by these women. Additionally, both “Captain” Boyle and Walter associate with freeloading parasites who further entrap them in their self-destructive, family-harming behaviors. Boyle sneaks around drinking with Joxer, who indulges his illusions of grandeur, avoiding both work and his wife Juno’s wrath. In a misguided attempt to become a man of “substance” and earn wealth to which he feels entitled, Walter allows his friend Willy Harris to convince him to invest $6,500, part of his father’s life insurance policy, into a far-fetched liquor store investment plan, even though part of the insurance money was earmarked for Beneatha’s schooling. Willy abruptly disappears with the money, squandering most of the inheritance.

Finally, both plays contain outspoken, thoughtful young female characters who are engaged in contemporaneous social movements. In A Raisin in the Sun, Beneatha Younger

---

mother will assume a certain kind of role.” Later in the interview, Hansberry also notes that “women, period, are oppressed in society and if you’ve got an oppressed group they’re twice oppressed.”
advocates for women’s and African American rights, and Juno and the Paycock’s Mary participates in the socialist and workers’ rights movements. Both women openly challenge the patriarchal mores of the time. Beneatha seeks education as a medical doctor rather than a more commonly accepted woman’s job as a nurse. Mary strives to become a leader within the male-dominated workers’ rights movement by participating in strikes and educating her community.

**Mythical Device: Kathleen ni Houlihan and Nationalism in Juno and the Paycock**

By intertwining Irish nationalism and the suffering of dispossessed urban tenant dwellers, O’Casey’s Juno and the Paycock and the rest of his “Dublin Trilogy,” which shared similar themes, characters, and settings, recalls the sacrificial nationalism called for by the Old Woman in Yeats and Gregory’s Kathleen ni Houlihan. While Kathleen ni Houlihan herself does not appear, coded language regarding the need to give all for one’s country and that one can never do enough for Ireland pervades Juno, referencing the notion of sacrificial martyrdom for the nation personified as female. The specter of Kathleen ni Houlihan looms large throughout the play in its ever-present indictment of nationalism.

In keeping with my reading of the Old Woman in the previous chapter as inciting a revolution that rejects bourgeois material standards, I argue that the Old Woman haunts O’Casey’s play as both conscience and commentary on a failed revolution in progress. While, as discussed in the previous chapter, Marina Carr’s By the Bog of Cats… indicts the Irish neocolonial state several decades after independence, O’Casey’s Juno and the Paycock depicts, unfolding in real time, the inability of independence’s to liberate Ireland’s most vulnerable citizens. In O’Casey’s Dublin, the tenant dwellers serve as cannon fodder for the Republican Die Hards and the Free Staters in their squabbles over the Anglo-Irish treaty. In O’Casey’s plays, the tragedy of the Irish Civil War is that independence and its deadly aftermath do not free suffering
communities; rather, the tenant dwellers struggle to avoid eviction, secure fair pay and working conditions (evidenced by the striking Mary), and protect themselves from their own neighbors, who may at any time inform on them to either side of combatants. Additionally, as Ronan McDonald states, O’Casey “debunks the mythology of Mother Ireland, who sends her sons out to die for the recovery of her four green fields, replacing it with images of real suffering mothers, of families torn apart by men drunk on ineffable dreams of political utopia and doggedly sober on a doctrine of arid, inflexible political principles” (137). For the Civil War fighters, Kathleen ni Houlihan is “the greater lover, the greater mother,” but, through the destruction becomes “the substitution of an illusory principle for a human reality” in ignoring the plight of the urban poor in the crossfires (Durbach 19). O’Casey, rather, supports the anti-materialist revolution underlying the Kathleen ni Houlihan figure in Yeats and Gregory’s play.

In light of its haunting by the dissident sovereignty figure, O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock*, set in a neighborhood where pro- and anti-Free State fighters show no regard for those caught in the crossfire, places nationalism itself on the firing squad. Rather than create celebratory odes to the heroes of the rebellion, O’Casey demonstrates that nationalism replicates the same injustices as under British colonialism, highlighting its false promises and the ruined lives in its wake. This echoes the theories of major postcolonial critics such as Franz Fanon, who criticizes nationalist parties for imitating the methods of their imperial oppressors in ignoring the poverty-stricken masses in favor of city-dwelling, educated colonial elites and failing to change the oppressive capitalist systems that reinforce the repression of a class-based society (111). In *Inventing Ireland*, Declan Kiberd identifies O’Casey as “a working-class realist who focused not on the deeds of warriors but on the pangs of the poor” who “found their streets invaded by rival armies who used them as shooting galleries for weeks on end” (Kiberd 218). Kiberd also points
out O’Casey’s reminders to nationalist leader James Connolly that without reforming capitalist wealth distribution, the new Irish government would “simply be exchanging one set of exploiters for another” (219). According to Kiberd, Juno and the Paycock’s characters’ frequent bemoaning of the rebellion’s failure to change their circumstances reveals Irish nationalism as an oppressive ideology in its inability to exact concrete social changes (218-219). Kiberd identifies “all the nervous joking by characters about money-lending and evictions” as “rooted in the social realities of the time” as nearly one-third of Dublin tenement dwellers were evicted annually for failure to pay rent (219). The rebellion and civil war had taken a huge toll on the Irish people, thus rendering them ill-prepared to re-imagine a new society. As Kiberd states, “The people were so exhausted by the expenditure of energy in dislodging the occupier that they seemed to have little left with which to reimagine their condition; and the coarsening effects of all uprisings on those caught up in them took an inevitable toll as well” (296). In O’Casey, Irish nationalism’s emphasis on the independent nation and its demand of sacrifices for Ireland does not liberate the poor but turns their neighborhoods into shooting galleries and leaves them in the crossfire.

Irish nationalism’s failures ensnare multiple characters in Juno and the Paycock. Johnny Boyle, a participant in both the Easter Rising and the Irish Civil War, tragically embodies nationalism’s drawbacks. The play’s earliest moments establish Johnny as a wounded, traumatized recluse who refuses to sleep too many nights in one household and reacts emotionally to seemingly innocuous situations, such as Juno offering him a cup of tea. He cannot move about freely without significant hardship, and he suffers from visions of dead comrades. Juno Boyle, when introducing her son to Mary’s suitor, labor leader Mr. Bentham, states: “…he’s after goin’ through the mill. He was only a chiselur of a Boy Scout in Easter Week when he got hit in the hip; and his arm was blew off in the fight in O’Connell Street…None can
deny he done his bit for Irelan’, if that’s goin’ to do him any good” (O’Casey 31). Juno’s comment here is telling; while she toes the “party line” that Johnny made appropriate sacrifices for his country in the Easter Rising, she doubts that his participation has benefited him due to the lack of financial support for him as a disabled veteran. Sacrifice for Ireland, as expressed in *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, also underlines a later scene when an army man comes to the Boyle house looking for Johnny to attend a meeting to investigate the death of a neighbor, Robbie Tancred. Johnny states that he knows nothing about Tancred and passionately implores: “I won’t go! Haven’t I done enough for Ireland! I’ve lost me arm, an’ me hip’s desthroyed so that I’ll never be able to walk right agen! Good God, haven’t I done enough for Ireland?” (O’Casey 59). The army man retorts: “Boyle, no man can do enough for Ireland” (O’Casey 59). This comment belies a deep, tragic irony as the army man asks the impossible while stating that even this sacrifice will never suffice. Later, the audience learns that Johnny provided the information leading to Robbie Tancred’s death (O’Casey never reveals his exact motivation), soldiers enter the Boyle home, take Johnny away, and execute him. Johnny demonstrates the bodily totality of nationalism; although he is both mentally and physically crippled and eventually loses his life to the conflict, it is still implicated that even this is not sufficient. He receives no support, no understanding from his comrades and the surrounding community, only further demands.

Mrs. Tancred, mother of the slain Robbie Tancred, especially embodies nationalism’s inability to improve the lives of the most vulnerable. In a telling exchange with a neighbor about the progress of the Civil War raging about them, Mrs. Tancred expresses its failures.

First Neighbour: It’s a sad journey we’re goin’ on, but God’s good, and the Republicans won’t be always down.
Mrs. Tancred: Ah, what good is that to me now? Whether they’re up or down – it won’t bring me darlin’ boy from the grave.

Mrs. Boyle: Come in an’ have a hot cup o’tay, Mrs. Tancred, before you go.

Mrs. Tancred: Ah, I can take nothin’ now, Mrs. Boyle – I won’t be long afther him.

First Neighbour: Still an’ all, he died a noble death, an’ we’ll bury him like a king.

Mrs. Tancred: An’ I’ll go on livin’ like a pauper. Ah, what’s the pains I suffered bringin’ him into the word to carry him to his cradle, to the pains I’m sufferin’ now, carryin’ him out o’the world to bring him to his grave! (O’Casey 52-53).

Here, the neighbor spouts empty platitudes and scripted comments about the war, especially his designation of Robbie’s death as “noble” and meriting a “king’s” burial. Mrs. Tancred points out that she will still be as poor as she was before Robbie’s death, and that no matter the war’s outcome, she has still lost her beloved son. The war has denied her the core values of family relationships and basic means of living. Here, we see O’Casey’s argument that nationalist “liberation” nonetheless disenfranchises the poor, despite their military contributions. Robbie’s value as a “die-hard” is ultimately diminished as his death for the total independence of Ireland, as the audience would well know, would be in vain. The mythology of nationalism, however, expressed by the neighbor in the exchange with Mrs. Tancred, convinces the disadvantaged that sacrificing oneself based on unfailing belief in one’s country is noble. As Errol Durbach states, “the spurious illusion of the heroic death is grimly balanced against the real horror of the old mother’s predicament” (19).

O’Casey also harnesses place and space to depict nationalism’s failure. While this dissertation has dealt with rural land and property ownership dispossession thus far, it is important to consider the city in this context. First, while nationalism focused its attentions upon
the rural Irish peasantry, whom they felt represented an “authentic” anti-imperialist Irish way of being, most nationalists were city-dwelling, educated, upper-middle class, and, as such, benefited from both colonial and post-colonial economic systems enforcing their wealth and social status. Additionally, we must consider the urban environment’s depiction property ownership dispossession. As previously discussed, the Dublin slums crammed people into deteriorating hovels, presenting physical dangers like building collapse, fire, flooding, etc., and public health hazards from overcrowding, poor diet, and lack of sanitation that led to high rates of disease and “the highest infant mortality level and general death rate of any city in the United Kingdom” by the turn of the 20th century (Kearns 12). Like their rural counterparts, whose hardships were especially exacerbated during the Great Hunger, the urban poor also suffered at the mercy of “profiteering landlords…who lorded over the poor like tyrants” (Kearns 10).

The city setting thus provides a microscope into nationalism’s failings when considering property ownership dispossession. In his article “Sean O’Casey’s Dublin Trilogy and the ‘Promise’ of Metropolitan Modernity,” Robert Brazeau contends that “history unfolds within space” and that O’Casey “chooses to concentrate his discussion on urbanism and family, on property and accumulation” (31). As the Civil War rages on around them, the only hope for the Boyle family seems to be a promised inheritance, like the Gillane family in *Kathleen ni Houlihan*

---

153 According to Declan Kiberd, this was emblematic of nationalism’s limitations as a return to an “authentic” pre-colonial Irish identity: “The problem with the ‘return to the source’ model was clear enough: there was very little source left, just a scattered Irish-speaking community in the most westerly regions. Nor were members of that community especially impressed by the lure of nationalism” (Kiberd 286).

154 Kearns also states that the landlords “…held the power to set rates, define occupancy terms, and evict tenants. Fear of the landlords griped many tenement dwellers throughout their lives…in 1899 there were about three hundred evictions granted every week in the police courts and countless more unrecorded, illegal evictions. Manipulative landlords also carried out what was termed ‘rent slavery’ by coercing the poorest tenants into cleaning yards and toilets, collecting rents, and performing other unpleasant tasks for them…Landlords were notorious not only for their rack-renting practices but also blatant neglect of basic maintenance and repairs of their properties. Leaking roofs, clogged toilets, broken water taps, and dangerous stairways were ignored. Tenants were reluctant to complain about conditions and request repairs for fear of having their rent raised” (Kearns 10).
and Carthage Kilbride in *By the Bog of Cats*. However, nationalism’s inability to stabilize the city dwellers’ lives is played out in the urban space itself. The Boyle home provides no peace or privacy from the raging civil war or societal pressures. Brazeau observes the “completely porous environment” of the tenement family home with its endless parade of visitors and invaders, stating that “the entire play is organized around the chaotic and sometimes murderous porosity of this environment which prevents it…from ever stabilizing into a known and knowable place” (33). Brazeau also observes the subjective nature of property accumulation in which Captain Boyle begins to travel differently in the city due to his newfound wealth, which ultimately presents itself to be illusory” (35). Boyle pompously describes his new situation as “a great responsibility” as he parades about his neighborhood, glad-handing like a politician (O’Casey 36). Brazeau explains that “for O’Casey, the spatial is never figured as anything but provisional, as prone to re-inscription by the forces of change, even violent change” as being raised in colonial Ireland impressed upon Casey the idea “that space is, first and foremost, the scene of disruption and conflict, and it remains in his plays a constant that the spatial is figured as dystopic” (35). In the city setting, there cannot be security as nationalist and colonial forces alternately inscribe networks of conflict that ensnare residents and exacerbate existing disadvantages. Thus, O’Casey engages the precarious nature of space within *Juno and the Paycock* to explore the ultimate futility of the pursuit of social and material stability within a capitalist, patriarchal, and imperialist system, even through the mythos of nationalism, which does not fundamentally change the oppression of the dispossessed.

*A Raisin in the Sun* also explores the limits of nationalism. Hansberry investigates nationalism through Beneatha Younger’s relationship with the Nigerian Joseph Asagai, who educates her on traditional Nigerian culture and discusses European colonialism in Africa. Even
though Hansberry herself openly supported anticolonial activities in Africa, she was also an
avowed socialist who recognized the drawbacks of nationalist ideology in its failure to provide
collective liberation and totalizing economic reform. Fanon Che Wilkins notes that, in what he
terms Hansberry’s “critical engagement with African nationalist independence movements” and
a “sober and penetrating engagement with the rise of Hansberry anticipated both “the
socioeconomic political challenges that engulfed the third World” and “neocolonialism” (193-
194). While Beneatha shares his anti-imperial convictions, she questions independence alone as a
method of societal reform. In a discussion on Nigerian independence, Beneatha quips:

“You with all your talk and dreams about Africa! You still think you can patch up the
world. Cure the Great Sore of Colonialism – (Loftily, mocking it) with the Penicillin of
Independence…Independence and then what? What about all the crooks and thieves and
just plain idiots who will come into power and steal and plunder the same as before –
only now they will be Black and do it in the name of the new Independence – WHAT
ABOUT THEM?!” (Hansberry 135).

While Asagai continues to promote independence, Beneatha’s suspicions align with
Fanon’s warnings against a “national bourgeois” who “steps into the shoes of the former
European settlement after the colonizer’s departure” (155). This newly independent middle class
had despised the “settler elite” but wished to take their place, including their status and

155 “In a 1959 television interview with CBS correspondent Mike Wallace, the writer and activist Lorraine
Hansberry declared her complete political solidarity with the upsurge of anticolonial activity in Africa, Asia, and the
larger Third World. With spirited optimism, Hansberry told Wallace that she could not recall a more important
period in the history of the twentieth century that was filled with as much hope and promise for oppressed people
around the world. Hansberry affirmed her political kinship with anticolonial insurgency by arguing that the sweep of
national independence movements globally was inextricably linked to the political initiatives of black Americans
engaged in similar, and sometimes overlapping, struggles for freedom, full citizenship, and self-determination.
During the 1950s and until her untimely death in 1965, Hansberry remained committed to an anticolonial/anti-
imperialist political project that challenged the supremacy of American capitalism and advocated for some variant of
socialist development at the height of McCarthyism and beyond” (Wilkins 192).
possessions, rather than reform the economy (Fanon 60). Because the “new” national system benefits the national bourgeois with the same imposed capitalist standards of the departed colonial administration, according to Fanon, the poorest members of society see no material change in their circumstances and are just as disadvantaged, if not more so, than under colonialism (60). Baraka concurs with Fanon’s assessment, observing that, through Beneatha and Asagai, Hansberry warns about “neo-colonialism and the growth (and corruption) of a post-colonial African bourgeoisie – the ‘servants of empire’” (Baraka 15).

Hansberry’s concerns regarding nationalism echo other post-colonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, and others who view nationalist ideology as a derivative discourse that simply trades one set of oppressive rulers for another. Hansberry’s warnings also coincide with O’Casey’s pessimistic depiction of a post-independence Dublin in which rabid nationalism steamrolls the basic needs of its disenfranchised inhabitants due to the lack of requisite economic reform, a step which the socialist Hansberry and O’Casey felt was essential in national liberation. While Hansberry’s nationalist cautions are not as strong as O’Casey’s in that she offers a portrait of the liberating potential for Beneatha through reclaiming her heritage and culture, she does caution against the wholesale embrace of nationalism without attending to necessary societal reform. In pointing to the possibility of neocolonialism, Hansberry calls for a Black nationalism that offers requisite communal liberation. Additionally, as numerous critics point out, Ashcroft et al point out, Black nationalist movements, like all postcolonial nationalisms, are often predicated on imposed imperialist models156.

---

156 According to Cooppan, “From Negritude on, anti-colonial movements seized and rearticulated for their own ends such dominant discourses of western identity as humanism, psychoanalysis, racial and national consciousness, and a modernizing ‘progress’” (Cooppan 23). According to Ashcroft et al, “The concept of Négritude developed by the Martinician Aimé Césaire (1945) and the Senegalese poet and politician Leopold Sedar Senghor was the most pronounced assertion of the distinctive qualities of Black culture and identity. But in making this assertion it adopted stereotypes which curiously reflected European prejudice. Black culture, it claimed, was emotional rather than
Prometheus and The American Dream: The Subversive Use of Greek Mythology in A Raisin in the Sun

While Irish use of classical mythology to undo the foundations of British imperialism has received significant scholarly attention, Black classicism remains an under-theorized field. It has often been summarily dismissed as embracing rather than questioning the dominant, white supremacist Eurocentrism. However, there is a growing body of scholarship that views Black literary classicism, like Irish classicism, as a means to subvert, not support, dominant ideologies from within. The scholarly reception of Phyllis Wheatley’s classicism, for example, reflects this critical divide; according to Robert Kendrick, Wheatley’s critics either “contend that Wheatley critiques white oppression through the skillful use of biblical and classical references” or “that Wheatley used her poetry to assimilate into the dominant culture” (71). Patricia D. Rankine’s Ulysses in Black: Ralph Ellison, Classicism, and African American Literature outlines a genealogy of black classicists, acknowledging classical interest among enslaved persons such as Phyllis Wheatley and tracing it to influential Black writers such as W.E.B. DuBois (25). Rankine argues that “the paucity of African Americans in the academic field of Classical Studies belies the influence of the ancients on black life and thought,” pointing out that “Homer, Cicero, and Plato seep through the oratory and writings of Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph

---

rational; it stressed integration and wholeness over analysis and dissection; it operated by distinctive rhythmic and temporal principles, and so forth. Négritude also claimed a distinctive African view of time-space relationships, ethics, metaphysics, and an aesthetics which separated itself from the supposedly ‘universal’ values of European taste and style. The danger was that, as a result, it could easily be reincorporated into a European model in which it functioned only as the antithesis of the thesis of white supremacy, a new ‘universal’ paradigm” (21). Ashcroft et al further explain that “The Black Power movements share many of the characteristics of the theory of Négritude in their assertion of the unique and distinctive forms of Black thought and emotion” (21).
Ellison, and Toni Morrison in profound and unexpected ways” (17). Additionally, she claims that the Ulysses figure in African American literature, particularly in Ralph Ellison’s works, creates “a black esthetic of heroism in the modern American context” as, like Ulysses, “the black American hero of the twentieth century…lives in a ‘home’ or ‘homeland’ that would seek to limit his heroic possibilities” (55). Rankine points out that, despite the backlash against authors like Ellison, Toni Morrison, Countee Cullen who use mythology, the classics allowed them to question American society from within its very foundations. For example, Lillian Corti argues that Countee Cullen’s “classical orientation was actually a guise for a more subversive subtext,” seeing his Medea as a Black Nationalist figure (625). There are also numerous scholars who work within the discipline of classicism to recover its distinctly African influences.

In A Raisin in the Sun, Hansberry re-fashions the traditional mythological figure of Prometheus in Walter, the Younger family protagonist, to reveal the inadequacies of the

---

157 Rankine characterizes overall reception of Black authors using classical forms as an accusation that they had “sold out” (84). She points out that, for Countee Cullen, his “return to a classical theme would be concomitant with his artistic demise” and that “the rebukes would come from both white and black critics” (85). Rankine also states that one interpretation of Ellison’s classicism is that “the novelist had sold out from the black masses, the Civil Rights movement, and progressive cases in general” and that his mythological references belied “his literary and political conservatism” (25). Additionally, she points out that Toni Morrison, despite critical commentary on the similarities to the Ulysses myth in her novel Song of Solomon, has consciously tried to distance herself from classical associations (62). Rankine identifies the New Negro and Black Aesthetics movements, as “assertions of artistic and cultural independence,” as turning points against Black classicism and points out that “the classics were used in a previous generation to support radical political, social, and esthetic agendas” (79). She uses the example of W.E.B. DuBois’s The Quest of the Silver Fleece, which, as she argues, “unabashedly adopted classical myth in strongly associative ways” (Rankine 79).

158 Martin Bernal’s 1987 Black Athena claims that ancient Greek civilization, philosophy, and culture had African roots later suppressed in the Eurocentric study of antiquity. Patricia D. Rankine calls this book “a watershed moment in the relationship between the classics and race discourse” (23). In response to Meyer Reinhold’s 1984 Classica America: The Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States, Michele Valerie Ronnick coined the term and created the subfield “Classica Africana” to address the exclusion of African American classicists such as William Sanders Scarbrough and Phyllis Wheatley and the influence of classicism in African American literature and philosophy. According to Ronnick, “The new subfield sharpens the wide view taken by Reinhold concerning the influence of the Graeco-Roman heritage in America, and looks at the undeniable impact, both positive and negative, that this heritage has had upon people of African descent, not only in America but also in the Western World” (Ronnick).
American Dream for African Americans as an imposed imperial ideology that tantalizes working class Blacks with the promise of bourgeois values but fails to provide collective liberation. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, American Dream ideology and its companionate myth, that of the self-made man, creates conflict between Walter and his family due to his singular obsession with material security and social status. By re-imagining Walter as Prometheus, Hansberry shows the inability of the American Dream to undo the systemic racism upon which American society itself is built, thus making it impossible for African Americans to realize.

Just as Brian Friel interrogates the foundations of Trojan War-based British imperialism, Hansberry takes apart the American Dream using Greco-Roman mythology, as American society and philosophy was greatly influenced by classical thought. For example, in *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment*, Carl J. Richard demonstrates how the classics shaped the intellectual and social lives of America’s founders. Additionally, the institutionalized racism concretized in America’s founding and ongoing social systems originated in British imperial activities, such as settler colonialism on the US continent and the slave trade, and British colonial racial hierarchies. As previously discussed, British imperialism incorporated classical mythology as its ideological foundations. Thus, rather than an embrace of white imperialist hegemony, Hansberry’s classical references in *A Raisin in the Sun* function as a mytho-postcolonial inquiry into the racist origins and bolstering of American Dream ideology.

Fittingly, one of the major strands of scholarly attention towards *A Raisin in the Sun* is its argument that the American Dream as unattainable for the African-American younger family due to its basis in white, middle-class, patriarchal values. Just as the Boyle family in *Juno and the Paycock* dream of escaping the Dublin tenement and their poverty caused by religious and colonial oppression, the Youngers in *A Raisin in the Sun* believe that they can achieve security
and respectability through moving to the suburbs, despite the reality of racism, sexism, and class-based prejudice. Walter Younger, the family’s father figure, encounters the American Dream through serving as a chauffeur to a rich white man; Walter “dreams of owning all and doing all the things he sees ‘Mr. Arnold’ do and own” (13). As a barrier to these dreams, Amiri Baraka identifies the “powerlessness of Black people to control their own fate or that of their families in capitalist America where race is place, white is right, and money makes and defines the man” (15). Walter is attempting to gain success by what Martha Bowers identifies as “white cultural values” (91). Like Sean O’Casey’s portrayal of nationalism’s inability to liberate the poorest of society, Hansberry dismissed the notion of the American Dream and “advocated a total dismantling of racial capitalism in favor of a fundamental socioeconomic equality,” seeking for African Americans not “integration into the American dream of bourgeois prosperity but the right and the means to claim and create a future of their own fashioning” (Chapman 453). This debate about the American Dream and its fitness for Black Americans echoes the contrasting ideas of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois. While Washington preached self-help and advancement through hard work and accommodation, DuBois argued that this philosophy only facilitates white oppression and advocated for a comprehensive civil rights movement and societal reform. As Richard Wafula points out, these ideas collide through Hansberry’s characters in their various approaches to social mobility (87-88). Washington is represented through the ideas of Walter Younger, while the thematic and dramatic development of the play itself reinforces DuBois’s philosophies.

Hansberry re-creates the traditional mythological of Prometheus as Walter to reveal the shallowness of white male bourgeois advancement in the American Dream. Hansberry introduces this reference through a clash between Walter and, as Erin D. Chapman describes,
“Beneatha’s bourgeois suitor” George Murchison, who embodies “African American ‘babbitry’ or bourgeois complacency, small-mindedness, smugness, and over-emphasis on respectability” (452). George, a college student and son of a wealthy Chicago realtor, wholeheartedly embraces white liberal capitalist values. George is shocked at Beneatha’s decision to wear natural hair and Yoruba clothing. When Beneatha attempts to engage George in intellectual conversations, he exasperatedly dismisses her, telling her that she is a “nice-looking girl,” assuring her “that’s all you need, honey, forget the atmosphere” (Hansberry 84). When Beneatha presses George regarding his unwillingness for discussion, he angrily exclaims: “I don’t go out with you to discuss the nature of ‘quiet desperation’ or to hear all about your thoughts…because the world will go on thinking what it thinks regardless…you read books – to learn facts – to get grades – to pass the course – to get a degree. That’s all – it has nothing to do with thoughts” (Hansberry 84). George expresses a transactional, patriarchal view of learning and dismisses Beneatha’s desire to think for herself. He also denigrates what he sneeringly terms Beneatha’s “heritage” as “nothing but a bunch of raggedy-assed spirituals and some grass huts,” demonstrating his internalization of the white hegemonic pejoration of African civilizations (Hansberry 85). In her description of “assimilationist Negroes,” whom she says she hates, as “someone who is willing to give up his own culture and submerge himself completely in the dominant, and in this case oppressive culture,” Beneatha illustrates George perfectly. While his family is financially comfortable, he is shallow, narrow-minded, and intellectually and spiritually bereft.

Representing the ambivalence inherent in postcolonial subjectivity, Walter both despises George and envies his success, and the men inevitably clash. After George has insulted his intelligence, Walter dismisses a college education as just learning “to talk proper and read books” (Hansberry 91). However, Walter’s constant rants about money belie his jealousy for
George’s success and the additional opportunities that a college degree will avail him. Once again, Fanon’s theories of the neocolonial bourgeois apply, pitting Walter as the oppressed who wishes to step into the shoes of the colonizer and enjoy the requisite advantages, rather than reform society in the interest of collective liberation, much like George has done in his embrace of white patriarchal bourgeois values. It is into this liminal postcolonial space that Hansberry introduces the Walter as Prometheus device. While arguing with Walter, George, in a seemingly thrown away line, references the Prometheus figure as a mytho-postcolonial device for revealing the inadequacy of the American Dream. George calls Walter “Prometheus!” and points his finger at the astonished insult recipient, intentionally including a mythological reference he knows Walter does not understand. George’s insult indeed infuriates Walter, who, flabbergasted and described as “in fury” by the stage directions, exclaims: “See there – they get to a point where they can’t insult you man to man – they got to talk about something ain’t nobody never heard of!...Prometheus! I bet there ain’t even no such thing!” (Hansberry 93). While George’s choice to call Walter “Prometheus” out of the pantheon of mythological figures may seem curious and only serve the purpose of confusing the uneducated Walter, this characterization incorporates a traditional mythological figure that undermines the “drive of capitalist acquisition and accumulation as something that was deeply American, and also perverse” (Perry 138).

The parallels between Walter and Prometheus in the context of the American Dream become apparent when we adjust our readings of both the play and the myth from surface-level optimistic readings. Such a reading A Raisin in the Sun’s seemingly happy ending celebrates that the Younger family overcomes the obstacle of living in a cramped house in the Chicago slums. However, Hansberry’s own life experience of suffering immense prejudice, threats, property damage, and prolonged legal battles after moving into a white neighborhood at a young age
reminds the reader that the Younger family’s troubles are just beginning. Middle class aspiration and acquisition do not solve the issue of systemic racism. There has been no additional improvement in the family’s circumstances, such as the removal of racist employment barriers that would permit Walter to obtain a higher paying job or both racial and patriarchal oppression that will undoubtedly complicate, or even end, Beneatha’s pursuit of a career as a medical doctor. It is also tempting to read the Prometheus myth in a singularly optimistic way that misses its wider implications. In the early days after the creation of humanity (the accounts of which differ between the source materials), Prometheus the Titan takes pity on humans, naked, freezing, and starving without fire, which Zeus has refused to provide, to warm themselves or cook food. Against the wishes of Zeus and the other Olympians, Prometheus steals the sacred fire from Mount Olympus and delivers it to humans, who experience an immense improvement in their immediate material circumstances. When Zeus discovers Prometheus’s treachery, he punishes Prometheus by chaining him to the side of a mountain, where an eagle eats his liver every day. The hero Heracles eventually liberates Prometheus. This story may seem uplifting, especially in Prometheus’s dedication to humanity and their newfound quality of life from the gift of fire. However, when considering the body of Greek mythology, fire does little to liberate humanity. They still suffer due to the capricious whims of the gods, goddesses, titans, and various immortals who dwell in the heavens and on earth and remain bound by the rules of Fate.

These “against the grain” readings, then, reveal that both Prometheus and Walter have subscribed to false beliefs that provide momentary relief but nonetheless uphold existing power structures. Prometheus believes that fire will ease humans’ suffering. However, in Prometheus’s world, Prometheus’s gift of fire still upholds the divine hegemony and authority of the Olympian gods. Humans have no endemic rights or protections; they simply must wait on the extremely
fickle, momentary benevolences of the gods to occasionally bestow gifts and graces upon them. Even this system favors the already powerful, especially the half-human (mostly) sons of philandering gods descended from Olympus. Throughout Greek mythology, humans remain entangled in the countless wars and petty squabbles between the gods, losing their lives, families, and material resources to these conflicts. While fire provides humans with the means to warm themselves, create art, make weapons, cook food, and innovate, this does not reform the system in which humans are ultimately subject to the wills of immortals who care little for them. Additionally, in ancient Greek mythology, humans were bound by the rules of fate, as illustrated in countless myths, perhaps most famously in the tales of Oedipus. Humans had no personal freedoms and were fated to follow a course predestined by divine forces. Within this system, the gift of fire cannot hope to liberate humanity.

Like Prometheus’s sincere but misguided belief in fire’s liberatory power, Walter’s complete trust in the American Dream posits money as the only solutions to his family’s misfortunes. Walter rhetorically asks his mother: “Do you know what this money means to me? Do you know what this money can do for us?” reflecting his belief that the insurance money and future earnings from investments will prevent his current bleak future, which he describes as “a big looming blank space – full of nothing” (Hansberry 73). Indeed, the insurance money allows the family to become property owners in a white suburb and escape their cramped apartment. Just as fire addressed many immediate issues for humans in the Prometheus myth, money moves the Youngers from their cramped apartment in which Travis sleeps in the family room, roaches parade through in almost militarily precise lines, and Mama and Beneatha must share a room. While the Youngers have escaped their crowded apartment, both history and Hansberry’s own experience, as previously described, remind us that their lives would be anything but easy from
that point on. Additionally, Walter’s views on upward mobility and capitalist acquisitiveness have remained unchanged\textsuperscript{159}. Despite the family’s change of living circumstances, Walter has still squandered a large portion of the inheritance, including Beneatha’s school money, in a misguided liquor store investment scheme. In this way, what both Prometheus and Walter fail to realize is that, respectively, the fire and capitalist aspirations only provide temporary, illusory liberation, only to give way to another set of problems. Through Walter as a Prometheus figure, Hansberry harnesses the totality of Greek mythology to show that humanity’s continued suffering in an unfair system of gods’ wills and fates parallels the inability of material success to reform a society built upon Black dispossession and institutionalized racism.

Hansberry uses the Prometheus figure Walter as the most complete embodiment of the ultimate failure of American Dream mythology for African Americans, especially its foregrounding of white patriarchal materialism\textsuperscript{160}. Just as Prometheus would remain chained to the rock for his daily torture, Walter continues to live in a purgatory of his own making, acting as a microcosm for all who subscribe to its false promises. As a chauffeur for a rich white man, Walter has been forced to observe a way of living to which he has no access yet feels entitled. Walter states that all he can give his son, Travis, who sleeps in the living room of the family’s crowded apartment, “is stories about how rich white people live” (Hansberry 34). Walter’s desire for a better life is not the issue; rather, his sole focus on material things as the means to liberation is extremely misguided. In a draft of a Village Voice article titled “Genet, Mailer, and the New

\textsuperscript{159}“Although the play was most often celebrated as a dramatic rendering of African American integration in simplistic, feel-good terms, Hansberry understood \textit{A Raisin in the Sun} as a critique of the liberal, patriarchal vision of the contemporary civil rights movement. In the course of her most famous play, Hansberry used her characters Lena Younger, her son Walter Lee and her daughter Beneatha to advance an interrogation of bourgeois ‘money values,’ Black patriarchal aspiration and Black matriarchy theory” (Chapman 448).

\textsuperscript{160}“Although Hansberry always averred that she saw Walter Lee as the play’s absolute protagonist, she put him at the forefront of the drama to critique him as a symbol of superficial American materialism and the civil rights movement’s most simplistically liberal aspects” (Chapman 454).
Paternalists,” Hansberry herself confirms this, stating that *A Raisin in the Sun* “more than anything else a long (and perhaps laborious) assault on money values (emphasis Hansberry’s own).” Erin D. Chapman states that Hansberry “advocated a total dismantling of racial capitalism in favor of a fundamental socioeconomic equality” (453). Additionally, Prometheus’s ongoing punishment and human suffering reflect the complication of race in the promise of the American Dream. Black advances through civil rights and economic advances are inevitably checked by systemic white supremacist moves such as redefining success markers, red-lining neighborhoods, and enforcement of de facto segregation, such as the wake of the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision that was a supposed move towards integrated neighborhoods but was followed by “white flight” and the establishment of majority-minority inner city schools.

Walter’s interactions with other characters throughout the play further portray the limitations of the American Dream. Hansberry uses Walter’s mother, Lena, to reveal that Walter’s yearning for money betrays the values of freedom and liberation. While Lena wishes to spend life insurance money from the death of her late husband on a new house for the family, Walter wants to invest in a liquor store and enter the business world. His desire turns into a singular obsession, causing him to constantly barrage his mother, wife, and sister about his plan. In one of his exchanges with his mother, Walter states: “I want so many things that they are driving me kind of crazy” (73). This comment reveals the debilitating nature of the American Dream’s focus on material acquisition; it remains in sight but ever out of reach. According to Curtis Lamar King, “Walter dreams for a better living because he sees the affluence of America passing all around him daily. Walter comes in contact with it wherever he goes….America has defined life in material terms…Walter has been taught that he should want the world, but,
because he is Black, he has been denied the possibility of ever having it. And that makes the desire more painful. He struggles with the world, but it is out of reach” (45).

Later in the conversation, the American Dream is further revealed to be a false mythology that denies the pursuit of freedom:

Mama: Son – how come you talk so much ‘bout money?
Walter: (With immense passion) Because it is life, Mama!
Mama (Quietly) Oh – (Very quietly) So now it’s life. Money is life. Once upon a time freedom used to be life – now it’s money. I guess the world really do change.
Walter: No – it was always money, Mama. We just didn’t know about it.
Mama: No…something has changed. (She looks at him) You something new, boy. In my time we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North if we could and how to stay alive and still have a pinch of dignity too…now here come you and Beneatha – talking ‘bout things we ain’t never even thought about hardly, me and your daddy. You aint’ satisfied or proud of nothing we done. I mean that you had a home; that we kept you out of trouble till you was grown; that you don’t have to ride to work on the back of nobody’s streetcar – you my children – but how different we done become” (Hansberry 73-74).

The contrast between Mama’s visions and Walter’s materialist strivings represent Hansberry’s use of Walter as an embodiment of the American Dream’s flaws, especially to the detriment of collective liberation.\footnote{In a February 1959 letter to Professor Peter Buitenhuis at Yale University, Hansberry states: “I see [Walter Lee] not so much, once again, as the traditional ‘adult-child’ which racist concepts persist in making of Negroes, but as an American man caught and captivated by precisely those values which surround him. There is nothing particularly fantastic in middle class aspiration. There is nothing peculiar in the desire for ascendancy. Walter Lee Younger is not so much a fool – as a desperate man. The roots of his desperation are enormous. Acquisition seems to be the logical end to a man who is encompassed in a culture which exalts acquisition. He is a man who wishes to do precisely what the rest of us wish to do: purchase tomorrow. The pathos of his failure has}
Big Walter, whose death after a lifetime of hard labor has provided the paltry life insurance reward of ten thousand dollars, strove for a life of freedom and dignity, their dream has devolved into Walter’s appetite for material things. Walter sees money as the path to liberation, while Mama focuses on freedom itself. Chapman points out that, for Hansberry, “freedom was ‘possession of the self,’ and ‘money values’ was its opposite. On behalf of Black America and Black people the world over, she did not seek integration into the American dream of bourgeois prosperity but the right and the means to claim and create a future of their own fashioning” (Chapman 453). Hansberry makes this apparent in the contrast between Walter’s father’s dreams and life aspirations and Walter’s materialist striving.

Hansberry also demonstrates the inaccessibility of the American Dream for African-Americans through the Younger family’s encounter with the white spokesperson character of Carl Lindner, the representative from the homeowners association of the white suburb. Lindner harnesses American Dream ideology to explain to the Younger family why they are not wanted in his community. Lindner explains, “Well – you see our community is made up of people who’ve worked hard as the dickens for years to build up that little community. They’re not rich and fancy people; just hard-working, honest people who don’t really have much but those little homes and a dream of the kind of community they want to raise their children in” (Hansberry 117). Lindner uses the white-supremacist coded language of “ordinary” people striving for their dreams of a home and community that reflects their dream of an exclusive white Christian bourgeois group. The play’s ending, which on some level is happy as the Younger family moves

base in the nature of the ‘opportunity’ which comes to him. Opportunity born only of death is suspect after all. Opportunity, furthermore, which is dependent on the haphazard can only reap haphazard ends – good or ill. The fact of the matter is that I might have easily have chosen an ‘honest’ Willy Harris. What then would be our assessment of Walter Lee Younger five years later as a successful business man? That I think is the key question which should concern us about Walter Lee Younger. His dream is not a Negro dream but an American one.”

169
to their new home in a white middle-class suburb, nonetheless suggests that the family is exchanging one set of challenges for another. Even though they have acquired a new home, the Younger story will not simply end with their moving into the new house. As Yomna Saber states, “…there are no radical changes for the Youngers. Walter still works as a chauffeur, Ruth as a maid. The family is taking the same old furniture, and the unwelcome presence of Lindner remains” (463). Thus, just as Irish nationalism failed to bring concrete changes to poor Dublin tenement dwellers, adherence to the American Dream and moving into a new home will not, in fact, provide the systemic change necessary to enact lasting reform in the Youngers’ lives.

The Mythical Device of Demeter and Persephone: Gender and Patriarchy in the American Dream and Irish Nationalism

O’Casey and Hansberry use the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone to reveal patriarchy as complicit with class, imperial, and racial oppression. While Ellen Handler Spitz’s article “Mothers and Daughters: Ancient and Modern Myths” has connected this myth to A Raisin in the Sun, its application to Juno and the Paycock represents a new contribution to the scholarly conversation. The obvious and most commented-on mythical context in Juno and the Paycock is the goddess Juno, sister-wife of Jupiter and keeper of the house, childbirth, and the nation. In examining how the plays use this traditional mythology to undo the imperialist

---

162 Numerous critics have explored this mythical embodiment in depth. Durbach states: “…with remarkable aptness Juno Boyle comes to incarnate those life-sustaining principles subsumed by her Roman counterpart: Goddess of childbirth who, by extension, ensures the multiplication of the race; protectress of the pregnant wife and guardian of the nation; the goddess who cares for the unborn child, who causes the mother’s milk to flow; and, above all, the Goddess of domesticity, of the family hearth, the Female Principle of existence…She is defined as soon as she enters with a parcel of food in her hand, hurrying home from her job to cook her malingering husband’s breakfast and protect her household against his scavenging friends…It is Juno’s human compassion and love which ultimately make the myth viable – this is the function of O’Casey’s realism – and the realistic presence of Mrs. Tancred, mourning for her murdered son, universalizes this maternal theme. Her stark, iconographic rhetoric speaks for all the Junos in Ireland whose domestic function has been destroyed by a heartless and obdurate peacockery” (18-19). According to Armstrong, “It was Boyle himself, we find, who nicknamed his wife ‘Juno’ because of various events connecting her with the month of June…, but he did not realize that ‘Juno’ as the Roman name for the goddess who presides over justice and loyalty in family life and safeguards women, marriage, childbirth, and finances. Juno Boyle tries to uphold the same ideals and protect the same things in the play…. From the outset, she
foundations of the ideologies of Irish nationalism and the American Dream, the Demeter and Persephone framework is most useful in its depiction of intergenerational female bonding that cannot be separated by patriarchal forces.

The tale of Demeter and Persephone, on its surface, explains the turning of the seasons as Demeter, the goddess of the harvest, in sorrow withholds her blessings upon nature when her daughter, Persephone, must descend to the underworld for part of the year. Upon deeper reading, the myth explores patriarchal control of female sexuality and women’s bargaining with patriarchy (per Kandiyoti’s theory elaborated in the previous chapter) in portraying the elaborate deception and collusion between several male gods kidnapping, rape, and permanent entrapment of the young Persephone, daughter of Demeter and Zeus by Hades, brother of Zeus and lord of the underworld. Zeus lures Persephone with the beautiful and sweet-smelling narcissus flower (which, in another tale, serves as the name of the youth who wasted away by a river after falling in love with his own reflection); once Persephone picks the flower, the earth opens beneath her to reveal Hades in his chariot, who steals away the crying girl to the underworld, holding her hostage as his unwilling bride and queen. In her anguish, Demeter wanders the earth in search of her daughter and removes herself from the company of the gods upon learning that Zeus was an accomplice in her daughter’s kidnapping. According to Spitz, Demeter “plays power games with [Zeus] by withholding her fertility. Permitting nothing to grow on earth, scourging the land with

---

is an unconscious devotee of the goddess Juno in her efforts to preserve the family in which she is the only wage-earner; she provides food, gives Mary sensible advice, comforts Johnny, tries to keep a tidy home and to get Boyle to work. She scolds him for laziness and deflates his talk of having been a seafaring captain...whereas Boyle uses these fictions to cushion himself against reality, Juno faces it and responds compassionately and constructively to the problems of their time...only Boyle’s pride is affected by Mary’s plight, but Juno’s altruism enables her to see that Mary may have forty years of bitterness to endure” (7-8). Keaton writes “Juno’s role as goddess of childbirth and maternity is self-evident in the way Juno Boyle protects Mary from the consequences of abandonment by both her lover and her father, and the way in which she promises to protect the child as well” (Keaton 86-87).

163 According to Ellen Handler Spitz, Zeus, “by staging [Persephone’s] ravishment, may in fact be seen as enacting by proxy his own incestuous wishes towards her” (412).
a cruel famine, she coerces him finally into returning Persephone to her” after the starving earthly citizens cry out in anger and anguish to the gods (413-414). When Hermes descends into the underworld to return Persephone to her mother, he finds that the sorrowful girl has once again been tricked: Hades had taken advantage of Persephone’s absent-minded state and slipped her some pomegranate seeds. Having tasted the food of the dead, Persephone cannot permanently dwell among the living. During part of the year, she must return to the underworld, and Demeter’s corresponding sorrow incites the annual winter season. When Persephone and Demeter reunite, the earth abounds in fertility and beauty, and the growth and harvest season commences. In this compromise, Persephone and Demeter must bargain with patriarchy to enjoy part of the year together. In an additional example of patriarchal bargaining, Demeter’s reconciliation with her husband, Zeus, and consequently the other Olympians, is facilitated by obedience to her own mother, the Titan Rhea, beseeching her to forgive her husband and once again bestow her gifts of fertility and harvest to the earth. In the multiple versions of this myth, Demeter and Persephone remain the central figures with the male characters functioning as merely figureheads or background operators.

Critics have identified O’Casey’s postcolonial feminist position on gender issues in his works, particularly his portrayal of ineffectual, delusional male figures who display various relationships to nationalism and the nation while leaving their families to suffer. Prior to the

---

164 In “The Performance of Masculinity and Nationalism and Nationalism: Sean O’Casey’s The Plough and the Stars and Juno and the Paycock,” David Waterman concurs with Kiberd’s analysis and claims that O’Casey’s plays “argue that Irish nationalism cannot succeed as a program of political emancipation because nationalism simply transposes foreign for domestic domination” as “the foundation of dominance/submission has not been challenged” (53). Waterman further identifies “resistance in the form of nationalism” in O’Casey’s works as “a performance of masculine wish-driven fulfilment largely driven, and finally undermined, by fear” in which O’Casey’s male characters’ performance of manliness and nationalism ultimately “collapses into a crisis of masculinity” (54).

165 Errol Durbach, in “Peacocks and Mothers: Theme and Dramatic Metaphor in O’Casey’s Juno and the Paycock,” points to the male characters’ “pervasive peacockery” as “an egotistic concern with one’s self, one’s importance, one’s opinions, and one’s appearance” that they employ to avoid “the horror of facing the reality of
action of the play, Boyle has refused to be active militarily or in the workforce. When he comes into his perceived inheritance, Boyle displays the relationship between bourgeois materialism, nationalism, and patriarchy by engaging in a pompous performance of masculinity that depends upon outlandish displays of gaudy material acquisitions and masculinist posturing. This also consists of mouthing empty nationalist platitudes in praise of the very nationalist and religious ideals he had virulently criticized during the play’s first act, such as his statement that “…I never like to be beholden to any o’the clergy…the clergy always had too much power over the people in this unfortunate country” (O’Casey 25). Reflecting his embrace of bourgeois materialism and its accompanying nationalist values, Boyle recounts a conversation with Father Farrell in which the priest tells him “how glad he was [Boyle] fell in for the money” and remarks that “Father Farrell is a man o’the people…the priests was always in the van of the fight for Irelan’s freedom” (O’Casey 38). During these moments, Juno also performs the role of subservient wife and defers to her husband’s authority, aligning herself with Boyle’s newfound patriarchal nationalist displays. According to Mary Trotter,

“Without the stresses of poverty, the family dynamic automatically falls into one of middle-class, patriarchal authority, with the head of the household assuming his position as the moral head of the family, giving up drink and Joxer for bourgeois respectability. No longer expected to do manual labour, Boyle takes on the persona of a sober paterfamilias. Juno moves from goading her husband to work to deterring to his wishes…the Boyles’ economic windfall exposes the inherent hypocrisies in a capitalist one’s domestic crises” (17). In “Opening the Eyes of the Audience: Visual and Verbal Imagery in Juno and the Paycock, Leslie Thomson claims that all of the male characters are “self-deluded escapists,” none of whom “is able or willing to assume his responsibilities as a member of society” (557). Waterman identifies the play’s male characters as “childish men and drunkards” (54). Maureen Waters, in The Comic Irishman, characterizes “Captain” Jack Boyle as “a complete imposter, a man, who despite his blather about the high seas, is obviously more at home in a pub. His posturing fails to dupe anyone for long, and his shifting opinions eventually reveal an appalling ignorance and intolerance” (155).
system that equates economic security with morality and, by the conclusion of the play, it also illustrates the social and cultural as well as economic impediments to class mobility” (Trotter 80).

Boyle’s quick turn to patriarchal nationalism reflects its illusory and ultimately performative nature. These male characters fail to live up to the image of the strong patriarch advocated by Irish nationalists and the early leaders of the new Free State in their utter failure to provide for their families and provide solid moral leadership within their homes. At the same time, this is not entirely the fault of these men with the contemporaneous political situation. Still reeling from the devastation of the Great Famine, the Irish economic system was largely agrarian, and the withdrawal of English investment following the Anglo-Irish War left many able-bodied men either unemployed or underemployed. Additionally, working class poor and un/underemployed men were especially targeted to serve in the armed forces, whether in the war for independence or in the Irish Civil War.

The Demeter and Persephone-like bond between Juno and Mary cements at the end of the play in their necessary solidarity against patriarchal values. The cowardly Captain Boyle hypocritically disowns Mary when he learns that she is pregnant by Bentham, who has also vanished after mishandling the situation with the Boyles’ will and learning of Mary’s pregnancy. Boyle selfishly makes Mary’s situation about his own suffering, quipping, “Oh, isn’t this a nice thing to come on top ‘me, an’ the state I’m in…Amn’t I ather goin’ through enough without havin’ to go through this!” (O’Casey 60). Shocked, Juno reminds him that “What you an’ I’ll have to go through’ll be nothin’ to what poor Mary’ll have to go through; for you an’ me is middlin’ old, an’ most of our years is spent; but Mary’ll have maybe forty years to face an’ handle, an’ every wan of them’ll be tainted with a bitther memory” (O’Casey 60). Not even
acknowledging this truth, Boyle threatens “I’m tellin’ you when I’m done with her she’ll be a sorry girl!” (O’Casey 60). Mary’s former boyfriend Jerry, fellow striker for workers’ rights, attempts to reunite with her but also rejects her when she tells him of her pregnancy, revealing that patriarchal mores outweigh any forward thinking associated with labor movements.

Like Demeter and Persephone, who rely solely on each other for survival within a universe controlled by patriarchal values, Mary and Juno reject the patriarchal structure of the male-dominated family to create a mother-centered existence. Juno realizes that she must forge a new household with her daughter to provide any hope of stability for the new child. Keaton argues that Juno must reject patriarchal institutions, including Irish republicanism and the patriarchal family, which “are shown to be unfulfilling for women in either principle or practice” (92). When she does so, Juno aligns with her daughter and other women on the grounds of motherhood, aligning her with what Keaton terms “maternal feminism” (92). When Mary despairs against God and pities her “poor baby that’ll have no father,” Juno responds with the resigned comment “What can God do agen the stupidity o’men!” and declares “It’ll have what’s far betther – it’ll have two mothers” (O’Casey). At the same time, just as Demeter and Persephone bargain with patriarchy to allow Persephone to split her time between the underworld and earth, Mary and Juno must also function within a patriarchal system, especially in dealing with the prejudice and judgment against single mothers and women-centered households. While the play ends with Captain Boyle and Joxer’s drunken musings after the women family members exit, we might wonder if there will come a dea ex machina moment in Juno and Mary’s future that mirrors the goddess Rhea’s pleas for her daughter Demeter to return to her husband Zeus, despite his active participation in the kidnapping and rape of their daughter. Perhaps another mother, either Juno or Captain’s Boyle’s mother, might return to convince Juno
to reunite with her suffering husband. In this way, O’Casey’s uses the Demeter and Persephone device to show that nationalism has not liberated Irish women from imposed imperialist patriarchal values.

Similarly, Hansberry uses the device of the Demeter and Persephone reveals the complicity of the American Dream and African Americans’ social and economic aspirations with patriarchy. In “Mothers and Daughters: Ancient and Modern Myths,” Ellen Handler Spitz notes the similarity between the absence of Beneatha Younger’s father and Persephone’s absent father. Spitz writes that Big Walter’s death creates an “absence of the husband and father” that “leaves the stage open at the end of Scene One for a uniquely powerful moment in American theater” in which the “fiercely independent, headstrong” Beneatha declares that she does not believe in God. The following ensues:

(MAMA absorbs this speech, studies her daughter and rises slowly and crosses to Beneatha and slaps her powerfully across the face. After, there is only silence and the daughter drops her eyes from her mother’s face, and Mama is very tall before her.)

MAMA: Now – you say after me, in my mother’s house there is still God… *In my mother’s house* there is still God.

In this scene, Spitz recognizes “the sheer weight of ongoing maternal presence as it shapes the consciousness of a daughter” and “readily guides, disciplines, supports, and opposes” the headstrong Beneatha, “who is obviously a second edition of herself” (415-416). This maternal bond between Beneatha and Mama, much like that between Demeter and Persephone, remains powerful both despite and in the face of patriarchal interference. Walter disrespects Mama’s maternal authority by dismissing his father’s and Mama’s lifelong quest for “freedom” and “a pinch of dignity” in his singular obsession with financial success (74). Additionally, he
squanders the portion of Big Walter’s insurance money assigned for Beneatha’s medical school, a pursuit he condescendingly dismisses throughout the play as a profession unsuitable for a woman. Like Demeter and Persephone, who joyfully await their reunions after Persephone’s mandatory descent into the underworld, Beneatha and Mama must work within the confines of patriarchal oppression to maintain their bond.

Hansberry uses the character of Walter Younger to show the influence of the American Dream on both repressive and repressed masculinity, like Captain Boyle in *Juno and the Paycock*. When the family comes into an inheritance, Walter wants to buy a business, but Lena, his wife, and Ruth, his mother, wish to use the money to purchase a home in the suburbs. Walter chafes against the women in his household and claims that they are attempting to hold him back from his dreams. Amiri Baraka ties Walter’s dreams to his performance of masculinity, arguing that “on another level he yearns to strut his ‘manhood,’ a predictable mix of machismo and fantasy” and a product of him “male chauvinism” (15). Chapman also points out the sexist nature of Walter’s dreams, arguing that his “shallow money values are tied to his patriarchal urge to drape his wife in pearls and a Cadillac convertible” and that Hansberry frames “Walter Lee’s desire to affirm his manhood through conspicuous consumption and familial mastery” (455). Walter’s dreams, then, represent his fantasy of acting out the traditional patriarchal role advanced by white middle-class values and exercising ownership and control over the women in his family. Hansberry does not outright condemn Walter’s patriarchal behavior; rather, she shows it as a product of his circumstances. Lana Lockhart locates Walter’s continuing struggle against emasculation not in his relationships with female characters, but on the basis of his poor financial standing and oppressive white standards of manhood, especially in the establishment of traditional gender roles in the middle twentieth century that “deemed men as failures if they
could not support their families financially and provide at least a middle-class standard of living” (49-50). As such, Lockhart also characterizes Black Nationalism’s embrace of a dominant masculine ideology as a response to these conditions (36). In her presentation of Walter, then, Hansberry portrays his misogyny but places its genealogy in the wider oppressive forces of imperial, white, and capitalistic standards of masculinity.

Throughout *Raisin in the Sun*, Walter’s character interactions reveal the embrace of patriarchy requisite with the American Dream. Walter blames the women in his life for his issues, exclaiming “Nobody in this house is ever going to understand me” and constantly criticizing his mother, sister, and wife for standing in the way of his business dreams when they raise legitimate concerns about the plan’s feasibility (Hansberry 39). Walter’s chafing against women is the essence of the bargain that he has made with liberalism, as described in the previous chapter; he must embrace patriarchy to access the promise of the American Dream, and this, in turn, requires that patriarchy and capitalism not be held responsible for their systemic issues. To his ambitious sister with whom he frequently argues, Walter sneers: “Who the hell told you you had to be a doctor? If you so crazy ‘bout messing ‘round with sick people – then go be a nurse like other women – or just get married and be quiet…” (Hansberry 39). He also criticizes Beneatha’s focus on racial issues and declares that she supports “unending agitation,” quipping that she would ask a critically ill or injured patient their views on race relations before beginning treatment (Hansberry 100). Walter’s silencing of Beneatha echoes the sentiments expressed by Beneatha’s suitor, George Murchison, who has wholeheartedly embraced white bourgeois values and tells Beneatha, in no uncertain terms, that he wants her to simply stay silent and look beautiful for him. Walter also holds other men to extreme patriarchal standards. Walter asks George, “Why all you college boys wear them faggoty-looking white shoes?” and dismisses
George’s college education as not “manly,” ranting: “What the hell you learning over there? Filling up your heads – (Counting off on his fingers) – with the sociology and the psychology – but they teaching you how to be a man? How to take over and run the world? They teaching you how to run a rubber plantation or a steel mill?” (Hansberry 91). Walter dismisses George as not a “real man” due to his lack of traditionally masculine physical activities.

Thus, in both Juno and the Paycock and Raisin in the Sun, the patriarchy of, respectively, Irish nationalism and the American Dream, not only oppresses the women characters but also produces ineffectual, feckless fathers, ironically casting them as weak heads of the household. In the plays, the character of the strong female matriarch who must, out of necessity, care for her family almost-singlehandedly appears in tandem with the inadequate father and husband. Juno is a long-suffering wife and mother who must function as the backbone of the family because of her husband’s insufficiency. As the only wage earner due to Johnny’s injury, Mary’s participation in a labor strike, and Boyle’s refusal to work, Juno must provide materially and emotionally for the entire family. This role can be viewed through both traditional and societal mythological lenses. Critics also recognize O’Casey’s commitment to moving beyond stereotypical

---

166 In The Irish Writer and the World, Declan Kiberd connects the “weak and ineffectual father” to the figure of the “all-powerful mother” (180). According to Kiberd, “the classic texts of the Irish Renaissance read like oblique meditations on this theme” in which an “overintense, clutching relationship between mother and son” develops in the wake of the abdication of the father and husband role” (180). In these Irish texts, Kiberd observes the character of a mother who must become “not just ‘wife and mother in one’ but surrogate father as well” (180). Kiberd remarks that “O’Casey is famous for his juxtapositions of industrious mothers and layabout fathers, of wronged girls and unscrupulous, sweet-talking men” (180).

167 Durbach points to “O’Casey’s image of the indomitable mother” and his “meticulous control of the mother as myth, symbol, and realistic presence” in which “human reality is juxtaposed with mythical identity” and that Juno “gradually assum[es] a mythic status in the play which ultimately transcends reality without compromising her essential humanity” (18). Durbach also explores Juno’s remarkable similarity to her Roman counterpart, Juno, in her attributes as the Goddess of childbirth and Goddess of domesticity who provides for her home and family in addition to the goddess Juno’s peacock iconography, an intertwinment which he refers to as “reality and myth coinciding in fantastic fusion” (18). According to William A. Armstrong in “The Integrity of Juno and the Paycock,” Juno’s sufferings “connect her with great feminine archetypes” such as the Irish national maternal figure, Cathleen ni Houlihan, the Irish mythical femme fatale Deirdre, the Roman goddess Juno, and the Virgin Mary.
depictions of women in his plays. Thus, representations of gender in Juno and the Paycock are intertwined with the depiction of nationalism’s deleterious effects on portrayal of a poor family’s experience as urban tenement dwellers.

Like Juno in Juno and the Paycock, Lena Younger functions as the head of the family who perseveres despite her wayward and irresponsible husband. In Lena Younger, Hansberry re-fashions the societal myth of the strong Black woman and matriarch. In some ways, this figure seems to celebrate Black women, but, in reality, it burdens them with societal restrictions and expectations. In “No Place to Rest: African American Political Attitudes and the Myth of Black Women’s Strength,” Melissa Harris-Lacewell explores what she terms “the myth of the strong Black woman” and seeks to understand how “the idea that Black women are endowed with a natural, superhuman capacity to overcome obstacles” affects African American attitudes (1).

This characterization oppresses Black women because it diminishes the systemic racial, gendered, and class discrimination they must endure by hailing them as strong enough to surmount any burdens rather than question why they should have to do so in the first place. In

---

168 In “Building Empowerment Through Drama: The Characterization Process of Irish Women in Three Plays by Sean O’Casey,” Claudia Parra argues that O’Casey is “one of the few male playwrights who demonstrated commitment to diverge from the nationalistic male-oriented path followed by Irish drama of the twentieth century” in his commitment to create “female characters that mismatched the dominant powerless shape which constituted mostly women’s theatrical proposals” (57). Parra contends that “O’Casey’s female representations configure a presumed deconstruction of the Irish traditional female figure” and that he characterizes “the feminine in such a subversive form” as representative of his awareness of the unfair conditions facing poor women during the highly masculinized nationalistic Irish independence process (57). Parra sees Juno as “undoubtedly a gendered representation” who is “strong, assertive, and capable of tremendous devotion to her family, and even though “her domestic and maternal actions correspond to the traditional stereotype thought for Irish women, her performance is not limited to the maternal and domestic sphere” and “breaks the traditional order of the Irish family” (Parra 60). Robert Brazeau argues that O’Casey’s representation of Juno demonstrates his “strong commitment to feminism” (31).

169 Harris-Lacewell identifies the language of this myth as “Mammy, Sapphire, Jezebel, Matriarch, Welfare Queen, Babymama, Chickenhead” in which women are “reduced by a patriarchal society to caricatures of true selves” and must “consistently fight to define their actual existences within the constraints imposed by these external images” (2). Harris-Lacewell identifies the “strong Black woman” portrait as an alternative symbol to these pejorative characterizations that has nonetheless oppressed Black women as they are consistently reminded that they somehow contain an ability to overcome or shake off obstacles facing them, a key component of the myth (6). In her article, Harris-Lacewell reports that this societal myth has poor effects on Black women’s mental health (6).
Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman, Michele Wallace studies the negative aspects of this societal myth, bemoaning stereotypes of the Black matriarch as “too domineering, too strong, too aggressive, too outspoken, too castrating, too masculine… one of the main reasons the Black man had never been properly able to take hold of his situation in this country” (91).\(^{170}\)

While some critics have described Lena Younger as a stereotypical portrayal of this “strong Black woman,” I contend that Hansberry modifies this figure to address intersectional issues facing low-income and struggling middle-class urban Black families, especially social stability and mobility through property ownership. My reading finds support among some recent scholarship\(^ {171}\). I argue that both plays use the mother-daughter mytheme of Demeter and Persephone to structure women’s survival adaptations intersectional within patriarchy. In both plays, the strong woman (Juno and Lena, respectively), is seen as antagonistic by the would-be family patriarch. Captain Boyle bemoans (what he frames as) Juno’s incessant nagging at him to get a job rather than spend his time cavorting with the parasitic Joxer, and Walter blames his lack of financial success on his mother, wife, and sister, all of whom he accuses of not listening to him and holding him back from business investments when they merely express understandable

\(^{170}\) Echoing Walter’s complaints in A Raisin in the Sun, Michele Wallace goes on to explain: “…the Black man had troubles and he would have to fight the white man to get them solved, but how would he ever have the strength if his own house is not in proper order, if his wife, his woman, his mother, his sisters, who should have been his faithful servants, were undermining him at every opportunity” (91).

\(^{171}\) In his dissertation Performing Hybridity: A Dialogic and Semiotic Study of Late Twentieth Century Drama from Africa and the African Diaspora, Richard Wafula argues that Hansberry’s characters move beyond stereotypes developed by both white and Black dramatists from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century (83-84). Teresa Pagel states that the women characters in A Raisin in the Sun “both refute and reinforce the image of the Black matriarch, who seems to be a descendant of ‘Mammy’” (151). In “Staging Gendered Radicalism at the Height of the US Cold War: A Raisin in the Sun and Lorraine Hansberry’s Vision of Freedom,” Erin D. Chapman states that while some critics denigrated the “simplistic, feel-good terms” of A Raisin in the Sun, Hansberry, in fact, enacted a subversive societal critique in “an interrogation of bourgeois ‘money values,’ Black patriarchal aspiration and Black matriarchy theory” (448). Chapman, then, does not see Lena Younger as a stereotypical Black matriarch, but as dissident gendered commentary. Rather, she portrays Black matriarchy theory as misogynist in its use of Black women as “scapegoats for Black people’s ongoing economic oppression…obscuring the necessity to dismantle systemic racial capitalism” (455). According to Amiri Baraka, those who see Lena “as the stereotyped ‘Black matriarch’ of establishment and commercial sociological fame…have not bothered to look more closely at the actual woman Hansberry created – and at what tradition she in fact upholds” (11).
concerns at the feasibility of his plans. Both men fail to realize their own culpability. In the
Demeter and Persephone myth, the god Zeus, with the other Olympians, pressures the despairing
Demeter to restore the earth’s fertility without acknowledging the root cause of the widespread
famine and starvation on earth as the kidnapping and rape of Persephone; a mother’s grief is cast
aside, and she is villainized for unleashing consequences. The figure of the “strong woman,”
then, becomes a study in necessity and cause and effect of women’s strategies in failed
patriarchal society. It is tempting to laud the virtues of women like Juno, Mama, and Demeter for
their remarkable abilities to persevere in the face of numerous trials and to prioritize family
while sacrificing so much of themselves. However, this praise effaces the complicity of men (and
other women) who establish and uphold patriarchal confines.

Conclusion

This chapter has extended extant scholarship on both Sean O’Casey’s Juno and the
Paycock and Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun in its comparative analysis of the two plays
and its attention to the societal mythologies of Irish nationalism and the American Dream. Using
the mythical devices of Kathleen ni Houlihan, Prometheus, and Demeter of Persephone, the plays
reveal these ideologies as capitalist, patriarchal, and imperialist, especially in their inability to
liberate the most vulnerable by upholding previous societal inequities rather than a thorough
reformation. The urban setting is key to the engagement of societal inequalities in the plays,
especially the fleeting nature of urban tenantry under capitalism. In the next chapter, I will transfer
my exploration completely to the American setting in a reading of Eugene O’Neill’s plays A Moon
for the Misbegotten and Long Day’s Journey into Night, keeping the focus on subversive readings
of the American Dream and traditional mythology.
CHAPTER FOUR

“Trickster Heroes, Royal Pigs, and Wily Storytellers: Eugene O’Neill’s Mythological Undoing of the American Dream in Long Day’s Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten”

This chapter uses a mytho-postcolonial theoretical lens to reveal the unobtainability of the American Dream, especially related to land ownership, for poor Irish American tenant farmers in Eugene O’Neill’s Long Day’s Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten. Both plays follow the saga of the aspirational Catholic Irish immigrant Tyrone family, set in tenuous homes the early twentieth century in the northeastern United States. I address gaps in both twentieth century theater studies and O’Neill studies related to the application of postcolonial theory to O’Neill’s works, the centrality of landownership within the American Dream, the dispossession of Irish American immigrants per replicated British imperialist hegemonies, and O’Neill’s use of mythology to subvert imposed colonialist hierarchies in the American context. My argument is twofold. First, O’Neill makes land acquisition and property ownership central to the two plays’ narratives, settings, characters, and themes. While previous critical readings have (not incorrectly) emphasized the plays’ emotional power, their visceral laying bare of failed relationships, their overtly Catholic themes of guilt, sin, and redemption; and the prevalence of alcoholism and substance abuse in their characters, I argue that land ownership acquisitiveness underpins all of these. In the multi-generational saga of the Tyrone family, Long Day’s Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten, O’Neill demonstrates that the pursuit of land ownership and its illusory promise entice disempowered Catholic Irish American immigrants to pursue entry to a middle class that will never fully accept them at the
expense of their family relationships, cultural identities, and spiritual fulfillment. Second, O’Neill harnesses traditional Irish mythologies of royal and/or divine pigs and swineherds, reimagined as Irish-American tenant farmers, and the national mythology of seventeenth-century Irish hero and rebel, Hugh O’Neill, to reveal the American Dream’s land ownership hegemony as an imposed imperial system that replicates Irish colonial land ownership dispossession in the American context. Through these mythologies, O’Neill re-fashions the Irish mythological trickster and storyteller figures to subvert Anglo-Protestant land ownership hegemonies.

Land concerns in O’Neill’s plays parallel the salient topics and thematic foci of Irish drama, especially those relating to land ownership dispossession discussed in the previous chapters. These plays bridge literary expressions of postcolonial Irish relationships to land in Ireland and for Irish-Americans, especially the oppression of unfair landlord-tenant relationships, property dispossession and evictions, and Irish and Irish-American attempts to earn societal respectability, security, and generational wealth through land ownership. O’Neill’s works also highlight the lack of tenants’ rights, a common theme for immigrants to America, and oppression of Irish Americans by reproductions of British colonial ideology in the American context.

*Long Day’s Journey into Night*, written by O’Neill in 1941-42, was not published until 1956. It premiered in Stockholm, Sweden in February 1956 and on Broadway in November 1956, despite the author’s wishes that the play would remain unpublished until twenty-five years after his death. The play was immediately recognized as a masterpiece,\(^{172}\) earning the 1957 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the 1957 Tony Award. Additionally, the play revealed itself to be

---

\(^{172}\) Critics have hailed Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* as both his masterwork and one of the greatest plays of the twentieth century. O’Neill’s corpus already included groundbreaking works renowned for introducing realism into the American dramatic oeuvre and addressing complex topics such as substance abuse, family strife, class disparities, racial prejudice, and gender issues. His plays *Beyond the Horizon, Anna Christie,* and *Strange Interlude* won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1920, 1922, and 1928, respectively.
the prequel to O’Neill’s final work, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, which premiered on Broadway in 1947 and has had four revivals. Both plays tell the saga of the Tyrone family, a semi-autobiographical representation of O’Neill’s own family. *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, which takes place in a single day, portrays patriarch James Tyrone, Sr., his morphine-addicted wife Mary, alcoholic son Jamie, and ailing younger son Edmund as they hurl accusations, blame, and resentments at one another. *A Moon for the Misbegotten* recreates Jamie Tyrone as Jim Tyrone as a spiritually deadened alcoholic suffering the recent loss of both parents.

O’Neill both inherited and furthered a literary and philosophical tradition that investigated the American Dream’s betrayal of a nation’s promise and potential. Scholars have explored O’Neill’s less than flattering depiction of the American Dream and its surrounding societal myths, such as American exceptionalism and the myth of the self-made man.

Throughout his dramatic oeuvre, O’Neill’s criticizes the American Dream’s excessive capitalist-

---

173 Miller writes that “O’Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Edward Albee have directly attacked the dangers of a sacred image, demonstrating in a variety of techniques the fatal, soul-destroying consequences of unquestioned generalized acceptance of and participation in the principles of a potentially destructive national myth” (190). According to John Patrick Diggins, “O’Neill shared the conviction held by the New England Transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau” that “America had become alienated and lost its soul without knowing it,” drawing attention to “the conventions that strangled society and left its members leading ‘lives of quiet desperation’” (2). Harold Bloom points out that “the major American writers who have engaged the dream – Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, Mark Twain, Henry James, Willa Cather, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Ernest Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald, Hart Crane – have been aware of [its] haziness and of attendant ironies. And yet they have affirmed, however ambivalently, that it must be possible to have a nation in which all of us are free to develop our singularities into health, prosperity, and some measure of happiness in self-development and personal achievement” (xv).

174 Mark A. Mossman’s “Eugene O’Neill and ‘the Myth of America:’ Ephraim Cabot as the American Adam” claims that O’Neill’s character Ephraim Cabot in *Desire Under the Elms* is a “complex archetypically modern American figure” but not a “transcendental, universal, myth-fulfilling character like Billy Budd” and as such is a “modernist creation” whose literary “birth” in 1923, very recently after the “close” of the American frontier, makes Cabot a “new kind of Adam” whose “profound ambiguity in his character is a result of this newness, a characteristic of it” (52). Mossman argues that, like much of O’Neill’s work, *Desire Under the Elms* is often read from a “historically European or classical critical perspective rather than from within this type of American mythological construct” and, as such, critical focus should examine the play’s mythic structure as predicated upon both Greek and American constructs (52-54). Declan Kiberd’s “Losing Ireland, Inventing America: O’Neill and After” points to O’Neill’s towering influence in American drama and argues that his influence extends to Irish drama as well as novels and poetry (1-2). John Patrick Diggins’s *Eugene O’Neill’s America: Desire Under Democracy* argues that O’Neill shared the conviction of New England Transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson that “America had become alienated and lost its soul without knowing it” and that “O’Neill would have America see life as it is, even though we may need illusions to hide from ourselves” (2, 8).
driven greed, its conscious alienation from community-based values, and foundations in imperialism and misogyny. As discussed in relation to *A Raisin in the Sun*, the American Dream, in O’Neill’s works, represents both a societal myth and a national myth founded in white patriarchal bourgeois values, functioning as a shared narrative in the nation’s collective consciousness that fetishizes individual willpower and determination. The myth of the American Dream offers a supposedly shared goal that to which Americans can strive and establishes acquisitiveness as the dominant American philosophy. This master narrative ensures a certain level of social conformity and convenient explanation for all material achievements and disappointments in which wealth and status reflect work ethic and moral character.

With the rise of immigration and Manifest Destiny pushing the settler frontier westward, buoyed by the notion of Manifest Destiny, this “myth of material success” saw conscious formation in media in Horatio Alger’s nineteenth century novels, which “laid the foundation

---

175 In his 2007 book *Eugene O’Neill, Desire Under Democracy*, John Patrick Diggins claims that “young O’Neill felt justified in protesting a country too willing to settle for less than the imagination demanded of history. One recalls the romantic imagination evoked in the conclusion of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*... Fitzgerald’s American Dream lived on in the remote past, perhaps more imagined than real. To O’Neill, the promise of American life had been compromised from the very beginning, with the first landing of Spaniards, who spoke of God while searching for gold” (Diggins 15). O’Neill refused to praise “American exceptionalism” and its association with “a unique new republic supposedly free of Old World vices” (Diggins 49). In “O’Neill’s ending: The Tragicomedy of Distant Echoes,” Daniel Larner claims that “…the implication O’Neill casts for our political lives is that the institutions we build inevitably induce obsession and hollow themselves out, as the core of the meaning and satisfaction, which we obsessively pursue, cannot emerge because it no longer exists. It is a shell, an echo. Capitalist institutions epitomize this paradigm, building themselves in orgies of profit and power, destroying culture and social relationships, then hollowing out any remaining inner meaning to make way for the obsession with money…Our political institutions begin with absurdly inflated ideas of the glory of national identity, of the possibility of success and riches, and the birthright of freedom. All are constructed as quicksand beds, or as mirages, which, the closer one’s compulsive desires pull one to the promise they offer, the more they melt into the fog and disintegrate into the agony of loss, and the huge bitterness that comes of compulsively desiring something that you long ago learned was illusory, but which you pursue anyway, because you cannot stop. Capitalism, the system of consumerism and oppressive gender stereotypes which engenders nothing but the compulsion to buy, is the paradigm of this compulsive craving for the hollow as an ensign of the substantive, the real. We are hoping the dream will come true, that our next purchase will change our lives” (Larner 10-12).

176 Lawrence Samuel points out that “Despite the fact that his real story was more tragedy than morality tale, the Horatio Alger mythology was a powerful one that provided a solid endorsement of America’s free-enterprise system. Adults were not just interested in following the principles of free enterprise but also committed to teaching them to young people…” (66).
of the rags-to-riches myth which developed a hope of success in the minds of Americans” that
would take the form of “the false hope of material satisfaction…symbolized by land acquisition,
high salary and social acceptance” (Bhagchandani 69). As Jeffrey D. Mason states in *Melodrama
and the Myth of America*, the American Dream is “an American narrative – a myth of our shared
experience” that “assures its disciples material plenitude and opportunity for self-improvement
but demands fealty to a sense of mission that could either be romantic or crushingly
burdensome,” creating a “new Eden” of a “prelapsarian, sentimental garden where the natural
state of humanity is virtuous domesticity, where industry produces happiness, where sensible
people conform to establish belief, and where property is the emblem and evidence of moral and
worldly success” (21). As Artz and Murphy point out, the “American Dream is a dream of
consumption…the myth and its reality are closely tied to the ability of capitalism to deliver the
goods, and the myth is defended by an ideology of individual merit that gently obscures
collective subordinate conditions and experience” (276). Thus, the American Dream centers
material acquisition and bourgeois capitalist achievement as the national quest. *Long Day’s
Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* explore the primacy of land ownership
within the materialist value system of the American Dream.

The American Dream, then, dangles a promise of material and social success that
conveniently elides realities such as institutionalized racism, generational poverty, misogyny,
religious prejudice, and anti-immigrant sentiment in its focus on the individual; success and
failure is attributed solely to individual efforts, since “everyone” supposedly has the same
opportunities. This elision of lived social experiences, as Claudia Cristina Mendes points out, “is
still perpetuating a myriad of structures of oppression and segregating the US society even more”
(84). Additionally, the American Dream bolsters American exceptionalism through glossing over
and outright suppressing critical analysis of American society, leadership, and values. Ricardo Miguez contends that the American Dream “skillfully obscures historical wrongdoings and stresses (sometimes artificially) American achievements at home and abroad” (5). Thus, the American Dream is a self-perpetuating ideology that squashes potential criticisms through its fetishizing of individual effort and effacing systemic injustices.

Homing in on its foundational importance to the American Dream, O’Neill establishes land ownership as the key thematic structure, plot device, and character motivation in both Long Day’s Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten and the foundation of the ongoing dispossession of poor Catholic Irish American immigrants. The multi-generational Tyrone family, throughout both plays, embodies what Lawrence Samuel terms “the desire to own a piece of land, to have a literal stake in the nation” per the “mandate to not be tread upon or fenced in” (3). In Long Day’s Journey into Night, patriarch James Tyrone, Sr., represents the unwavering belief in the security of land, buying up land and property while leaving no money to help his ailing wife and son with medical problems. As he flips properties to generate income, his own family is itinerant, shuttled between hotels and a shabby summer home. A mythological father figure, Tyrone is a tyrant, rather than healer or leader. Additionally, Tyrone’s habits of speculating upon properties and reinvesting earnings provide temporary financial earnings rather than prevents land-based generational wealth accumulation. A Moon for the Misbegotten illustrates the precarious situation of Irish-American tenant farmers constantly facing the possibility of eviction, similar to the Irish context. Phil Hogan, also a father archetype and family patriarch, worries that landlord, Jim Tyrone (also a character in Long Day’s Journey into Night but older here), will renege on his promise to sell Phil the farm that Phil and his daughter, Josie, have occupied for over twenty years. Tyrone has made several comments about selling the farm...
to a wealthier buyer once Jim’s father’s estate is settled. Incensed, Phil Hogan employs his daughter, Josie, in an elaborate scheme to seduce Jim and ensnare him into marriage with Josie and force him to sign over the farm to Hogan. For Tyrone and the Irish-American family, the Hogans, in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, their status as Irish Catholic immigrants precludes them from entering the largely Anglo-Protestant upper echelons of society, who function as landed gentry in the American context by controlling the laws and societal standards.

**The American Dream and Land Ownership: A Reproduction of British Colonial Ideology**

O’Neill harnesses ancient myths from the Greek and Irish traditions (the latter of which will be discussed later in this chapter) in *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, to depict the American Dream in relation to land ownership and examined its ultimate unattainability to Irish-American immigrants. A postcolonial approach, specifically mytho-postcolonial, is applicable to *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* because, as explained in the previous chapter, the American Dream derives from imposed colonial ideology, and Irish-Americans, particularly poor Catholic immigrants, endured commensurate discrimination in the United States as in colonial Ireland. Recent scholarly attention has increasingly acknowledged the relationship between O’Neill’s work, his Irish heritage, and his focus of Irish/Irish American themes and characters. Using his position as a

---

177 O’Neill’s re-imaginings of Greek myth in *Desire Under the Elms*, which employed the Oedipus myth, and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, a retelling of Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*, engaged with contemporaneous modernist remakings of classical myth in art and literature to address current topics.

178 Herman Daniel Farrell III’s 2018 article “‘A Clannish Pride’: Eugene O’Neill’s Eventual Embrace of His Irish Heritage,” and E. Andrew Lee’s 2014 article “The Image of the Irish in the Life and Work of Eugene O’Neill,” have considered O’Neill’s relationship to his Irish heritage and how his concepts of “Irishness” have shaped his literary output. Lee argues that O’Neill’s frequent themes of sin, punishment, and redemption in his works reveal the influence of his Irish Catholic upbringing, even though he himself had lost faith in Catholicism early in life due to his mother’s morphine addiction; Lee points out that “O’Neill’s distinctly Irish characters speak of God, devil, and Heaven in a variety of concepts” (138). In “The Genius of O’Neill,” Tony Kushner suggests that O’Neill’s would-be protagonists, the Melodys, in his incomplete cycle *The [A] Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed*, as late-eighteenth-century Irish immigrants, much like his mother’s family (251).
first-generation American descended from Irish immigrant families on both parents’ sides, O’Neill, in his drama, bears witness to the failures of the American promise of wealth and equal opportunity. Throughout his early youth and adulthood, Irish Catholics were an actively denigrated social group in the United States. At the turn of the century, Noel Jacob Kent describes Irish people as “permanently consigned to the underclass of unskilled laborers and housemaids” and “the object of abuse and violence from the anti-Catholic Know Nothings and other nativists” (99). Along with other prominently Catholic immigrant groups such as Germans and Italians, the Irish were “popularly stereotyped as lazy, stupid, and unstable” and “were prone to begin and end their working lives at heavy manual, mind-numbing work” (Kent 81). Due to these factors, for O’Neill, the promise of the American Dream and the corresponding myth of the self-made man failed to materialize for poor Irish Americans.

In his work, O’Neill explored the notion of a uniquely American literature, particularly the American drama, in the context of a nation which he deemed an abject failure. From a postcolonial lens, the very construction of America itself, in its attempts to establish an identity apart from Britain, has not facilitated improved circumstances for its inhabitants due to its inattention to economic and societal restructuring beyond capitalist acquisitiveness and the continuing influences of America’s foundation in chattel slavery, theft of indigenous lands, and patriarchy. This is reflected in national literature. As Ashcroft et al state, the “first post-colonial society to develop a ‘national’ literature was the USA,” and this American national literature particularly explored “the optimistic progression to nationhood because it seemed that this was

---

179 According to Kent, “There were still in 1900 an abundance of poor shanty and lower working-class Irish Americans residing in Chicago, Boston, New York, and elsewhere, and high rates of tuberculosis were registered among children of mothers born in Ireland. Big-city criminal gangs were often composed of second-generation Irishmen. Being Irish still carried a stigma in many places, and negative Irish stereotypes around strong drink and popery abounded. They continued to be excluded from established society” (Kent 100).
one of the most potent areas in which to express *difference* from Britain” (15). For O’Neill and other realist dramatists, literary exploration of nationhood took a notably pessimistic tone in its consideration of lived experiences of hardship and dispossession. In “Myth and the American Dream: O’Neill to Albee,” Jordan Y. Miller notes that in a 1946 interview, O’Neill claimed that “America was the greatest success and the dismal failure as a country that the world has ever known” before spending his remaining active years writing a play cycle “based upon this view of his country’s split personality” that aimed “to reveal the nation’s progressive failure and loss of soul as reflected in the history of a single American family from colonial days to the present” (190).

In a review of the Gate Theatre’s 1998 production of *Long Day’s Journey into Night* in the *Irish Times*, Fintan O’Toole identifies a “paradox” in O’Neill’s works as “he was trying to create a national drama for what he saw as a lost, failed nation. His plays do not celebrate the America they reflect, they mourn it…What makes him great is that he is so much at odds with the climate of his country. And in this, it is, for an Irish audience at least, worth noting that the Irish strain in his makeup is what gives his work its compelling, tormented contrariness” (11). According to O’Toole, this “paradox” also marks the work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, whom he identifies as “coming in [O’Neill’s] wake” and for whom “O’Neill’s disillusion with the American Dream was a critical precedent” (11). While these playwrights “invented a modern American theatre,” each was “in various ways at odds with modern America…edging in from the outside” of American consciousness, and each speaking from “a

---

180 “The rare public interview given by O’Neill after his ‘silence,’ in anticipation of the opening of *Iceman*, clearly reveals his attitude toward America. His oft-quoted words provide the context to any evaluation of his history Cycle. America, he said, ‘instead of being the most successful country in the world, is the greatest failure. It’s the greatest failure because it was given anything, more than any other country…Its main idea is that everlasting game of trying to possess your own soul by the possession of something outside of it.’ Possession and greed, he believed, had destroyed the soul of America” (Berlin 82).
specific sub-culture outside the mainstream\textsuperscript{181} (11). Thus, O’Neill, as an Irish-American immigrant, examines the American Dream from the position of a group for whom the American Dream’s promise was largely inaccessible in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A mytho-postcolonial approach to O’Neill’s plays must consider how anti-Irish prejudice in the United States reflects imposed imperialist hegemonies and follows similar prejudice in Great Britain. Subject to both ethnic and religious prejudice\textsuperscript{182} since the earliest waves of immigration to the United States, Irish Americans both fought against and attempted to achieve success through the same Anglo-Protestant standards they endured in Great Britain. According to Lawrence John McCaffrey in \textit{Textures of Irish America}, “Anglo-American Protestants inherited the anti-Catholicism of British nativism and considered Catholicism as a superstitious and tyrannical danger to American culture and institutions…the arrival of the aggressively and self-consciously Catholic Irish in large numbers convinced most Anglo-American Protestants that the curse of popery had reached their shores” (2). In \textit{Beyond the American Pale: The Irish in the West 1845-1910}, David Emmons, while acknowledging that his is a contrarian opinion, nevertheless argues that “true American republicanism was based on Protestantism,” and as such, “…the American response to Irish Catholics was almost a mirror image of what had occurred in

\textsuperscript{181} O’Toole notes that “In O’Neill’s case, his Irish background is crucial to virtually everything he wrote. Miller’s consciousness is strongly, if not always explicitly, Jewish. And Williams’s sensibility is very much that of the defeated economically marginalized South” (O’Toole 11). Additionally, Williams was “a gay writer at the time when homosexuality, even in the theatre, was denied an official existence” (O’Toole 11).

\textsuperscript{182} “Anti-Catholicism…was an integral element of American politics and culture in the 1920s and beyond. As for elite culture…anti-Catholicism was the one intellectually respectable form of bigotry in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. The equation of Catholicism with anti-democracy and anti-republicanism has long roots in American history, stretching back to the Revolution and beyond. But what is surprising is the extent to which this form of anti-Catholicism survived into the twentieth century, especially among intellectuals. Indeed, Catholic ‘authoritarianism’ was generally construed as so clearly the opposite of the democratic ideal that anti-Catholicism became a central component of the liberal creed…the hierarchical (some said ‘authoritarian’) element in Catholicism weakened individualism and freedom, clearing the way to totalitarian government” (Kenny 208-209).
Britain” because “both societies were based on a self-conscious Protestantism and on the aggressive anti-Catholicism that was central to it” (6). In this way, according to Emmons, “the anti-Catholicism of Britain as mother country and of America as rebellious progeny were alike in style and substance” (Emmons 6).

The American Dream appears the flagship philosophy of Anglo-Protestant values in the fledgling nation, based on what David Lloyd terms the “Protestant ethic of labor and accumulation” that also existed in Britain (5). Additionally, as explained in the previous chapter, the American Dream derived from a nationalist rejection of imperial ideology. As Heike points out, “the notion that upward mobility in US society is unlimited regardless of inherited social and financial status has been used to contrast the US to European societies with rigidly stratified social hierarchies” (367). However, the American Dream and the myth of the self-made man have not granted the social mobility promised by the new nation’s rejection of European imperial ideology. Rather, de facto class hegemony remains as strong as ever in the American context due to an emulation of white materialist values from the former colonizer. Despite this, belief in class mobility remains an almost religious aspect of American ideology and ensures conformity to continued belief in the American Dream’s promise. As Lawrence Samuel points out, “although in recent years study after study have shown upward mobility to be an even greater myth than the Dream itself, most Americans refuse to believe such a thing, the concept of class fluidity so ingrained in our national ethos. This feeling of entitlement, that if one plays by the rules one will in time reap his or her just rewards, has led many an American astray…our mythology taken for a promise” (7). Thus, while American society, especially in its nascent years, may have prided itself on establishing a nation independent from Britain in style and substance, this could not be
further than reality for most Americans, especially those oppressed by racial, gendered, immigration status, and economic hegemonies.

Thus, postcolonial America follows the example of other former colonies in recreating the colonizer’s standards in the new nation, which Chatterjee describes as the “ambivalent rejection” within nationalism that calls for “the rejection of the alien intruder and dominator who is nevertheless to be imitated and surpassed by his own standards” (2). Additionally, the phenomenon of the embrace of British anti-Catholicism and anti-Irish ethnic prejudice in favor of an acquisitive Anglo-Protestant capitalism emblematizes Fanon’s description of the nationalist bourgeois, a class who inherits “those unfair advantages that are a legacy of the colonial period” (152). This phenomenon depends on a failure to restructure the imperial capitalist economy, which certainly is the case in the American context. The Anglo-Protestant ruling hegemony in the United States, as depicted in O’Neill’s plays, embodies Fanon’s nationalist bourgeois. Both Long Day’s Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten contain Anglo-Protestant landlord figures who represent the very top social and economic echelon who benefit from residual white patriarchal colonialist hegemonies.

Due to their supposed inability to conform to Anglo-Protestant capitalist work practices and their adherence to Catholicism, the Irish in colonial Ireland and Irish immigrants in America were deemed hopelessly “backwards” and unfit to maintain Enlightenment-influenced notions of forward linear progress. Irish communalism both opposed and directly threatened this ideology in both America and Britain\(^\text{183}\), destabilizing the very center of the capitalist, accumulative,

\(^{183}\) In this philosophical vein, In “Black Irish, Irish Whiteness, and Atlantic State Formation, David Lloyd summarizes various labor-based racializations of the Irish, including John Stuart Mill’s approach, which was “prognostic in its transformation of racial stereotypes toward an evolutionary model coherent with the larger liberal project of empire” and “reinscribed the Irish as a race essentially in need of guidance from without in order to overcome an habituated long-formed habits of shiftlessness” and contrasted “their incapacity for sustained labor and their customary social and political dependence with Anglo-Saxon self-dependence” (Lloyd 8). Lloyd notes that “writing on the eve of the Famine in 1843, political economist Nassau Senior noted all these characteristics of the
individual-driven American Dream. In “Black Irish, Irish Whiteness, and Atlantic State Formation,” David Lloyd examines communal Irish labor positionality, which he terms “the Irish offense to political economy,” in relation to Anglo-Protestant accumulation practices\(^1\) (5). He relates how British racialized constructions were, in large part, a reaction to the Irish as “a deeply destabilizing force of possible alternatives to the emerging norms of labor and politics under industrial capitalism” (Lloyd 7). Just as, according to Dipesh Chakrabarty, colonial subjects “were assigned a place ‘elsewhere’ in the first in Europe and then elsewhere’ structure of time” that deemed them undeserving of self-governance until they had proven themselves sufficiently civilized, Irish-American immigrants were unworthy of the American Dream’s potential until they could properly embrace its tenets (22).

Irish shuttling into menial labor and poor housing conditions was often used to further their societal dispossession as evidence that they were unfit to fully participate in American life. According to Emmons, the Catholic Irish immigrants were categorized as lacking the “plucky individualism necessary” for full participation in Manifest Destiny and the American Dream (10). Most Irish immigrants in America arrived penniless and lived in hazardous, cramped tenant situations in cities, forced to do lowly work as their work and educational possibilities were limited. Irish immigrants worked in mines, mills, railroad construction, shipyards, and service professions. Therefore, their economic dispossession formed an anti-Irish prejudice based upon circular logic; because of their difficulties adjusting to American society, Irish immigrants were clearly unable to conform and unworthy of the promises of the American Dream. Their

---

\(^{1}\) According to Lloyd, “…the Irish example was feared to be contagious not so much because of its literal transmission of disease and squalid living to English slums as on account of its paradoxically utopian anti-capitalism” (5).
communal labor attitudes, dangerous and destabilizing to American capitalist values, precluded them from the myth of the self-made man.

**American Dream, British Dispossession: Land Struggles for Irish-American Immigrants in**

*Long Day’s Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten*

O’Neill uses land struggles to highlight the reproduction of colonial relationships in the American context in *A Moon for the Misbegotten* and *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. In both America and Britain, land ownership grants access to power, generational wealth, and social standing. In both contexts, there is a stigma associated with failure to own land and access an empowered community. In America, land ownership grants privileges of suffrage, especially prior to African American and white men’s universal suffrage. In England, peerage is connected to ancient land ownership, and English absentee landlords dominated the Catholic majority in Ireland. While scholars have commented on the reproduction of strife between the English and the Irish in these plays, the land ownership aspect has received some, yet significantly less, critical attention, with O’Neill scholarship emphasizing his maritime settings. In both *Long

---

185 Herman Daniel Farrell III contends that “O’Neill’s deep understanding of the long struggle between the Irish and the English, with all of the class and ethnic strife built into that history, was dramatized in his last three completed plays” (69). In “The Image of the Irish in the Life and Work of Eugene O’Neill,” E. Andrew Lee points to the struggles between O’Neill’s Irish American characters and their Anglicized foes: Despite obvious class differences, Phil Hogan and Jim Tyrone find themselves allied as Irishmen against a traditional foe – the Anglo pseudo-aristocrat. In [*A Moon for the Misbegotten*], T. Stedman Harder is the Standard Oil millionaire aiming to buy Tyrone’s property in order to evict his Irish tenants. In *Long Day’s Journey*, written earlier, Harker was the name of the oil baron who suffered the indignity of being outwitted by the ‘wily Shanty Mick’ (3.724) named Shaughnessy” (Lee 156-157).

186 In “Classifying Rural Dramas: O’Neill’s *Desire Under the Elms* and Schonherr’s *Erde, Saur argues that the rural setting is essential to the play, stating that “owning and cultivating rural land is an integral issue” and that “relationship to the land is the determining factor in the familial and sex roles” (103). (102). Robert Baker-White’s “Blarsted Dirt, Bloomin’ Farm, Mysterious Darkness: The Presence and Rhythm of Rural Nature in O’Neill’s Early Plays” claims that the relationship of the Mayo brothers to the land determines their ultimate fates in O’Neill’s *Desire Under the Elms* and that the brothers orient themselves to three ideas about the farm, which are all introduced in the opening dialogue: “…farm as idyll, farm as workplace, and horizon as freedom” (61). Additionally, Baker-White argues that O’Neill disrupts the notion of the de facto virtue of rural life and its inhabitants (which I would argue echoes the work of J.M. Synge in works like *The Playboy of the Western World* and Patrick Kavanagh in “The Great Hunger”) stating that “Beyond the Horizon” may be O’Neill’s most cutting denunciation of environmental mythology…the ecological terrain that O’Neill chooses to excoriate here is his native New England soil…the hollowness of the ‘rural values’ embodied by the successful family farm is revealed most
Day’s Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten, the Hogan and Tyrone family struggles echo centuries of land-related dispossession for poor Irish people. In Long Day’s Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten, Eugene O’Neill demonstrates that, despite its attempts to distinguish itself from Britain, America especially promulgated its same standards based upon capitalism and acquisition, especially related to land ownership, as the Irish-American immigrant characters strive for social and material stability and respectability through the same acquisitive land ownership practices as their Anglo-Protestant “Yankee” neighbors. In the plays, the flawed Irish-American embrace of capitalist Anglo-Protestant land accumulation standards materializes through the experience of the Tyrone family, who will never achieve parity with the likes of their neighbors, the Chatfields, the Harkers, the Harders, etc., who represent the upper echelons of Anglo-Protestant society. The family stays at a shabby summer home with snobby neighbors who reject them yet represent standards to which they long to aspire. They pursue accumulation of land as their hoped-for, but never achieved, sense of material and social success. O’Neill shows how the Tyrones deny their Irishness as flawed as they internalize imperial standards, especially as they forget their own history of evictions and

strikingly in Robert’s seething exposure of Andy’s entirely instrumental approach to the fruits of labor in his Argentine futures training” (66). Wei H. Kao, in “Troubled Desires and Social taboos in Eugene O’Neill’s and Marina Carr’s Dreams of Land,” contends that O’Neill and Marina Carr shared an interest in the themes of forbidden characters in Greek tragedies and mythology, especially that of incest, and that their adaptations of Greek tragedy in their plays Desire Under the Elms and On Raftery’s Hill situated women’s desires in the religious settings of New England and the Irish midlands (48). Kao explores the intertwining between disordered sexuality and the desire for land in both plays, pointing out that incestuous affairs secure land ownership in each work.

187 Mary Tyrone’s musings on their social status in a conversation with Edmund: (She pauses, looking out the window – then with an undercurrent of lonely yearning): Still, the Chatfields and people like them stand for something. I mean they have decent, presentable homes they don’t have to be ashamed of. They have friends who entertain them and whom they entertain. They’re not cut off from everyone. (She turns back from the window.) Not that I want anything to do with them. I’ve always hated this town and everyone in it. You know that. I never wanted to live here in the first place, but your father liked it and insisted on building this house, and I’ve had to come here every summer.
dispossession. This reflects Chatterjee’s description of the rejection of the colonizer and the simultaneous embrace of colonial standards.

While seeming secondary to the themes and topics of denial, blame, guilt, forgiveness, addiction, family issues, and fatalism, land and property issues are the foundation of all other factors in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. In the figure of James Tyrone, Sr., O’Neill embodies the uneasy and detrimental embrace of land ownership to social and economic security and ties acquisitive land ownership practices to masculinity and fatherhood. Having left school at the age of ten to work in a machine shop to support his family, who had endured crushing poverty and multiple evictions, James Tyrone accepts a stereotypical part in the popular and successful *Count of Monte Cristo* and invests all his earnings in buying land and properties. Throughout the play, both Tyrone and his family frequently complain about his land-buying habits; while Tyrone insists that investing in land, especially property speculation and property “flipping,” is the only way to ensure material security. However, his extreme stinginess because of investing most of his earnings into land has turned his family members against him. The opening exchange of the play quickly turns to a discussion about land between Tyrone and his wife, Mary. When Tyrone praises a batch of cigars that his business associate, McGuire, had recommended to him, the mere mention of McGuire’s name quickly irritates his wife and entices Tyrone to react defensively in what seems like an all-too-common disagreement:

Mary (*A trifle acidly*): I hope he didn’t put you on to any new piece of property at the same time. His real estate bargains don’t work out so well.

Tyrone (*Defensively.*): I wouldn’t say that, Mary. After all, he was the one who advised me to buy that place on Chestnut street and I made a quick turnover on it for a fine profit.
Mary (*Smiles now with teasing affection.*): I know. The famous one stroke of good luck.

I’m sure McGuire never dreamed – *Then she pats his hand.* Never mind, James. I know it’s a waste of breath trying to convince you you’re not a cunning real estate speculator.

Tyrone (*Huffily.*): I’ve no such idea. But land is land, and it’s safer than the stocks and bonds of Wall Street swindlers (O’Neill 19).

This brief exchange reveals Tyrone’s ironclad belief in the security of property accumulation to the detriment of his family relationships. Even though Tyrone is correct in his assertion that land is a safe investment, his speculating on properties for brief ownership stints prevents the accumulation of future wealth for his family through land ownership. As demonstrated in this exchange, when his family points out his hypocrisy, Tyrone lashes out.

Mary Tyrone, who suffers from a morphine addiction, blames her husband’s miserliness for her addiction as he did not hire a qualified doctor when she delivered their son Edmund, leaving her dependent upon the morphine the doctor administered. Tyrone refuses to send Edmund to a quality private treatment facility, instead insisting that his taxes as a property owner already support the public sanatorium and that he is too “land-poor” to afford a private one. Tyrone’s sons, especially Jamie, are quick to criticize their father’s stinginess at the family’s detriment. When Tyrone claims financial hardship as the land is “all mortgaged” and thus wishes to send Edmund to a state-run sanatorium, Jamie quickly retorts: “Because you always buy more land instead of paying off mortgages. If Edmund was a lousy acre of land you wanted, the sky would be the limit!” (O’Neill 31). Jamie’s sneering comment reveals the Tyrone sons’ bitterness at their father’s prioritizing land investments over his family.

In dealing with tenants, Tyrone is impatient and harsh, replicating the same mercilessness with which landlords treated his poverty-stricken single mother in Ireland. Here, he reenacts the
same fraught landlord-tenant relationship that Irish people endured for centuries at the hands of often absentee British and Anglo-Irish landlords. When Edmund mentions that he met Shaughnessy, one of Tyrone’s tenants, at the Inn, Tyrone immediately criticizes Shaughnessy as a “wily Shanty Mick” who “could hide behind a corkscrew,” demanding to know “what’s he complaining about now, Edmund, for I’m damned sure he’s complaining” (26). Tyrone’s comments display his attempted assimilation of internalized Anglo-Protestant landowning standards. He feels that he can ensure his own security by embracing and reproducing these hierarchical relationships with himself in the superior position. This represents the “liberal bargain” discussed in previous chapters; per Sa’ar’s analysis, Tyrone embraces the flawed tenets of liberalism to reap its benefits for himself, and, in doing so, perpetuates dispossession upon others (682). In “Losing Ireland, Inventing America: O’Neill and After,” Declan Kiberd argues that the family’s attempts to put down roots in a summer house “smacks of the Anglo-Irish” and that “the Tyrones seem more like absentee landlords, fretful about every unnecessary expense,” observing that “…Long Day’s Journey Into Night explains why it’s hard for people who knew only evictions to put down roots” (Kiberd 13). However, yearning for property has left Tyrone materially and spiritually bereft. He now must contend with his wife’s addiction, his son Jamie’s profligate behavior, and his son Edmund’s ongoing debilitating illness.

In his pursuit of land ownership, James Tyrone, Sr., also rejects emotional, spiritual, and artistic fulfillment. In an especially sad moment in Long Day’s Journey into Night, James Tyrone, Sr., equates his ambition for success in the theater with denying his Irish identity: “I was wild with ambition. I read all the plays ever written. I studied Shakespeare as you’d study the Bible. I educated myself. I got rid of an Irish brogue you could cut with a knife” (O’Neill 125). In addition to succumbing to imposed imperialist standards regarding his Irish accent, James
Tyrone, Sr.’s devotion to Shakespeare belies British colonial influence. Shakespeare’s specter haunts the Irish actor who condemns himself as an artistic failure for his rejection of Shakespeare as the gold standard of theatre excellence. Tyrone, too late, recognizes that his embrace of a one-note, unchallenging role with commercial appeal and guaranteed income has ruined his chances for artistic achievement. According to Tyrone, before he bought the play, he “was considered one of the three or four young actors with the greatest artistic promise in America” (124). Tyrone mourns that the “God-damned play [he] bought for a song and made such a great success in – a great money success…ruined [him] with its promise of an easy fortune” (125). He describes himself as “a slave to the damn thing” that permanently identified him with one part and made him lose “the great talent [he] once had through years of easy repetition, never learning a new part, never really working hard” (125). Tyrone has traded his artistic talent and ambitions for precarious financial success and social respectability.

The entire action of A Moon for the Misbegotten, the sequel to Long Day’s Journey into Night, ties land ownership and the American Dream. In presenting the all-too-familiar threat of eviction, O’Neill evokes images of Irish peasant tenant farmers and poor white and African American sharecroppers in the United States. Tenant pig farmer Phil Hogan struggles to hold onto his long-occupied yet unowned land with his seemingly unmarriageable daughter, Josie, whom he calls “a terrible wanton woman,” as his three sons have deserted him to escape his “slave-driving” (O’Neill 36, 42). Hogan and Josie scheme to entrap their landlord, Jim Tyrone (the elder son from Long Day’s Journey into Night), into marrying Josie and selling the farm to Hogan rather than to real estate developers or, more dangerously, to the owner of the neighboring estate, Standard Oil millionaire T. Stedman Harder. While Jim Tyrone shares his Irish heritage with the Hogans, he represents the landlord class of America, like his father in
Long Day’s Journey into Night. The Hogans’ position is dangerous as in the early twentieth century, landlords could capriciously evict tenants at a moment’s notice, as there was little government protection for renters.

Like other plays in this study, including A Raisin in the Sun, Kathleen ni Houlihan, By the Bog of Cats..., and Juno and the Paycock, inheritance is the main plot device driving the action in A Moon for the Misbegotten. At the beginning of the play, Jim Tyrone is awaiting the settlement of his father’s estate. Phil Hogan frets about Jim Tyrone’s possible interest in Act 1, Scene 1 in selling the farm he rents from Jim to other parties.

Hogan: I’m serious, and you’d better listen, because it’s about this farm, which is home to us.

Josie (Surprised, stares at him.): What about the farm?

Hogan: Don’t forget, if we have lived on it twenty years, we’re only tenants and we could be thrown out on our necks any time. (Quickly.) Mind you, I don’t say Jim would ever do it, rent or no rent, or let the executors do it, even if they wanted, which they don’t, knowing they’d never find another tenant.

Josie: What’s worrying you then?

Hogan: This. I’ve been afraid lately the minute the estate is out of probate, Jim will sell the farm (O’Neill 50).

This conversation reflects the precarious nature of the tenant existence. As both tenants and Irish immigrants in heavily Anglo-Protestant New England, Hogan and Josie cannot access the promise of the American Dream through the social standing and generational wealth afforded by land ownership. Even O’Neill’s stage directions describe their home itself as an outsider in its Yankee environment: “The house is not, to speak mildly, a fine example of New England
architecture, placed so perfectly in its setting that it appears a harmonious part of the landscape, rooted in the earth. It has been moved to its present site, and looks it” (O’Neill 25). Hogan and Josie fear that the upcoming inheritance will make them homeless. Although Jim Tyrone, their landlord, has promised to sell the farm to Hogan and Josie after the settlement of his father’s estate, he has also alluded to Hogan that he may have other interested buyers. While Josie urges Hogan not to take Jim seriously and reminds that “Jim loves to try and get [his] goat,” Hogan worries that the potential client might be the “damn fool of a millionaire buying land to make a great estate for himself, like [their] beautiful neighbor, Harder, the Standard Oil thief” (O’Neill 51). As Harder employs an English manager, whom Hogan curses as a “Limey superintendent,” he both represents the Anglo-Protestant elite in America and the British landowning class. Hogan is especially disturbed by Jim’s tendency to fall into “his sneering bitter drunks” in which he makes statements like “money is the only thing in the world, and everything and anyone can be bought if the price is big enough” (O’Neill 52). In this exchange, O’Neill establishes landlord/tenant relationships as the primary plot and thematic device of A Moon for the Misbegotten as well as the characters’ primary motivation. While Tyrone’s later heart wrenching moonlight confession and absolution at Josie’s breast provides the emotional climax of the play, the entire moonlight rendezvous between the two is a manufactured encounter stemming from these property issues.

Archival Research and Long Day’s Journey into Night: A Case Study of the 1985 Abbey Theatre Production

My readings of both Long Day’s Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten, reveal the primacy of land and tenant relationships, especially in the context of a wider tradition of Irish and Irish-American literature. However, it was an almost accidental archival discovery while parsing materials related to Eugene O’Neill in the Abbey Theatre collection, housed
digitally at the National University of Ireland, Galway, that directly solidified, in an almost physical way, the foundational importance of land and property to O’Neill’s work. Given the influence of the 1911 Abbey Theatre tour of New England upon O’Neill’s writing career, which produced, according to Nelson O’Ceallaigh Ritschel, “an American dramatist in a Syngean vein,” I was curious to explore O’Neill’s reception in Ireland, especially through the many O’Neill plays produced by the Abbey itself.

While studying the Abbey’s February 1985 production of *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, I was taken aback by the almost overwhelming number of negative reviews on the Abbey’s February 1985 production of *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. This struck me as especially odd considering its stellar cast, including acclaimed veteran actors Siobhan McKenna and Godfrey Quigley, and its famed director, legendary stage, TV, and film actor and director Patrick Laffan. The critical reviews bemoan the production’s lack of emotional power and failure to captivate its...

---

188 Many theatre scholars have noted the immense influence of the Abbey Theatre upon O’Neill’s dramatic style, thematic foci, acting philosophy, and tone, most notably as a refreshing alternative to the schmaltzy melodrama that had previously dominated American theatre. In “Ireland and O’Neill,” Audrey McNamara and Nelson O’Ceallaigh Ritschel claim that “the influence of [the 1911-12 Abbey Theatre Tour] cannot be understated, regardless of whether those being influenced identified themselves as Irish or not” (v-vi). In “The Haunted O’Neills,” a programme note in the February 1985 Abbey Theatre production of *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, noted Irish poet and non-fiction writer Michael O’hAoda quoted O’Neill’s remarks on the Abbey Tour: “It was seeing the Irish Players that gave me the first glimpse of my opportunity…I went to everything they did. I thought then and I still think that they demonstrate the possibilities of naturalistic acting better than any other company.” According to Nelson O’Ceallaigh Ritschel, “The opportunity that the Abbey Theatre illuminated [for O’Neill] was two-fold: its restrained acting style and production values arguably led to American independent, non-commercial theater values like the Washington Square Players and the Provincetown Players, while the works of the Abbey’s John Millington Synge specifically offered O’Neill a methodology into folk lyricism” (129-130). Ritschel also states that “…without a doubt, the Abbey acting style of 1911 was far more life-like for O’Neill than the large and exaggerated style of Broadway theater. The Irish form appeared much more natural and truthful as the actors slowly and deliberately delivered their lines” (Ritschel 132). In his book *Abbey Theatre, Dublin 1904-1966*, Gabriel Fallon quoted Brinsley MacNamara, a member of the 1911-1912 Abbey Tour on the influence of the Abbey upon O’Neill and the wider American dramatic tradition: “Is it not a fact that Eugene O’Neill, the Irish American, who is probably, ahead even of Shaw, the foremost dramatist in the world today, had his first urge to write from seeing the work of Synge in the repertoire of the Company during these first Abbey tours?…And would there not be a great deal of truth in it if one said that by these visits of our Theatre the seeds of a remarkable new development on the American Theatre were sown, resulting in a whole new body of American writers, poets, novelists, as well as dramatists, who sprang into production all in the space of a few years?” (20)
audience into the storied tribulations of the Tyrone family. In his article “Low Key Production of Eugene O’Neill Classic” for the *Evening Herald*, Ronan Fannon describes the “low key” nature of the production in which “the rage is subdued, the pain of the three male Tyrones as they watch the mother slip into her addiction once again, less intense than in the three previous Abbey productions” and concludes that “for all its fine qualities the passion is spread a bit thin” (5). In a review for the *Irish Times*, David Nowland calls the production “curiously flat,” lamenting that “the production suffers from a lack of definition and would benefit hugely from an injection of the theatricality which the author knew so well” (6). In “The Long Night of O’Neill’s Soul” for the *Evening Press*, Con Houlihan remarks that “the proverbial suspension of disbelief was hardly achieved last night” and that the normally “dramatic” Tyrones “seemed only dull” (8). In “‘Journey’ Does not Reach the Right Terminus” in *The Sunday Press*, Tim Harding observes that “the catastrophe that at last divides and demolishes the Tyrone (O’Neill) family is too cozy. Their condemnations of each other do not reach event at the climax, a sustained height (or should it be depth?) of searing damnation” (11). Fintan O’Toole, writing for the *Sunday Tribune*, attributes the play’s failure to its lack of attention to its Irishness. According to O’Toole, “Ireland gives its resonance to every line in the play, the Ireland that forced its children into the boat and into the dog-eat-dog world of immigrant America. Yet in the Irish national theatre’s production of the play this Irish dimension is all but ignored, and the play is denied any real insight into the forces that drive it,” which leads to an abiding sense in *Long Day’s Journey into Night* at the Abbey of a play chosen for no clear reason, directed with no particular inspiration and acted for the most part with a deep uncertainty” (10).

It is Fintan O’Toole’s assessment that particularly piqued my interest in this apparently dull production. To put it colloquially, something just didn’t add up. Why would a production of
what is commonly acknowledged as one of the greatest American plays of the twentieth century with such a star-studded cast and experienced director fail so miserably? This line of inquiry led me further into the Abbey archive, particularly the play’s prompt scripts, to see if there were any alterations. It is common practice for directors of modern theatrical productions of Long Day’s Journey into Night to perform judicious text cutting, as the play’s running time spans over four hours with an unedited script. Examining the prompt scripts revealed that, not only were many of the most emotionally searing lines cut, but, most importantly, these included the bulk of the lines related to Tyrone Sr.’s childhood poverty, his atavistic acquisition of land, and his miserly behavior towards his family. For example, in the following removed exchange, Jamie accuses his father of stinginess while wasting money on poor property deals:

Jamie. Well, don’t give Hardy your old over-the-hills-to-the-poorhouse song about taxes and mortgages.

Tyrone. I’m no millionaire who can throw money away! Why shouldn’t I tell Hardy the truth?

Jamie. Because he’ll think you want him to pick a cheap dump, and because he’ll know it isn’t the truth – especially if he hears afterwards you’ve seen McGuire and let that flannel-mouth, gold-brick merchant sting you with another piece of bum property!

(O’Neill Act 2).

---

189 For example, the following heated exchange, which highlights Tyrone’s extreme disappointment with his son, Jamie was cut: Tyrone. After all the money I’d wasted on your education, and all you did was get fired in disgrace from every college you went to! Jamie. Oh, for God’s sake, don’t drag up that ancient history! Tyrone. It’s not ancient history that you have come home every summer to live on me. Jamie. I earn my board and lodging working on the grounds. It saves you hiring a man. Tyrone. Bah! You have to be driven to do even that much! (His anger ebbs into a weary complaint.) I wouldn’t give a damn if you ever displayed the slightest sign of gratitude. The only thanks is to have you sneer at me for a dirty miser, sneer at my profession, sneer at every damned thing in the world – except yourself. Jamie. (wryly). That’s not true, Papa. You can’t hear me talking to myself, that’s all. Tyrone (stares at him puzzled, then quite mechanically), Ingratitude, the vilest weed that grows”! Jamie. I could see that link coming! God, how many thousand times!
Also, Edmund’s vicious blaming his mother’s morphine addiction on Tyrone was removed: “…instead you put her in the hands of a hotel quack who wouldn’t admit his ignorance and too the easiest way out, not giving a damn what happened to her afterwards! All because his fee was cheap! Another one of your bargains!” These missing sections highlight the foundations underlying the characters’ fraught relationships; without them, the virulent furies the Tyrones continuously hurl at one another seem overblown and ultimately confusing to the audience.

The production’s editing of patriarch James Tyrone’s speeches, however, truly removes the play’s dramatic power. Tyrone’s following speeches, which detail his childhood struggles and self-entrapment in The Count of Monte Cristo at the expense of a legitimate acting career, appear below with the struck portions matching those in the prompt script:

Tyrone: My mother was left, a stranger in a strange land with four small children, me and a sister a little older and two younger than me. My two older brothers had moved to other parts. They couldn’t help. They were hard put to it to keep themselves alive. There was—no damned romance in our poverty. Twice we were evicted from the miserable hovel we called home, with my mother’s few sticks of furniture thrown out into the street, and my mother and sisters crying. I cried too, though. I tried hard not to because I was the man—of the family. At ten years old!...and my poor mother washed and scrubbed for the Yanks by the day, and my older sister sewed, and my two younger stayed at home to keep the house. We never had clothes enough to wear, nor enough food to eat. (O’Neill 150).

Tyrone: I’ve never admitted this to anyone before, lad, but tonight I’m so heartsick I feel at the end of everything, and what’s the use of fake pride and pretence. That God-damned play I bought for a song and made such a great success in – a great money success – it ruined me with its promise of an easy fortune. I didn’t want to do anything else, and by
the time I woke up to the fact I’d become a slave to the damned thing and did try other—
plays, it was too late. They had identified me with that one part, and didn’t want me in—
anything else. They were right, too. I’d lost the great talent I once had through years of—
easy repetition, never learning a new part, never really working hard. Thirty-five to forty
thousand dollars net profit a season like snapping your fingers! It was too great a
temptation.

I reproduce these speeches from the prompt scripts with their struck sections in context as
they explain the staggeringly poor reviews and reveal that the themes of land and property
acquisition as related to poverty and survival are the very center of *Long Day’s Journey into Night*,
rather than adjacent to it. I contend that the excision of these lines directly led to the production’s
critical rejection. The 1985 Abbey Theatre production’s critics overwhelmingly pointed to its lack
of emotional core, its dearth of character depth and purpose, and its failure to achieve its
heartbreaking climax. These edited passages demonstrate the removal of so many of the play’s key
lines that, in their absence, the audience fails to connect with the characters’ property-based plight
and cannot understand their tragic motivations. The missing portions of Tyrone’s first lengthy
speech quoted here lay bare his miserable childhood and the recounting of his family’s evictions
from their “miserable hovel we called home, with my mother’s few sticks of furniture thrown out
into the street, and my mother and sisters crying” (O’Neill 150). Even in this moment, the ten-
year-old Tyrone feels responsible for his family and does not allow himself to cry because he, in
the wake of his father’s departure, “was the man of the family” (O’Neill 150). Additional removed
lines would have allowed the audience to sympathize with James Tyrone as a ten-year-old child
tasked with supporting his family, terrified at the prospect of once again losing his home, working
in a machine shop rather than attending school in a desperate attempt to support his family.
These removed lines also grant sympathy to the adult Tyrone. For example, without them, we miss Tyrone’s poignant reflection on the loss of a challenging acting career in great dramatic works such as Shakespeare and Ibsen due to his typecasting in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, which he saw as an easy opportunity for guaranteed financial success and a surefire way to protect his young family from his childhood suffering. Without Tyrone’s lamentation that he’d “become a slave to the damned thing” and had “lost the great talent I once had through years of easy repetition, never learning a new part, never really working hard,” this speech casts him as a money-hungry schemer looking for the quickest and easiest way to land a fortune” (O’Neill 152). The removed sections also cast Tyrone in a more sympathetic light when he mourns the loss of an artistically fulfilling career as a Shakespearean actor: “I loved Shakespeare. I would have acted in any of his plays for nothing, for the joy of being alive in his great poetry. And I acted well in him. I felt inspired by him. I could have been a great Shakespearean actor, if I’d kept on. I know that! (O’Neill 125). Without this story, Tyrone appears a one-dimensional callous miser who has refused to provide adequate medical care for his wife and son solely out of spiteful parsimoniousness.

The story of Tyrone’s childhood, together with his despair at “selling out” for mindless earnings, both excised in this prompt script, flesh out his character, earn greater sympathy for his family’s plight, and highlight the play’s Irish connections. Fintan O’Toole’s review of this production, which criticizes its lack of emphasis on the play’s Irishness, is particularly salient here. What O’Toole has so incisively noticed is that the play’s Irish elements, namely the plight of an immigrant family who faces the same struggles with poverty and eviction in America that they were trying to escape in their native land, have been deleted from this production. What is more “Irish” than a poor, homeless family, evicted from their land due to no fault of their own? Or a misguided patriarch whose rapacious acquisition of land and property, a survival instinct resulting
from a destitute, itinerant upbringing (not unlike Peter Gillane in *Kathleen ni Houlihan*), not only alienates his entire family but also his own soul? In an almost physically concrete manner, the 1985 Abbey Theatre production of *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, which removed lines from the script related to land and property issues that provided key insights into character motivations and decisions, and its subsequent poor reviews shows that the very Irish and Irish-American topics of land ownership, eviction, and dispossession are at the heart of this play.

**Irish Mythology in *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*: Tricksters, Storytellers, and National Heroes**

The second component of my argument is a consciously mytho-postcolonial approach that analyzes the incorporation of recreated mythical systems within the plays to undo imperialist land ownership hegemonies at their foundations. In *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, O’Neill invokes the national Irish hero Hugh O’Neill and particularly recalls the power of the Irish storyteller/satirist and the archetypal trickster figure in his mythological re-fashioning. O’Neill also draws upon the prominence of pigs, boars, and swineherds in Irish mythology, many of whom enjoyed divine favor or status, to upend imposed imperialist hegemonies in the American context. O’Neill re-fashions these mythologies to invert the power dynamic between his newly imagined trickster swineherds, Shaughnessy in *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and the Hogans in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, and privileged Anglo-Protestant landowners who oppress their Irish-American tenants and mimic their counterparts in the British-Irish context. Both *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* pit Anglicized land baron foes against wily Irish pig farmers in a dispute over a shared fence repeatedly broken to give the farmers’ pigs access to their rich neighbors’ fine ponds. These conflicts blur the meaning of the pigs as representing lowliness, property, investment, Irishness,
and humanity. Even though the farmers are clearly and admittedly at fault in both episodes, they launch bamboozlingly adroit verbal assaults and employ deception to turn the accusations upon their quite befuddled landowner neighbors, who end up skulking off in frustration. As these encounters do not conclude the plays or result in a change in circumstances, however, O’Neill shows the strength of established Anglo-Protestant land ownership hegemonies.

Irish mythology abounds with royal or divinely favored pigs and figures. Muicinis, or Pig Island, is one of the ancient names of Ireland in Irish folklore (Jameson 869). Additionally, in an early lost manuscript, “The Book of Druim Snechta,” two daughters of Cain and Banba, whose name means “pig,” are the first arrivals to Ireland after the biblical Flood (Campbell 299). Banba was identified with the land of Ireland that would emerge from the Flood waters, known as “the island of Banba of the women” (Rees 115). The Irish trickster, shapeshifter, sea god, King of the Tuatha, and hero Manannan Mac Lir was associated with pigs through his “rejuvenating swine” who “could be consumed endlessly by the gods, who washed the food down with his ale of immortality” (Rees 39). Additionally, many swineherds in Irish mythology achieve royal status or recognition. In a story from Munster, the King’s swineherd has a “miraculous vision which foretells that Cashel would be the residence of the Kings of Munster forever” (Rees 178). Due to his vision, the swineherd is granted freedom for himself, family, and friends, as well as the right to proclaim the future Kings of Munster (Rees 178).

*Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* draw on the traditional Irish mythological importance of pigs to undo the power balance between landowner and poor tenant in associating reimagined pigs and swineherds, not Standard Oil millionaires, with power and honor. While these entertaining episodes merely seem to function as comic relief and
knowingly nod to O’Neill’s Irish heritage and biography,\textsuperscript{190} they serve a much more dissident purpose. The farmers’ intense vocal disputes with their wealthy landowning neighbors embody a complex system of Irish mythological references that undermine Anglo-Protestant landowning standards and property-related greed. These moments upend the power dynamic between seemingly lowly tenant farmers and wealthy landowners who embody power, land, and mythical “Americanness” as pillars of industry and respectable society. In these observations, this chapter builds upon previous scholarship’s attention to O’Neill’s re-fashioning of classical Greco-Roman myths and examines O’Neill’s engagement of Irish mythologies, both traditional and national, in the context of the Irish-American immigrant experience, land ownership dispossession in America, and the dominant ideology of the American Dream.

The characters of Shaughnessy in \textit{Long Day’s Journey into Night} and the Hogans in \textit{A Moon for the Misbegotten} serve as refashioned mythological trickster swineherd figures who unsettle the landlord ownership hegemony. O’Neill heavily associates Shaughnessy and the Hogans with their pigs and appoints them as the pigs’ protectors, especially in \textit{A Moon for the Misbegotten}. O’Neill permeates Hogan with porcine characteristics in the stage directions:

“[Hogan] has a thick neck, lumpy, sloping shoulders, a barrel-like trunk, stumpy legs, and big feet. His arms are short and muscular, with large hairy hands. His head is round with thinning sandy hair. His face is fat with a snub nose, long upper lip, big mouth, and little blue eyes with bleached lashes and eyebrows that remind one of a white pig’s (O’Neill 34). Hogan also shows additional, albeit for humorous effect, concern for the pigs in his insistence that Harder

\textsuperscript{190} As Frank Ardolino describes, O’Neill developed the conflicts in both plays based on events concerning property that the O’Neill family owned in New London, Connecticut; farmer John Dolan rented the farm bordering on the estates of Standard Oil millionaires E.C. Hammond and E.S. Harkness and often engaged in disputes with the estate owners (63). Ardolino claims that “O’Neill found in the conflict [between the farmers and the millionaires] an archetypical situation which allowed him to dramatize his concern with the legendary and historical Ireland of his ancestors” (63).
reimburse him for each dead pig, plus funeral expenses, or risk being taken to court as a “pig-murdering tyrant” (O’Neill 77). Hogan follows this accusation with a bewildering question, in, as the stage directions indicate, “a quick change of pace to a wheedling confidential tone,”: “Tell me now, if it isn’t a secret, whatever made you take such a savage grudge against pigs? Sure, it isn’t reasonable for a Standard oil man to hate hogs” (O’Neill 77). Hogan, in fact, so identifies with his pigs that he quips that he should have drowned himself in the pond so that Harder would always be reminded of him (O’Neill 77). This contrasts Edmund’s suggestion to Shaughnessy in Long Day’s Journey into Night that “[Shaughnessy] should have reminded Harker that a Standard Oil millionaire ought to welcome the flavor of hog in his ice water as an appropriate touch” (O’Neill 28). Furthermore, they claim their right to a royal status through their association with pigs, like the Munster swineherd with divine visions. The supposedly lowly pig farmers, associated with purportedly filthy creatures, are elevated through Irish mythological traditions that associate pigs and swineherds with divinity, royalty, and immortality.

In addition to imbuing the farmers with the Irish mythological divine significance of pigs and swineherds, both plays align the landowner neighbors with the Anglo-Protestant elite in America and the English themselves. O’Neill’s connection of Anglo-Protestant and English landlords demonstrates the commensurate colonialist dispossession of the poor native Irish and Irish American immigrants. In his choice of Harker and Harder for the Standard Oil millionaire character in both plays, O’Neill invokes capitalist connotations of “hawking” goods and sharpness. Additionally, Martha Bower points to “O’Neill’s intentional use of a name that sounds like Harvard,” citing O’Neill’s use of the name Harford for the “WASP family” in A Touch of the Poet and More Stately Mansions (112). She argues that “in all cases, these Protestant aristocrats, signifiers of the Ivy educated, blue blooded, New England elite, enemies
of Irish Catholics, are the targets of O’Neill’s satirical barbs” (Bower 113). The stage directions describing Harder in *A Moon for the Misbegotten* align Harder with both the “Yankee” Protestant elite as well as their English predecessors while lampooning his “good breeding.” O’Neill describes his face as “unmarked by worry, ambition, or any of the common hazards of life” and “coddled from birth, everything arranged and made easy for him” (O’Neill 71). He wears a “beautifully tailored English tweed coat and whipcord riding breeches” and “immaculately polished English riding boots with spurs” (O’Neill 71) Harder’s secretary, Simpson, is English, and, according to Frank Ardolino,” his “name is slang for ‘son of a fool’” (68). Hogan frequently refers to Simpson as “the Limey” and, in conversation with Harder, as “that English bastard, Simpson” (O’Neill 64, 75). By aligning the landlord figures with both the Anglo-Protestant elite in America and British landowners, O’Neill applies postcolonial significance to these encounters.

In the tradition of archetypal tricksters, O’Neill describes the exchanges in both plays in militaristic terms with only verbal weapons. In *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, Edmund describes Shaughnessy as “delighted because he’d had a fight with [Tyrone’s] friend, Harker, the Standard Oil millionaire, and won a glorious victory,” which Edmund later describes as “the great Irish victory” (26, 28). In these “battles,” O’Neill depicts the seemingly powerful millionaire opponents as poorly matched for their wily opponents. Edmund quips that, against Shaughnessy, “Harker had as much chance as [he] would with [boxer] Jack Johnson” (O’Neill 27). O’Neill quips in Harder’s stage directions that “it would be hard to find anyone more ill-equipped for combat with the Hogans” (70). Both Shaughnessy and the Hogans use diversionary tactics, subterfuge, and verbal warfare to defeat their opponents. Stage directions describe the “experienced strategy of the Hogans in verbal battle is to take the offensive at once and never let
an opponent get set to hit back” using a “beautifully co-ordinated, bewildering change of pace, switching suddenly from jarring shouts to low, confidential vituperation,” all with exaggerated “Irish brogues to confuse an enemy still further (71). Shaughnessy and the Hogans’ trickster tactics echo those of pig-associated mythological tricksters like Manannan Mac Lir.

O’Neill employs mytho-postcolonial tactics by appropriating colonial and neocolonial discourses of respectability and social class. Rather than kowtow and grovel towards their “betters,” as is expected in this situation, Shaughnessy and the Hogans insist on their own royalty and mock that of Harker/Harder using the very language of their oppressors. In these verbal tactics, the pig farmers follow Homi Bhabha’s notion of imitative postcolonial “discourse…as a form of defensive warfare” in which “mimicry marks those moments of civil disobedience within the discipline of civility: signs of spectacular resistance,” like Hugh and Jimmy Jack’s use of The Aeneid as postcolonial mimicry (163). These exchanges are consciously postcolonial as “the words of the master become…the warlike sign of the native” that “seek to change the coercive reality that they so lucidly contain” (Bhabha 163). Echoing the language of class-based land ownership hegemony, Edmund Tyrone quips to his father that “Harker will think you’re no gentleman for harboring a tenant who isn’t humble in the king of America” (O’Neill 26). Then, when detailing Shaughnessy’s recounting of the confrontation, Edmund relays that Shaughnessy boasted that “he never gave Harker a chance to open his mouth. He began by shouting that he was no slave Standard Oil could trample on. He was a King of Ireland, if he had his rights, and scum was scum to him, no matter how much money it had stolen from the poor” (O’Neill 27). While the humor in Shaughnessy’s statements is apparent in the next stage direction that Mary Tyrone “can’t help laughing,” it is important to note here Shaughnessy’s complete lack of deference to Harker. Not only does he refuse to let Harker have the first (or last word), he
criticizes Harker’s wealth building as stealing from the poor and insists upon his own rights as a royal individual.

Similarly, in A Moon for the Misbegotten, Jim Tyrone, himself caught between his Irish immigrant roots and his status as an American landlord, mocks Harder as “a leading aristocrat in our Land of the Free and Get-Rich-Quick, whose boots are licked by one and all – one of the Kings of our Republic by Divine Right of Inherited Swag” and “Standard Oil’s sappiest child” (O’Neill 65). Phil and Josie Hogan similarly claim their dignity against Harder. When Harder asks, “Are you Hogan?” Hogan responds, “I am Mister Philip Hogan – to a gentleman,” and Josie asks him “Where’s your manners, you spindle-shanked jockey? Were you brought up in a stable?” (O’Neill 72). Hogan’s insistence on being called “Mister” by his social and economic superior co-ops hegemonical language to insist upon his own rights in the situation. Later in the conversation, Hogan calls Harder a “blackguard of a millionaire,” a “bloody tyrant,” a “born crook,” and claims that his land was “bought with Standard Oil money that was stolen from the poor it ground in the dust beneath its dirty heel – land that’s watered with the tears of starving widows and orphans” (O’Neill 76). Hogan orders Harder to “keep [his] place and be soft-spoken to [his betters],” which indicates a startling role reversal as this is certainly a phrase that Hogan has heard all his lives (O’Neill 77). Once again, Hogan embodies Bhabha’s observation of mimicry as “civil disobedience” and “spectacular resistance” as he turns “the words of the master” against himself (163). After forcing Harder to leave his property, Hogan calls it “a great day for the poor and the oppressed” (78).

The verbal nature of the “battles” recalls the ancient Irish tradition of the power of speech and adds the further mythological dimension of a re-created Irish storyteller. According to Robert Elliott in The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art, the ancient Irish satirist could “inflict
wounds on his enemies and win battles with the force of his tongue” (20-21). In both *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, the Irish “combatants” enjoy what Frank Ardolino terms “ur-Irish power of speech” (25). Shaughnessy unleashes what Mary Tyrone calls a “terrible tongue” upon Harker, stopping his accusations in his tracks with a string of verbal insults and subterfuge (O’Neill 27). Even though Shaughnessy has broken the fence between the two properties to allow his pigs to bathe in Harker’s pond, Shaughnessy, according to Edmund, “accused Harker of making his foreman break down the fence to entice the pigs into the ice pond in order to destroy them,” and “the poor pigs…caught their death of cold. Many of them were dying of pneumonia and several others had been taken down with cholera from drinking the poisoned water” (O’Neill 27). Shaughnessy then tells a flabbergasted Harker that he is hiring a lawyer to “sue him for damages” and orders him to “remove his dirty feet from the premises before he sicked the dog on him” because “he’d be damned if he’d stand for a Standard Oil thief trespassing” (O’Neill 27). In an additional reference to Irish storytelling mythology, as Frank Ardolino points out, “Even O’Neill’s choice of his name reflects an emphasis on the farmer’s verbal adroitness. *Shaughnessie* recalls the *shanachie*, the traditional teller of tales in Irish folklore” (25). Using the ancient mythological power of the storyteller, Shaughnessy co-opts the power of speech from the oppressor and re-writes the narrative in his favor.

In *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, Phil and Josie Hogan employ similar verbal diversionary tactics and narrative appropriation by exaggerating their Irish accents, alternately shouting and whispering to each other, constantly interrupting Harder, and purposely misunderstanding Harder’s statements. Instead of responding to his requests, they create a new story and call Harder a “poor crazy creature” and a “poor loon,” even offering to “telephone the asylum” (O’Neill 74). Like Shaughnessy’s accusations against Harker in *Long Day’s Journey into Night*,
Hogan alleges that Harder and Simpson have performed a “contemptible trick” of breaking their own fence “to entice [his] poor pigs to take their death in your ice pond,” leaving Harder “so flabbergasted by this mad accusation that he cannot even sputter” (O’Neill 76). Hogan claims that he has “mended that fence morning after morning and seen the footprints where you had sneakied up in the night to pull it down again,” leaving his “poor pigs murthered one by one” who had “caught their death of cold in his damned ice pond and died of pneumonia,” to which Josie adds that “ten more died of cholera after drinking the dirty water in it” (O’Neill 76). To a still-bewildered Harder, Hogan claims that he was offered “two hundred dollars apiece for them” and demands “twenty pigs at two hundred, that’s four thousand. And a thousand to cure the sick and cover funeral expenses for the dead” (O’Neill 77). If Harder refuses to pay, Hogan threatens to “drag [him] in every court in the land” and “paste his ugly mug on the front page of every newspaper as a pig-murdering tyrant,” adding “Before I’m through with you, you’ll think you’re the King of England at an Irish wake!” (O’Neill 77). All that Harder manages to say are what O’Neill describes as “three sputtering words:” “I’ve had enough -!” before Hogan tells him to “get the hell out of here” and “beat it now!” (O’Neill 77). In both instances, Shaughnessy and the Hogans employ the ancient power of the Irish satirist and storyteller, seizing the control of the narrative from their better economically and socially situated opponent. Using a flurry of insults, confusing statements, alternating versions of events, and distracting behaviors, the tenant farmers force the Anglicized Yankee landlords to do “battle” on their terms, a struggle for which the millionaires are woefully unprepared. The Standard Oil men are left bewildered and confused with threats of legal action for crimes that even the amused audience knows that they did not commit. In addition to flustering them, the Hogans have created an albeit imaginary narrative in which the wealthy landowner will finally be held accountable for crimes against the community.
In addition to harnessing divinely favored trickster swineherds and pigs as well as the ancient powers of the Irish storyteller, O’Neill conjures the famous trickster Hugh O’Neill, the Irish national hero whose achievements reached the stature of national master narrative for the Irish people. Hugh O’Neill’s personal historical relationship to land ownership and dispossession at English hands, especially the continuing negative consequences of the English seizure of his lands and settlement of Northern Ireland, provides Eugene O’Neill with a complex opportunity to use this nationally mythologized figure, whose last name he shares, with all of his historical and cultural gravitas, to depict Irish-American tenants exploited by Anglo-Protestant elite landowners in the extension of hundreds of years of conflict which Hugh O’Neill was dangerously close to ending. Hugh O’Neill, Earl of Tyrone, instigated what Andrew Hadfield calls “the most serious threat to the English crown that it had experienced since the War of the Roses” (16). The Nine Years War, fought between the English and Irish from 1594 to 1603, was the largest conflict of the Elizabethan era. It marked the completion of England’s Irish conquest begun in the twelfth century, which had largely mellowed to loose English control limited to Dublin and its surrounding areas, known as the Pale, and marked by a mostly peaceful assimilation of English settlers to Irish life (Morgan 152). Led by O’Neill, the war was a direct result of Irish resistance to intensified English involvement in Ireland begun under the Tudors, including aggressively Protestant

---

191 According to Jon Latimer, for almost three hundred years prior to the rule of Henry VIII, English control in Ireland was limited to Dublin and the twenty-mile span around it known as the Pale (62). Nicholas Canny writes that outside of this area, the native Irish and the “Old English,” descendants of twelfth-century Anglo-Norman invaders, lived mostly peacefully as the Old English favored “conciliatory measures” rather than the forceful settlement that Edmund Spenser and others began to call for in the sixteenth century (14). In this vein, many of the Old English adopted Irish manners, clothing, and language, and some intermarried with the Irish people, according to Michael Neill (9). As a result, the Irish and many of the Old English simply “paid lip service to the [English] government in Dublin,” retaining “traditional Celtic culture” and laws (Latimer 62).
settlement efforts and punitive, controlling laws. Although O’Neill ultimately surrendered on March 30, 1603, he came extremely close to victory and the potential end of English colonial activity in Ireland.

As described in Chapter One, Hugh O’Neill’s surrender after his near-victory led to perhaps the largest single “land grab” in the centuries-long conflict between England and Ireland. O’Neill and his fellow Irish nobles fled to Europe and forfeited their land holdings in Northern Ireland, followed by systematic colonization of these properties by English Protestants. Despite his defeat, Hugh O’Neill became a “larger-than-life” figure in the Irish national imagination and would be appropriated for various nationalist purposes that often ignored, wildly exaggerated, or plainly fabricated the historical facts of his life, gaining the stature of a national mythical figure.

---

192 S.J. Connolly describes a new wave of settlers known as the “New English,” including Spenser, who arrived in Ireland under the Tudors, to replace Irish cultural, legal, linguistic, and religious activities with their own (256). These new settlers had no intention of peacefully blending in with the native Irish as did the Old English.

193 Under the Protestant King Henry VIII, the English government attempted the “official legal and religious subjugation” of the Irish (Latimer 63). The Irish Parliament in Dublin passed the Act of Supremacy in 1536, which declared Henry VIII head of the Church of Ireland and began the dissolution of the Irish Catholic Church (Horning 27). Parliament Statute 33 of Henry VIII passed by the 1541 Dublin Parliament reclassified the Irish as subjects of the English crown (Neill 5). These statutes aimed to make the Irish more English, forcing them to abandon their culture and religion.

194 Archbishop Peter Lombard with his tract *De Hibernia Insula Commentarius*, written between 1598 and 1599 and published in its entirety until 1632. In the *Commentarius*, Lombard makes sweeping, loosely historical claims about O’Neill’s unmatched achievements and unwavering commitment to Catholicism. He insists that O’Neill vowed to “never sheath” his sword “until all heresy and schism has been expelled from every corner of Ireland, and the free exercise of the one only true Roman Catholic and Apostolic religion...has been restored and established throughout the whole of this Island” (41). Lombard also assigns O’Neill an exclusively Gaelic lineage “descended in unbroken line from the ancient Kings of Ireland” (27). Following Archbishop Lombard’s *Commentarius*, Hugh O’Neill became the ideal Gaelic Catholic patriot at various key times throughout Irish history. His mythologization directly correlates with the goals of various movements and trends, such as the nineteenth century Young Ireland group and the insularity of the Irish Free State. Both stressed a homogenous Gaelic Catholic Irish heritage and minimalized Anglo-Irish and Presbyterian contributions to Irish culture. This image of O’Neill matched squarely with what Dennis Dworkin describes as the Young Ireland movement’s “crusade to save the Irish people from becoming Anglicized” (51). De-anglicizing Hugh O’Neill became synonymous with de-anglicizing Ireland. However, this singular vision of O’Neill and Ireland isolated Ulster loyalists, who “saw themselves as British” (Dworkin 50). Following the 1916 Easter Rising and the Irish Civil War, which led to the creation of the Irish Free State, a restrictive vision of Irish nationalism continued, with Hugh O’Neill as an exemplar. F. C. McGrath points to the 1930s rise of the “dominant myth” of “the Gaelic O’Neill, the warrior hero who united the country and nearly overthrew English rule” (213). This version of Hugh O’Neill resonated with the politics of the Free State, dominated by a “narrow Gaelic, Catholic, conservationist, isolationist nationalism” (McGrath 211).
Hugh O’Neill loomed large for Eugene O’Neill both personally and historically. The O’Neill family, who shared his surname, often discussed his legendary deeds in their household. Sean O’Faolain’s biography *The Great O’Neill* greatly fascinated Eugene O’Neill. *The Great O’Neill* portrayed a wily Irish hero who exploited his intimate knowledge of the English gained from his years of military service in his own battle tactics against them. The Ui Neill line of kings was arguably the most influential and powerful in Ireland, especially Northern Ireland; they ruled at Tara from 380 AD to 1022 AD with their seat of power in county Tyrone. Eugene O’Neill was captivated by the sixteenth-century hero from a young age when his father performed the play *O’Neill, or the Prince of Ulster* for him, and the young Eugene O’Neill would read many books on Irish history (Alexander 62, Gelb 88). Later in life, he would It is no accident that, in the autobiographical pieces *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* that his own family name O’Neill was shifted to Tyrone, which was the Northern Irish seat of power for the O’Neill (Ui Neill) lineage.

Eugene O’Neill imbues Shaughnessy and the Hogans with the qualities he most admired about Hugh O’Neill depicted in *The Great O’Neill*. In a letter recommending *The Great O’Neill* to fellow Irish-American writer James T. Farrell, Eugene O’Neill describes Hugh O’Neill as “a fascinatingly complicated character, strong, proud and noble, ignoble shameless and base, loyal and treacherous, a cunning politician, a courageous soldier, an inspiring leader” (qtd. in Ardolino 66). Considering Eugene O’Neill’s militaristic portrayal of the conflicts between poor tenants and millionaires, it is fitting that he would also imbue these incidents with what Ardolino terms “the personal and military characteristics of Hugh O’Neill as delineated by O’Faolain” (67).

In *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, Eugene O’Neill primarily draws upon Hugh O’Neill’s strategic deceptiveness. Hugh O’Neill’s elaborate
deceptions were key to his near success against English forces. Prior to his rebellion, O’Neill earned trust from the English crown on numerous occasions by subjugating Irish rebellions; in turn, O’Neill used his official position as Earl of Tyrone, bequeathed by Queen Elizabeth, to build up his own forces under the guise of training soldiers for the English army. According to Frank Ardolino, “O’Neill’s depiction of Hogan’s deceptive personality and strategy is like O’Faolain’s portrait of Hugh O’Neill’s character and tactics. O’Neill’s deceptiveness was his cardinal quality...throughout his political and military career, O’Neill was the calculating ally and enemy of the English and warring Irish chieftains. At one point, when he perilously navigated among the conflicting forces, the resulting situation is described by O’Faolain in theatrical terms that parallel the context of the Hogan confrontation” (68). Like O’Neill, Shaughnessy and the Hogans use deception to keep their opponents off balance. While in both circumstances, the farmers are technically guilty in that they have indeed broken the fences between the properties and allowed their pigs to bathe in their wealthy neighbors’ ponds. Much like O’Neill’s rebellion broke English law, the farmers’ use of trickery places their baffled, more powerful opponents at fault for the entire incident. Despite their considerable material and societal disadvantages, similar to Hugh O’Neill’s forces when compared to British armies, the tenants here win what Edmund Tyrone laughingly terms a “great Irish victory” (O’Neill 28).

Also, just as O’Neill employed his considerable charisma in his bid to unite warring factions against England, Shaughnessy and the Hogans exude charm in their hilarious interactions. Shaughnessy captivates Edmund with his dramatization of the encounter, who then

---

195 As Earl of Tyrone, O’Neill was authorized a standing force of six hundred troops, trained by English officers (Latimer 64). O’Neill built up his force by training men, rotating them out of his army, and enlisting raw recruits (Latimer). Eventually, this process led to his being able to field about one thousand cavalry, one thousand pikemen, and four thousand infantry trained in firearms (Latimer 64).
196 John McGurk describes O’Neill as having the “rare gift of patience and the ability to inspire loyalty among erstwhile feuding chieftains” (9).
entertains his family at breakfast with the tale. During the confrontation between the Hogans and T. Stedman Harker, Jim Tyrone is heard guffawing offstage from Josie’s bedroom, despite Phil Hogan’s description of Jim as “a cruel skinflint of a landlord who swindles me out of my last drop of whiskey” (O’Neill 77). Both Shaughnessy and the Hogans also, in their own way, match Eugene O’Neill’s admiration of Hugh O’Neill for being “strong, proud, and noble” in their refusal to defer to the Standard Oil men as American “royalty” and insist on their own stateliness. And, hilariously, they also embody Eugene O’Neill’s characterization of Hugh O’Neill for being “ignoble, shameless, and base” in their many crude comments and actions, especially in Shaughnessy’s threat to let his dog attack Harker and Josie’s quip that she’ll “wager [Harder is] no damned good to a woman” (O’Neill 72).

Even though Hugh O’Neill, Shaughnessy, and the Hogans indeed won some spectacular victories, they all would inevitably lose the longer war. Hugh O’Neill’s resounding defeat at the Battle of Kinsale led to the end of his rebellion and escalated English territorial occupation in Ireland. While Long Day’s Journey into Night and A Moon for the Misbegotten do not show the eventual fates of Shaughnessy and the Hogans in their ongoing struggle with their neighbors and larger issues as poor tenant farmers, it is not likely that their “Irish victories” liberated them from the cycle of poverty and uncertain existence. The historical person who inspired the Shaughnessy and Hogan scenes, John Dolan, clashed with his neighbors, millionaires E.C. Hammond and E.S. Harkness, and failed in his bid to buy the property he inhabited for over twenty years when, in 1924, Eugene O’Neill inherited it from his brother, Jamie, and put it up for sale (Ardolino 63).

O’Neill shows how these mytho-postcolonial encounters threaten the power of the landlord class through the viscerally disturbed reaction of James Tyrone, Sr. to the tale. To preserve his precarious status and societal power as a landlord, Tyrone must maintain a veneer of
solidarity with Harker against Shaughnessy, which Edmund acknowledges in his quip about “your friend, Harker, the Standard Oil millionaire,” as Tyrone’s own financial and social stability depends upon the maintenance of the landlord-tenant hegemony (O’Neill 26). Throughout the conversation, Tyrone’s tries to hide his clear admiration and amusement at Shaughnessy’s tactics by expressing scorn for Shaughnessy. When Mary refers to Shaughnessy as a “dreadful man” who, nonetheless, is “funny,” Tyrone responds: “(Scowling) He’s not so funny when you’re his landlord,” reinforcing his position in a superior hierarchical relationship to Shaughnessy (O’Neill 26). Throughout the conversation, he upholds his standing by referring to Shaughnessy as “a wily Shanty Mick,” “a dirty scallywag,” a “damned old scoundrel,” and “a dirty blackguard” (O’Neill 26-28). In these insults, Tyrone employs an ethnic slur against a fellow Irish-American and engages anti-Irish immigrant stereotypes, such as lack of hygiene and moral scruples, revealing his paradoxical allegiance with the Anglo-Protestant landowning class. When Tyrone’s sons teasingly suggest that Harker will ignore him the next time they meet at the Club and “think [Tyrone’s] no gentleman for harboring a tenant who isn’t humble in the presence of a king of America,” Tyrone exclaims that he does not “care to listen” to Edmund’s “Socialist gabble” (O’Neill 27). Tyrone dismisses the mere mention of class differences as Socialist. However, even the dour Tyrone can barely contain his amusement at the tale. When Edmund describes Shaughnessy’s breaking the fence to allow his pigs to bathe in Harker’s pond, the stage directions describe Tyrone’s reaction as “sourly, but with a trace of admiration” before he dismisses Shaughnessy’s actions as “like him” (O’Neill 27).

As the conversation continues, Tyrone’s classification of Shaughnessy’s activities is not only increasingly pejorative but also proportional to his thinly veiled rising enjoyment at the tale. The next exchange shows Tyrone’s almost bipolar vacillation from amusement to rejection:
Edmund: So Harker came in person to rebuke Shaughnessy. A very bonehead play! If I needed any proof that our ruling plutocrats especially the ones who inherited their boodle, are not mental giants, that would clinch it.

Tyrone (With appreciation, before he thinks.): Yes, he’d be no match for Shaughnessy. (Then he growls.) Keep your damned anarchist remarks to yourself. I won’t have them in my house. (But he is full of eager anticipation). What happened?

Here, the stage directions and Tyrone’s remarks on the uneven match between Harker and Shaughnessy show that he is hanging on the edge of his seat. However, Tyrone must maintain his precarious and hard-won solidarity with the landlord class. When Edmund has once again pointed out the class differences at play, Tyrone declares Edmund’s recounting anarchist. He then frets about his own business affairs, even as he continues to laugh at the story. After proclaiming “By God, you can’t beat him (Shaughnessy)!”, O’Neill’s stage directions indicate that he “stops abruptly and scowls” before griping “He’ll get me in serious trouble yet. I hope you told him I’d be mad as hell –” (O’Neill 27). Edmund, incisively pointing out his father’s hypocrisy, reports that he “told [Shaughnessy] you’d be tickled to death over the great Irish victory, and so you are. Stop faking, Papa” (O’Neill 28). When Edmund reports that he “told Shaughnessy he should have reminded Harker that a Standard Oil millionaire ought to welcome the flavor of hog in his ice water as an appropriate touch,” Tyrone warns Edmund to keep his “damned Socialist anarchist sentiments out of [his] affairs” and calls him “a fine son…to help that blackguard get [him] into a lawsuit” (O’Neill 28). O’Neill’s use of these terms is deliberate when considering his association with organizations like the Communist Labor Party of America. Additionally, it is important to point out here that socialism calls for shared property use, in opposition to capitalist individualist profit-based land ownership. While amused at the
tale, Tyrone has become increasingly concerned about his business affairs, worrying that this incident will reflect his relationship with Harker and drag him into a lawsuit. He wishes to protect his place in the landlord class from even humorous assaults.

Tyrone’s insecure reactions to the Shaughnessy/Harker battle reveal the inherent ambivalence in Irish-Americans chasing the American Dream. As discussed in previous chapters, landowning, in the Irish context, was a supposed guarantee of social respectability and material security, despite the incongruence of this individualistic, Anglo-Protestant influenced view with more communal native Irish landholding practices. In particular, the Gillane family in *Kathleen ni Houlihan* and the landholding elite in *By the Bog of Cats*..., such as Carthage Kilbride and Xavier Cassidy, represent this Irish drive to own land, stemming from centuries of British land-based dispossession in the form of cruel, absentee landlords, the uncertain fate of tenant farming, and the ever-looming threat of evictions, especially in the time of the Famine. As demonstrated in these plays, the Irish both internalized and were oppressed by imposed capitalist Anglo-Protestant, imperial standards of land ownership. In *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, the American Dream (and the nation of America itself) has its ideological roots in this aggressively capitalist form of Anglo-Protestant individualism. As Ricardo Miguez states, this constitutes “a national (quasi-official) faith in US superiority” that he terms “the ‘American Creed’,” which Americans are taught to respect as their most important civic duty since they are very young” that outlines “a Land grounded on material wealth and

---

197 Miguez explains that the American Creed “blurs the distinction between collective and individual achievements...if one succeeds, s/he owes it to the country, but if s/he fails, it is his/her fault. It is the public culture of accomplished winners versus laidback losers. The Promised Land, the Garden of Eden, the American Creed, as far as religious metaphors may be found in them, are the American Dream. It represents the unlikely accomplishment of all collective and individual enterprises in a single society” (5).
private entrepreneurship” (5). Lawrence Samuel terms the American Dream “a dominant theme in our civil religion or, perhaps, our civil religion itself” (5).

Tyrone also represents the re-inscription of British colonialism into the Irish-American psyche and the ambivalence inherent in accepting this ideology. The upper echelons of New England society, which consist of Anglo-Protestant landowning elite families, seem hopelessly out of reach for Tyrone. Both despite and due to his own experiences with unfair landlords and eviction practices as a child, Tyrone perpetuates this same system of exploitation rather than show sympathy for those in similar circumstances. Despite this, his place in society is woefully insecure. Nowhere in the play is this more apparent than Tyrone’s explosions at Edmund’s humorous storytelling about Shaughnessy. Rather than enjoy the humorous tale, he becomes increasingly defensive about his own position in society, worries about his business affairs, and condemns Edmund’s views as “anarchist,” revealing them as so dangerous, to him, that they threaten to destroy his entire world. The incongruity and insecurity are reproduced in A Moon for the Misbegotten. Landlord Jim Tyrone lords his land ownership over his tenants, Phil and Josie Hogan, leaving them feeling insecure and betrayed that he might sell the farm to their wealthy neighbor. Like his father, he has experienced no joy or fulfilment from land ownership, nor does he show loyalty to his fellow Irish-Americans.

Conclusion

Through the heartbreaking saga of the Tyrone and Hogan families, O’Neill depicts the postcolonial alienation of the Irish-American self in an American society that harnesses British colonial ideology in its discriminatory practices that uphold a white Anglo-Protestant male landowning hegemony. In contrast to their more communal attitudes, the skewed materialist value system of the American Dream tantalizes yet ultimately excludes poor Catholic Irish
immigrants in *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. While the individualistic American Dream is, in theory, an effort to avoid European social stratification and allow for social mobility, it replicates the economic, gendered, and racial hierarchies of Britain through de facto social segregation. Per Fanon’s assessment, the American Dream transfers the benefits of the colonial power to the Anglo-Protestant nationalist bourgeois class, especially through land ownership, ensuring the continued dispossession of the indigenous population, people of color, women, immigrants, and the poor due to a failure to reform the capitalist foundations of society (155). In their attempts to assimilate to this bourgeois ideology, Irish Americans are subject to the twofold degradation of the colonial self as described by Ashcroft et al in which “a valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by *dislocation*, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or ‘voluntary’ removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model” (8). Both processes are actively occurring in *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*; forced dislocation from Ireland due to poverty and the incongruity of Irish Catholic viewpoints with Anglo-Protestant American Dream ideology have stranded the Tyrones and Hogans in a hostile country that represents both an alien location and cultural foundation.

O’Neill re-fashions Irish traditional mythologies of divinely favored and royal pigs and swineherds to subvert the imposed imperialist Anglo-Protestant white male landowning hegemony. Also, through the tactics of the dispossessed pig farmer tenants, he embodies the Irish national mythological figure Hugh O’Neill. Hugh O’Neill represents both an Irish rebel hero and a turning point in Britain’s land-based domination of Ireland as his defeat and exile at the beginning of the seventeenth century allowed the British to seize all the lands forfeited by him.
and his fellow landowning Irish noblemen. These mythologies also harness the subversive power of the trickster and the Irish storyteller/satirist to upset the power dynamic between tenants and landowners. In harnessing these Irish mythologies in the American context, O’Neill employs postcolonial resistance tactics against the reproduction of British colonial values in the American context, especially as related to the materialist values of the American Dream.

This chapter has employed both traditional textual analysis methods and original archival scholarship to support my claims on the centrality of land ownership to the plays’ character motivations, thematic foci, and settings. Study of archival materials related to the 1985 Abbey Theatre production of *Long Day’s Journey into Night* revealed the direct link between the play’s emotional depth and land ownership. While many directors choose to cut significant portions of *Long Day’s Journey into Night* due to its lengthy run time, the removal of multiple sections related to James Tyrone Sr.’s eviction-littered past, his tragic rejection of artistic fulfillment, and his desperate attempts to ensure financial security for his family through land ownership resulted in a severe weakening of the play’s emotional power, shown in the plethora of negative reviews on the production. These discoveries reveal the concrete connection between land ownership and the overall dramatic impact of *Long Day’s Journey into Night*. Without the emphasis on land ownership and the personal, artistic, and material dispossession resulting from chasing the American Dream through landowning security, the Tyrones’ heart wrenching tragedy becomes merely a sad evening.
CONCLUSION

This dissertation has applied a mytho-postcolonial reading to twentieth century Irish and American dramas, including Brian Friel’s *Translations*, W.B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory’s *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, Marina Carr’s *By the Bog of Cats*, Sean O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock*, Lorraine Hansberry’s *Raisin in the Sun*, and Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. In these dramas, the authors have re-fashioned traditional Greek and Irish mythologies related to land to reveal the imperialist foundations underlying land ownership dispossession of certain oppressed groups: Irish, African Americans, and Irish American. The traditional mythologies have included the Trojan War, the Irish sovereignty goddess, Demeter and Persephone, Prometheus, and Irish pig and swineherd tales. A mytho-postcolonial approach incorporates feminist and postcolonial theories in viewing myth as a totalizing system that can be harnessed either to reinforce or undermine imperial systems. A mytho-postcolonial lens applied to these works examines the interrelated oppressions of imposed capitalism, patriarchy, and racism in imperial, postcolonial, and nationalist hegemonies. This lens also considers the wider mythical system underlying the single character or story represented. As myths, like imperialism, depend upon structuring principles, assigned roles, and codified behavior, they can be especially useful in dismantling imperialist hierarchies.

A mytho-postcolonial reading of literature offers myths liberation from calcification into retrogressive nostalgia and complicity with repressive societal structures. For example, the *dinnshenchas* tradition represented in Brian Friel’s *Translations* of imbuing land with the stories and the heritage of the community through evocative place names, while characterized by the
British mapping team and their Irish collaborators as hopelessly “backwards” and antithetic to modern progress, reveals communal, non-capitalistic approaches to land ownership and stewardship not inferior to, rather, incommensurate with, imposed imperial standards. Considering the wider mythological context of the place names reveals the Baile Beag villagers’ resistance to the mapping project as an attempt not to reject a seemingly more “efficient” place name methodology but to preserve the cultural heritage and relationship to the land that these place names and their attached stories represent. Similarly, a mytho-postcolonial reading of the Trojan War mythology in *Translations* makes two critical observations. First, it questions simplistic assignations of stubborn anti-modernity to Hugh, Jimmy Jack, and the hedge school system by tracing British imperialism’s harnessing of the Trojan War as its ideological foundation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as Britain escalated its physical and legal conquest of Irish. It also recognizes that these characters and systems, as represented in the play, re-fashion Trojan War mythology as a subversive form of anti-colonial resistance by dismantling British imperialism at its moment of genesis in Irish history.

Through re-fashioning land-related myths such as the Trojan War, the sovereignty goddess, Demeter and Persephone, and pigs and swineherds, the authors in this study demonstrate the ultimate violence inherent in materialist land ownership values. Nowhere does this become more apparent than when studying the distressed family units in each play as a microcosm of the wider society. A mytho-postcolonial comparative reading of plays’ depictions of mothers, fathers, and their relationships with their children reveals the spiritual, emotional, familial, and psychological damage caused by pursuit of imposed imperialist bourgeois land acquisitiveness.
Yeats, Gregory, Hansberry, and O’Neill use re-fashioned mythological mother figures such as the sovereignty goddess, Demeter and Persephone, and the Virgin Mary to portray the oppression of mothers in a patriarchal land ownership value system that simultaneously demands their participation and oppresses them. In *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, Bridget Gillane eagerly anticipates a new daughter-in-law whose dowry-laden arrival represents an opportunity to expand the family’s land holdings and receive the long-awaited bargain with patriarchy, per Deniz Kandiyoti, that will allow her to “cash in” on years of her subservience and exercise her earned authority over a dutiful daughter-in-law. Unlike the popular figure of the saintly mother in Irish drama, as explained in Chapter Two, Bridget freely expresses her frustration with her treatment to her husband, Peter, throughout the play but ultimately seems to acquiesce to him if the promise of material fulfillment is in view. When Peter chides Bridget that her own dowry was not sufficient to expand the family’s land holdings, Bridget focuses on the potential of Delia’s dowry to secure their farm. They treat their second son, Patrick, almost as an afterthought as he does not figure into in the family’s materialist plans. When Peter points out that Patrick will be “looking for a fortune, but he won’t find it so easy to get it and he with no place of his own,” Bridget suggests that they “might be put in the way of making Patrick a priest some day, and he so good at his books” (Yeats and Gregory 158). Due to the imposed colonial system of primogeniture, which was incompatible with more communal indigenous Irish land ownership approaches, Patrick, as a second son, was not eligible to inherit the family’s land holdings and would therefore make a poor candidate for marriage.

Bridget’s materialist striving, however, is all in vain upon the arrival of the Poor Old Woman, the Mother Ireland figure, who lures Bridget’s son, Michael, away from his marriage, which will facilitate his family’s bourgeois social climbing. Rather, Michael sacrificing himself
for Ireland, echoing the ancient sacred practice of marriage to the sovereignty goddess. Bridget has lost both her son and the false promise of the patriarchal bargain. Just as Bridget’s participation in patriarchal bourgeois materialism is meaningless upon the Poor Old Woman’s arrival, so is land acquisitiveness itself under British colonialism; both systems will leave its participants bereft and dispossessed, regardless of their eager participation.

Materialist land ownership values similarly ensnare and oppress mothers in By the Bog of Cats... Through the figures of Big Josie and Hester, the latter of which represents a modified sovereignty figure, Carr demonstrates that alienation based on gender and ethnic minority status in a land ownership obsessed society obsessed causes hardship for both mothers and children. Like Bridget Gillane, both Big Josie and Hester attempt to comply with societal standards to ensure their acceptance, but their efforts are ultimately meaningless due to patriarchy and ethnic prejudice resulting from their Traveller heritage. In the case of Big Josie and Hester, such alienation causes them to behave in ways that would categorize them as “bad” mothers. Big Josie, while not physically present in the play, casts a shadow over its entire action. Permitted at times to participate in community events due to her hypnotic personality and singing skills, Big Josie nonetheless feels restricted by the settled community. She eventually leaves, telling her daughter, Hester, to await her return on the Bog of Cats. Before Hester’s birth, Big Josie also endured sexual harassment at the hands of wealthy landowner Xavier Cassidy. Hester spends her life waiting for her mother, trying to reconcile her own desires to wander by engaging in “transgressive” behavior like continuing to keep a caravan and walking the bog at night. She attempts to buy her way into respectable society with money obtained through the murder of her brother with her former lover, Carthage Kilbride. However, as in the case of Bridget Gillane, Hester’s ambitions cannot ensure her place in a patriarchal bourgeois materialist value system.
built upon imposed imperialist standards. When Hester casts her aside to pursue an advantageous marriage with Caroline Cassidy, daughter of Xavier Cassidy, the community drops its veneer of tolerance and Carthage’s attempts to eject her from her home on the Bog of Cats to consolidate his land holdings. Like her mother, the bourgeois community’s rejection drives Hester to destructive and unmotherly behavior as she murders her daughter to prevent her from enduring the same lifelong separation from her mother. While Big Josie’s and Hester’s actions are certainly condemnable, Carr’s nuanced portrayals force the audience to consider society’s role in pushing both mothers to the brink. Both Big Josie and Hester represent women’s lack of agency in patriarchal society and the deadly consequences of oppressive bourgeois values around land ownership and social status.

As discussed in Chapter Three, O’Casey and Hansberry harness the myth of Demeter and Persephone to show the damaging effects of patriarchal bourgeois property ownership values upon mothers. In both *Juno and the Paycock* and *A Raisin in the Sun*, Juno and the Younger mothers, Lena and Ruth, struggle to hold their families together in shabby tenant home during the Irish Civil War and 1950s segregation. Demeter, both the mother of Persephone and an Earth Mother goddess in her control over the land and its fertility, also struggles within a patriarchal system that separates her from her daughter and abuses her power. Just as Demeter finds ways to resist and survive despite her husband Zeus’s tyranny, especially in aiding Hades to kidnap and rape his own daughter, Persephone, Juno, Lena, and Ruth must overcome the far-fetched bourgeois striving plans of their household patriarchs. While these women fit the role of the “strong mother” who remains indefatigable in the face of hardships, their suffering is exacerbated by their husbands’ outrageous abdication of responsibility to provide for and lead their households to pursue materialist bourgeois aspirations. As in the myth of Demeter and
Persephone, the bonds between mothers and daughters in *Juno and the Paycock* and *A Raisin in the Sun* are borne out of necessity within a patriarchal society, forcing the women to bond together for their very survival.

In *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, O’Neill creates modified Virgin Mary figures in the characters of Mary Tyrone and Josie Hogan to demonstrate women’s bodily and emotional effacement in patriarchal bourgeois land ownership value system oppressing Irish Americans. O’Neill’s engagement of these problematized mythical mother figures reflects Yuji Omori’s argument that “in his major plays, O’Neill repeatedly groped for a way to reinstate the Mother disrespected in modern patriarchal, materialistic Western culture” (58). While not a literal mother figure, Josie Hogan in *A Moon for the Misbegotten* embodies the mythical and maternal qualities of the Virgin Mary. Like Caroline Cassidy in *By the Bog of Cats*... and Delia Cahel in *Kathleen ni Houlihan* Josie becomes a traded commodity for land. Hogan proffers her to their landlord, the drunken Jim Tyrone, in the hopes of entangling him in a precarious situation that will force him to marry Josie and sign over the farm the Hogans have rented for decades. While Josie and the notorious womanizer Jim awkwardly play at flirting during their arranged encounter, Jim’s despair over his mother’s recent death and his sordid life take over, and, according to Andrew E. Lee, “O’Neill replaces the Catholic confessional booth and priest with Hogan’s rustic farmhouse and with Josie as inadvertent yet sensitive Madonna” (156). In the would-be pre-marriage bed of the farmhouse, Jim, instead, seeks absolution from Josie, who tenderly observes that Jim is a “damned soul coming to me in the moonlight, to confess and be forgiven and find peace for a night” (O’Neill 135). Josie’s tender

---

198 Lee goes on to describe that Jim “has idealized Josie as a type of Mother Mary figure in a dual sense – by clinging to an image of her as virginal, as well as placing her in the role of surrogate mother to replace his own dead mother” (156).
mothering of Jim and her own virginity, despite tales of her sexual exploits, align her with the Virgin Mary. Josie especially embodies the Virgin Mary in her association with the virgin birth. Josie remarks that, after her night with Jim, she is “a virgin who bears a dead child in the night, and the dawn finds her still a virgin” (O’Neill 155). Both Josie Hogan and the Virgin Mary give birth to figuratively dead children. Jim Tyrone is spiritually and emotionally dead and will purportedly die soon from his alcoholism. The Christ child’s death, long foretold by Scripture, was also immediately apparent in the Magi’s gift of burial spices to a newborn child. By imbuing her with these Madonna qualities, O’Neill uses myth to empower Josie to defy her father’s authority over her body, instead offering condolence to a fellow suffering human being. Like the sovereignty figures in Kathleen ni Houlihan and By the Bog of Cats…, Josie, as Madonna, removes herself from the women for land marriage exchange system.

O’Neill attributes Virgin Mary qualities to Mary Tyrone in Long Day’s Journey into Night to highlight her loneliness, physical afflictions, and subsequent struggles with morphine resulting from maternal alienation in a patriarchal bourgeois land ownership value system. Mary’s husband and two sons isolate her through idolatry; they profess their undying love for her but fail to treat her like a member of the family. According to Edward L. Shaughnessy, each of the adult men with whom Mary lives is “riveted to her in passionate devotion: her husband, a very model of fidelity; her sons, proud of her fragile beauty, aware that through her some gentleness attaches to their otherwise unholy lives” (161). Like the Virgin Mary herself (and also the nationalistic Mother Ireland who emblematizes Ireland), Mary becomes an iconographic rather than real human figure. This is further reflected in the gendering of the space and language in the play, as described by Laurin Porter, who states that “those spaces dominated

---

199 Porter points to “the play’s rich network of allusions” and argues that “they constitute what is essentially gendered language” as “the playwright has assigned the three male characters numerous allusions, which they use in
by the men in the family are public, communal, and visible to the audience; those associated with
Mary are private, isolated, and invisible\(^{200}\), leading to her ongoing marginalization as “her own
needs – for acceptance, for forgiveness, for agency – go unmet” (38). In her idolatry as a Mother
Mary figure, Mary Tyrone lacks an identity beyond her construction “by the gaze of men,” and
“References to watching and being watched abound in the play” (Porter 44). Mary cannot exist
beyond the roles that have been assigned to her by society, those of wife and mother. Her sad
musings at her love of music and success in the convent school reveal her desire for expression
in other areas of her life. Because of her husband’s work in the theatre and constant land
speculating, she has been left without her own homestead, instead liminally existing between a
summer home and hotels. She is highly revered and loved, yet spiritually and emotionally bereft.

Additionally, Mary’s maternal body has suffered abuses due to her husband’s greedy land
speculating. Tyrone has “unquestionably assimilated into American materialistic culture and cut
himself off from nature” in his treatment of land as saleable commodity (Omori 58). This
alienation from nature does violence to Mary’s body, causing her a lifetime of physical and
emotional suffering. As Tyrone has tied up all his admittedly substantial income in land
speculation, Mary is forced to give birth in a hotel, not the comfort of a home of her own, at the
hands of a hotel doctor who disregards her so thoroughly that the subsequent trauma of birth
leaves her addicted to morphine. This shows the complicity of bourgeois land ownership values
with disregard and harm towards maternal bodies. According to Omori, the doctor’s “careless
treatment of the mother arises from the same modern thinking that objectifies, operates upon, and

\(^{200}\) Porter notes that “except for her trip to the drugstore to get more morphine, Mary never leaves the
house. James and Jamie trim the hedges on the front lawn; all three men spend the afternoon in town, with James
coming home at dinner time, Edmund, not until the evening, and Jamie, even later” (Porter 43).
abuses Mother Earth,” making Mary’s body “a microcosm reflecting the damage modern material civilization does” (Omori 60). Mary’s body experiences abuse just as her husband abuses and separates himself from land by treating it as an object for material gain and financial security. As Omori states, “Mary’s illness – her poor postnatal convalescence, which she takes to be the patriarchal God’s punishment of her, and her ensuing morphine addiction – can be seen as a modern cultural disease caused by patriarchal and materialistic values in combination” (61). In this way, Mary’s maternal body becomes a microcosm for the patriarchal violence of land ownership materialism.

Surprisingly, Brian Friel’s *Translations* lacks a mother figure, and the significance of this admission should be explored in further research, considering the pervasive gendering of land as female in the Irish context, especially related to colonial territorial possession and nationalism. While Hugh, the schoolmaster, has two sons, Owen and Manus, the play does not depict or mention their mother except in passing references. The remaining characters, pupils at the school, could very well be mothers, but this is also not explored. However, the lack of a mother in the form of a character does not preclude the presence of a mythical mother due to the ancient tradition of the sovereignty goddess’s association with the land and its fertility. As argued in Chapter One, *Translations* is a play about land, and in the Irish context, this automatically invokes the sovereignty goddess tradition. Nevertheless, further research should consider the lack of a significant mother figure in *Translations*.

The authors in this study also demonstrate the familial damage of materialist land ownership values through father figures. Strikingly, most of the father figures in these plays are incompetent and irresponsible as purported heads of household and participate in manipulative behavior to further their pursuits of land and property ownership security. Kathleen ni
Houlihan’s Peter Gillane, *By the Bog of Cats*...,’s Xavier Cassidy, and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*’s Phil Hogan trade women for land through marriage to further their own land ownership ambitions. In each of these cases, the play’s action punishes those who participate in these exchanges, showing the authors’ disparagement of such patriarch-arranged marriages. Peter Gillane’s son, Michael, rejects bourgeois marriage to sacrifice himself for Ireland in a revolution that calls for a re-imagining of Irish society beyond imposed imperialist capitalism and land ownership acquisition. In *By the Bog of Cats*..., Xavier Cassidy hoped to use Carthage Kilbride as a pawn by exchanging his daughter, Caroline, for the promise of the farm and seize Hester Swane’s land and property in the process, which Carthage planned to acquire by forcing Hester to sign it over to him. However, Hester refuses to participate in this land grab and exercises her vengeful power as a sovereignty goddess, burning the farm, and destroying all its livestock.

In *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, O’Neill allows Josie Hogan an opportunity to confront her father’s damaging actions. Phil Hogan’s scheming behavior has driven away his sons prior to the action of the play. He connives to use his daughter, Josie, to entrap their landlord, Jim Tyrone, Jr., into a compromising situation that will force Jim to marry Josie and transfer ownership of the farm to Hogan. Josie discovers his deceit and rejects her father’s authority, choosing instead to comfort the distraught Jim Tyrone. Unlike Caroline Cassidy and Delia Cahel, who do not get the chance to speak against their use as pawns, O’Neill gives Josie the opportunity to confront her father as a “clever schemer” whose “only dream [he’s] ever had, or will have, is of [himself] counting a fistful of dirty money, and divil a care of how [he] got it, or who [he] robbed or made suffer!” in an angry diatribe that lays bare his entire plot:

You knew I loved him and wanted him and you used that. You used all you knew about me – Oh, you did it clever! You ought to be proud! You worked so it was me who did all
the dirty scheming – You knew I’d find out from Jim you’d lied about the farm, but not before your lie had done its work – make me go after him, get him drunk, get drunk myself so I could be shameless – and when the truth did come out, wouldn’t it make me love him all the more and be more shameless and willing? Don’t tell me you didn’t count on that, and you such a clever schemer! And if he once had me, knowing I was a virgin, didn’t you count on his honor and remorse, and his loving me in his fashion, to make him offer to marry me? (O’Neill 158).

Josie’s speech signals her refusal to participate in her father’s schemes and her removal from the marriage for land exchange system. Also, she reveals that his ambitions ultimately come down to monetary acquisition, not the land ownership security he claimed to seek through entrapping Jim Tyrone and his daughter.

The fathers in Juno and the Paycock, A Raisin in the Sun, and Long Day’s Journey into Night pursue bourgeois property ownership aspirations to the detriment of their families’ well-being. The hapless Boyle and Walter vacillate between one grandiose plan after another, prompted by the device of an inheritance that they believe will grant them middle class status. Boyle parades his anticipated wealth by buying egregiously tacky clothing, furniture, and household luxuries on credit, only to have everything repossessed when a legal error causes the inheritance to vanish. Walter, despite the advice of his mother and wife, becomes obsessed with using his father’s life insurance money to invest in a liquor store with his unreliable friend, Willie. Walter’s mother laments that Walter’s own father strove his entire life for dignity and freedom, only to have his son reject those ideals to embrace money values. Like Juno and the Paycock, the inheritance in A Raisin in the Sun does not deliver on its promise as Willie disappears with Walter’s portion, which consisted of Walter’s sister Beneatha’s medical school
fund. Both Boyle and Walter lash out in abusive tirades against the women in their household, whom they perceive as oppressive, who are merely trying to keep their struggling families afloat. The end of *Juno and the Paycock* depicts Boyle’s wife and daughter leaving him, after his son, Johnny, has been killed. The ending of *A Raisin in the Sun*, while seemingly more optimistic, does not resolve the long-standing rifts in the family, largely caused by Walter’s obsessive materialist strivings.

In *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, James Tyrone, Sr.’s constant land speculation in a desperate bid for middle class respectability and security has left the family materially destitute, itinerant, and struggling with various illnesses and addictions. The entire action of the play sinks the family deep into despair, laying bare Tyrone’s alienation of his angry sons and the tragedy of Mary Tyrone’s morphine addiction. The after-effects of Tyrone’s paternal abdication manifest in his son Jim Tyrone’s self-destructive alcoholism and womanizing in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. *Long Day’s Journey into Night*’s Edmund and Jamie Tyrone both live with their father due to, respectively, health and financial reasons, but they despise and resent his cold miserliness. Alcoholic James Tyrone, Jr., is adrift and angry, and Edmund, suffering from consumption, burns with anger that his father will not pay for appropriate treatment. James Jr. and Edmund also bemoan their mother’s condition.

In *Translations*, while Hugh, father of Manus and Owen, does not appear to have materialist land ownership ambitions, his authority as a father and relationship with his sons becomes compromised due to the inevitable clash between indigenous heritage and colonial modernization regarding land ownership and the people’s relationship to the land. Hugh stubbornly clings to Gaelic and classical languages, despite his own students’ demands for English. At the same time, representing the reality of postcolonial hybridity, Hugh himself is
fluent in English and has applied for an upcoming job in the new National School System. Manus, Hugh’s son, also speaks English but only teaches Gaelic, Latin, and Greek alongside Hugh in the hedge school. Manus is both romantically and vocationally stunted. His attempted courtship with Maire halts when she meets the English Captain Yolland, and while he longs to leave the hedge school setting, he refuses to apply for the National School job due to his father’s application. Owen, Hugh’s younger son, especially embodies the disparity between indigenous values and imperialist modernization. Owen has returned from Dublin, where he has been working with the Ordnance Survey Team as, in his terms, a “part-time, underpaid, civilian interpreter” (Friel 404). He demonstrates his internalization of colonization values by further explaining his job as “to translate the quaint, archaic tongue you people persist in speaking into the King’s good English” (404). Owen frequently criticizes his father, Hugh, for Hugh’s adherence to Gaelic and classical languages over English. When Hugh describes Gaelic as “a rich language” and a “rich literature” and the native Irish as “a spiritual people,” Owen snaps: “Will you stop that nonsense, Father!” (Friel 418). Owen most egregiously rebels against his father’s values in his assistance with the Ordnance Survey team; as explained in Chapter One, like Aeneas in Carthage, Owen appears as a harbinger of doom in his role of colonial collaborator on a project aimed to destroy the villagers’ way of life represented through Gaelic place names, the dinnshenchas tradition, and an indigenous way of relating to the land steeped in local mythological narratives.

Like the mother figures in this study, the father figures, none of whom could essentially be called “good” or “benevolent” fathers, are themselves oppressed by societal forces that blunt their effectiveness as fathers. As in the recognition that community alienation in By the Bog of Cats... leads Big Josie Swane to abandon her young daughter, Hester, and for Hester to later
murder her own daughter, this observation does not to make excuses for these fathers who range from mildly ineffectual at best and tyrannical at worst. Rather, it recognizes the hypocrisy inherent in an imposed imperial value system based on patriarchy and aggressive materialism that simultaneously lauds the mythical ideals of the family and the roles of father and mother yet creates conditions that all but guarantee their failure. The fathers in the colonial Irish context, Peter Gillane and Hugh, must ensure what little security they can under British colonization. In their responses to imperial oppression, Peter engages in marriage for land exchange schemes, and Hugh distances both of his sons, for various reasons, through his stubborn adherence to ancient traditions that seem to hinder their progress in “modern society.” In independent Ireland, bourgeois materialism ensnares fathers like Xavier Cassidy, who, like Peter Gillane under British colonialism, eagerly exchanges women for land, pawning his daughter in marriage to the greedy social climber Carthage Kilbride. Additionally, while it is easy to criticize the hapless job avoidance of Captain Boyle and the parasitic Joxer in Juno and the Paycock, it is also necessary to understand how the systematic degradation of the native Irish, the lack of housing opportunities, and the dearth of jobs besides menial labor have contributed to his situation. Irish nationalism’s embrace of rigid patriarchy, while condemnable, responded to centuries of the pejorative feminine gendering of Irish men as weak, emotional, untrustworthy scoundrels.

In the American context, systemic racism in A Raisin in the Sun cripples Walter’s educational and employment prospects, leading him to attempt extreme patriarchal control in his own home and blinding him to the complicity of the American Dream with patriarchy and capitalism. Finally, in O’Neill’s plays, while the autocratic behavior of Irish American immigrant family patriarchs James Tyrone, Sr. and Phil Hogan destroys their family’s emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being, they have internalized the values of the white Anglo-
Protestant landowning hegemony, who inherited its own power from the British colonial hierarchy. These fathers embrace these standards in the desperate hope, especially for Tyrone, of protecting their families from a lifetime of poverty as tenants in insecure housing and land ownership situations.

Thus, the damage inherent in white patriarchal bourgeois values materializes most clearly when examining family relationships. In harnessing various mythologies in their indictment of these imperialist systems, the authors have depicted their physical, emotional, and spiritual violence through family relationships. Mothers are simultaneously valorized yet punished for transgressing societal norms, and fathers dictated with their role as heads of household are themselves oppressed by systemic capitalist and racist oppression. In the plays, the family, held up as the core societal unit, cripples under the weight of materialism. Parents are alienated from their children, and family cohesion falls apart as, even in postcolonial societies, imposed colonial values dictate land ownership acquisitiveness as the key to financial and social stability.

I leave this study with a call for the subversive and nuanced re-imagining of myth as engaged by Friel, Yeats, Gregory, Carr, O’Casey, Hansberry, and O’Neill in their unflinching analyses of the imposed imperial basis of societal mythologies like the American Dream and Irish nationalism, the violence inherent in bourgeois land ownership materialism, and the complicity of patriarchy with these value systems. As demonstrated by these authors, myth has a particular power to capture the experience of downtrodden groups by harnessing and re-fashioning the stories at the core of civilization. Myth offers us a trenchant form of commentary that offers not only an artistic distance from difficult issues but also an imaginative way of engaging them through literature. Mythos is at the very origin of literature, and mythologizing occurs at all levels of society, artistic forms, and national histories. What if myth were not
offhandedly dismissed as nostalgic, “backwards,” and “primitive,” or fetishized as an “authentic” yet monolithic and restrictive reclamation and expression of culture? What if myth became instead a system of thinking, as in mytho-postcolonialism, that challenges larger oppressive forces at their very foundations and undoes the assumptions that created and continue to feed these influences? With the continued litmus tests for patriotism in America demanding a wholesale acceptance of the myths of American exceptionalism, the self-made man, and the American Dream, how can we instead use myths to think critically about these ideas and their implications? Why can’t we incorporate myth in our questioning, for example, the Irish government’s mishandling of the Tuam archive records and hiding the shameful treatment of unwed mothers in a nation whose very constitution enshrines their role as essential to Ireland’s national success? Each traditional myth, whether that of Prometheus or the sovereignty goddess, carries with it an entire network of associated stories, characters, and values. Can we possibly harness the weight of mythologies and mythological systems to dismantle oppressive forces at their base? As Joseph Campbell states in *The Power of Myth*, “myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life” (5). As a society, we must think about how we can call upon these “spiritual potentialities” to reverse the harmful role of myths in enforcing dispossession and, instead, re-imagine a new human potential revealed and portrayed through mythology.
WORKS CITED


Cavanagh, Sheila T. “‘The Fatal Destiny of that Land:’ Elizabethan Views of Ireland.”


Cleary, Joe. “‘Misplaced Ideas’?: Colonialism, Location, and Dislocation in Irish Studies.”


Donohue, John W. “Bench Marks.” *America*, January 20, 1979, 30-33


Mailbag: O’Casey-Hansberry, New York Times A. Doyle, Los Angeles, California

251


---. Personal Correspondence to Peter Butenheis

Hanks, Angela et al. “Systematic Inequality.” *Center for American Progress*, 21 February 2018,  


Hays, Peter L. “*Raisin in the Sun* and *Juno and the Paycock.*” *Phylon*, vol. 33, no. 2, 1972, pp. 175-176.


255


Kent, Noel Jacob. *America in 1900*. M.E. Sharpe, 2002


---. “Irish Babel: Brian’s Friel’s *Translations* and George Steiner’s *After Babel*.” *Comparative Drama*, vo. 23, no. 1, 1989, pp. 31-49.


Program for the University of Melbourne’s Melbourne Theatre Company’s production of Translations, October 20-December 11, 1982, Brian Friel Papers, MS 37, 086/10


March 21 to April 12, 1986


