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**The Politics of Melancholia in Twentieth-
Century Irish Drama by Women:
Augusta Gregory, Teresa Deevy, Christina Reid
and Marina Carr**

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**School of Humanities
National University of Ireland, Galway**

Ph.D.

2017

**The Politics of Melancholia in Twentieth-Century
Irish Drama by Women:
Augusta Gregory, Teresa Deevy, Christina Reid and
Marina Carr**

by

Mikyung Park

A thesis submitted to the Department of English
in conformity with the requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis explores the dynamics of national and historical melancholia as invoked in twentieth-century drama of four Irish women, Augusta Gregory (1852-1932), Teresa Deevy (1894-1963), Christina Reid (1942-2015), and Marina Carr (1964–). It offers a theoretical and historical approach to major works that achieved significant success in Irish theatre but have been diminished in the canon formation. I argue that melancholic assimilation of socially ‘undesirable’ elements, often a gendered process, has been a key practice in the social, cultural, and political landscape of both South and North of Ireland. I propose melancholic performance as the umbrella critical device to investigate how the playwrights aesthetically respond to and challenge the gendered discourses of exclusion and defeat. Distinguished from the conception of performance as a singular act of expression in the present, melancholic performance refers to the continuous and compelled engagement with loss, exposing the affective genealogy of what appears on stage. Employing this theoretical device, I argue that these playwrights embed melancholic states and performative acts structurally into the selected plays, although on very different aesthetic or semiotic terms. Their embrace of melancholia also exposes melancholic alterity – social elements that the modern/contemporary (Northern) Irish state can neither fully incorporate nor entirely abandon – as a lived experience for marginalized (female) subjects in Irish drama. Creatively reworking a melancholic loss and abjection, however, these playwrights transform the affective state into a battleground for negotiations between various opposing forces. This thesis ultimately envisions the capacity of melancholic performance as a critical tool for elucidating painful migrations occurring when the boundaries are broken. Rather than aspiring to a positive resolution to existing conflicts represented in the works, melancholic performance reinscribes the meaning of struggles, including performative failure of female agency, as a demand for a change in power relations within society.

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Introduction

Engaging with Melancholic Performance and Alterity

‘The Politics of Melancholia in Twentieth-Century Irish Drama by Women’ explores the dynamics of national and historical melancholia as invoked in twentieth-century drama by four Irish women: Augusta Gregory (1852-1932), Teresa Deevy (1894-1963), Christina Reid (1942-2015), and Marina Carr (1964–). These playwrights wrote (and write) for Ireland’s national theatres, the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and the Lyric Theatre in Belfast, which have been instrumental in “defining and sustaining national consciousness” (Murray 2000: 3). The thesis considers how these playwrights have challenged institutionalised and canonised narratives of historical memories in the cultural and social formation. I argue that the teleological canonization of historical narratives has contributed to the promotion of a hegemonic national/group identity throughout the twentieth century in Ireland; the canonization has been characterised by the melancholic assimilation and exclusion of a history of (gendered) differences for the ideal of social homogeneity. The work by these playwrights presents and contests such narratives in a way that creatively intervenes in the predominantly masculine environment of the Irish and Northern Irish theatre. Investigating the authors’ aesthetic responses to social changes, or crises, at historical moments of Irish nation formation, I deploy melancholia as has been elaborated in the context of postcolonialism and gender/feminist theories. Cultural theorists have expanded Sigmund Freud’s concept of melancholia and theorised it as a critical mode in which to unravel conditions of being in relation to historical processes of domination, subjection, and resistance. Throughout the thesis, I propose an enabling force of melancholia at both aesthetic and critical levels: melancholia creates a representational space for the exploration of historical losses and alterity, unsettling the domain of presence and allowing us to avoid the articulation of the self-styled and auto-affective notion of the individual.

This thesis is concerned with the authors’ aesthetic practices that enable the subjects and memories lost to Ireland’s hegemonic identity

formation to emerge in complexity against the backdrop of multiple forms of domination in society: how the dramatists restore the relationship of marginalised people's psychological, physical, and linguistic suffering to political and historical crises of the outside world. I associate these aesthetic practices with the playwrights' embrace of melancholic dramaturgies. That is, the authors integrate various sites of loss and abjection into their work in a hybrid form that combines domestic/social realism pervasive in the tradition of Irish drama and theatre with alternative genres and semiotic and symbolic elements of theatrical performance. Melancholic dramaturgies explored in this thesis invoke the complex dynamics of migrations and subversions between the realms of melancholic subject/power, haunting, and sufferings of 'categorised'/marginalised social others: they restore a threshold where the relation of melancholic subject to lost others is explored in a way that transforms the fixed time, space, and identity politics. The embrace of hybridity in form and content, therefore, is a distinct characteristic of drama of melancholia, making possible multiple migrations of melancholic symptoms (the other's melancholic symptoms subversively opens up symptoms of me, or of the social/political structure). It dismantles any ideas that melancholic illness belongs to (usually marginalised and depressed) individuals or groups. Rather, the unsettling of rigid boundaries enacts a need to rewrite the particular illness in association with social and historical conditions: the foreclosure of certain identifications, subsequently producing *failures* of belonging and connectivity in society.

Attention to these dramaturgies exposes how the authors and their play texts, as well as theatre performances, exist in a larger context of melancholic citationality of literary and theatre history/memory – repeated practices of assimilation, accumulation, and dissemination in the cultural formation that institutionalise patriarchal canon and produce loss of arts by women. However, instead of reiterating the traditional configuration of dramatic form and content, the playwrights creatively re-engage with loss to expose structural and psychological terms of abjection as lived and affective state of marginalised beings in Ireland. I relate this creative re-engagement to *melancholic performance* whereby the authors allow key characters, mostly but not exclusively female, constantly to engage with loss, or at

times perform loss by exteriorising the dynamics between desire for possession and pain of dispossession. Similar to psychoanalytic forms of ‘acting out’ indicating the subject’s compulsory performance of conflicts triggered by what is repressed or inability to remember, melancholic performance, rather than claiming a singularly expressive mode of performance in the present, affectively exposes the genealogy of what appears on stage.

An aesthetic and critical exploration of constitutive and exclusionary relations of power through which the subject on stage and beyond has been formed, melancholic performance illuminates how the totalitarian politics of identity, at individual, communal, and national levels, contains and disavows *alterity* of the other that cannot be articulated along the discursive principles of dominant narratives. That is, melancholic performance presents the dynamics between what is performed on stage and what is not: as Judith Butler states, “what is exteriorised and performed can only be understood in reference to what is barred from the signifier and from the domain of corporeal legibility” (1993: 179). This melancholic performance opens up space for alterity, or remainder of communal/national assimilation, that has been turned into the realm of absence but kept alive in the matrix of (national) subjecthood: alterity that is, in Butler’s terms, retained “‘inside’ the [melancholic] subject [or nation] as its own founding repudiation” (Butler 1993: 3). In the playwrights’ dramaturgies of melancholic performance, alterity erupts, returns, and indeed ghosts to complicate the structure of national identity and reveal its incompleteness.

The thesis also considers possibilities of melancholia as a critical framework through the investigation of cultural theorists’ reinvestment in melancholia and proposes its theoretical efficacy for a more extensive understanding of these women’s drama. Irish drama and theatre studies have rarely paid attention to melancholia due arguably to the term’s strong association with individual pathology – the inability of the melancholic subject to envision future possibilities of transformation as has been theorised in Freud’s 1917 work “Mourning and Melancholia.” However, cultural theorists such as Judith Butler, Paul Gilroy, Anne Cheng, and Ranjana Khanna consider melancholia as crucial to the understanding of

destructive effects of power, heteronormativity, colonialism, and racism. In their theories, melancholia is no longer limited to the individual inability. Instead, it becomes a critical term that not only explains the existing mode of domination but also embraces sufferings of those who are abjected from the social formation.

I propose that a critical framework of melancholia enables us to think beyond binary categories such as centrality and marginality, success and failure, or emancipation and subjugation. These categories may be mobilised in any field of representation to understand conditions and possibilities of resistance, and indeed, numerous critical works based on feminism and postcolonialism have sought an emancipatory vision in the arts especially by women. However, the vision for a total refusal of oppression radically politicising women's arts has the risk of disregarding the conditions of negotiations that women or subjects on the cultural/social margin face in everyday life. Moreover, those subjects who are considered to fail to gesture towards a more positive option continuously languish on the margin. The lens of melancholia presents the women's drama as an aesthetic battleground between those opposing forces, elucidating painful migrations occurring when the boundaries are broken and reinscribing the meaning of performed/assumed failure of female agency as a demand for a change in power relations within society.

The selected playwrights are prominent figures in the Irish cultural landscape. Gregory as a founding member of the Abbey theatre wrote more than forty plays that provided a wide range of staples for the theatre's repertoire; Deevy as a successor of Gregory in the Abbey saw the successful productions of her plays in the 1930s; a writer-in-residence at Belfast's Lyric Theatre in the early 1980s, Reid was one of the leading playwrights in the late twentieth century providing key voices about women's life thus far invisible in Northern Ireland due partly to the bigoted political conflict; finally, Carr is a canonical figure in contemporary Irish theatre, and her plays have been widely performed nationally and internationally receiving critical acclaim. However, the recognition of the playwrights' achievement in Ireland's national theatres has long been coupled with the persisting diminishment of their contribution to Irish drama and theatre, which is

operated on the plane of “the separatist categorisation of women as gendered artists” (Sihra 2016: 549). Although the last few decades have seen a critical challenge against pejorative terms of such categorisation, the plays by these playwrights (except for Carr) have continued to remain on the margin creating an uncanny realm of Irish drama: they are marked in the canon and yet, their plays are unmarked constituting loss along with a myriad of plays by Irish women. This blatant or inadvertent omission invites a critical engagement with the plays by these women to challenge the limitations of canon formation in Irish drama (mirroring, or at least, related to patriarchal narratives of history) and investigate the playwrights’ creation of melancholic dramaturgies and interrogation of inequity and abjection at the centre of lived experiences of the marginalised.

This thesis examines the plays that were instrumental in the authors’ success and/or have attracted academic readings by (feminist) scholars of Irish drama in order to explore the workings of melancholic performance as an aesthetic and interpretative mode. Particularly, the thesis focuses on Gregory’s comedy *Spreading the News* (1904), which signalled the successful opening of the Abbey Theatre, and *Grania* (1910), her re-writing of the mythic female ‘hero’ in Irish folklore. For Deevy’s drama, I examine *In Search of Valour* (1931; otherwise known as *The Disciple*), *The King of Spain’s Daughter* (1935), and *Katie Roche* (1936), all of which explore the young protagonists’ painful journeys in search of agency under the oppressive conditions of the new Irish Free State. Reid’s best-known plays *Tea in a China Cup* (1983) and *The Belle of the Belfast City* (1989), delving into the familial/individual rites of memorising through storytelling or performance, are examined for counter-narratives to obsessive ethno-identitarianism in Northern Ireland. Carr’s Midlands plays, *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996), and *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998), have established her as a principal Abbey writer to the present day. With the notable exception of *Grania* (1910), which was never performed in the Abbey or anywhere else in Gregory’s lifetime, the plays under discussion in this thesis saw successful productions in the national theatres.

These plays, however, often perplexed audiences and scholars. Critics, whether feminist or not, voiced dissatisfaction over failure in the

plays to radically reject oppressive patriarchal sign systems or of conferring on the protagonists any sense of autonomous agency. Critical dissatisfactions also encompassed the playwrights' dramaturgy of indeterminacy: the border-bending melancholic dramaturgy, which incorporates many subgenres such as Gothic, satire, fantasy, musical performance, and myth into a recognisable form of domestic realism. For example, a reviewer of the premiere of Deevy's *In Search of Valour* complained about the playwright's "vesture of reality to clothe [the] dancing skeleton [of fantasy]" ("*A Disciple*" 25 August 1931: 8). Brecken Rose Hancock, discussing Carr's incorporation of "the ghosts of patriarchal literary authority" into her dramaturgy of *The Mai*, criticises "her culpability in the cycle of repetition and mother-blaming" through the perpetuation of the wounded myth of matrilineal connectivity (2005: 20, 24). Similarly, a reviewer of *The Belle of the Belfast City* castigated Reid's use of songs and lyrics as a simple add-on that damages the artistic integrity of the play (Keyes 1989: 27). The unjust condescension to Gregory's comedy also continues describing it as merely delightful and improbable farce that lacks artistry. These 'unsatisfactory' outcomes have often resulted in the degradation of the playwrights' artistic endeavours and the neglect of their drama in revival projects, which has in turn functioned to subtly erase their work from the overwhelmingly masculine canon of Irish drama.

This thesis explores anew the 'successful' plays of the selected women dramatists with 'successful' careers in the Irish national theatres. 'Successful' in inverted commas indicates the limitations of the word to encompass their plays and their careers in the mainstream cultural institutions, while also emphasising their achievement of reconfiguring the symbolic register of national theatres and cultures. Rather than attempting to propose correctives to complaints about the dramatists' ambiguous representations of female agency and formal 'disorder', the aim of this thesis is to expand the interpretative frame for the ruptures that the women authors create in their aesthetic engagement with the nation. I argue that these dramatists deliberately invoke women's symptomatic disorders characterised by their difficulty or inability to connect with the outside world. Accordingly, the playwrights' creation of porous and border-bending

formal/thematic tensions invites audiences to explore the performed meaning of failures in relation to social and historical mechanism of foreclosing the emergence of marginalised people as speaking subjects and their disconnections from history and society.

In recent years, there have been numerous scholarly engagements in Ireland in which to redress discourses around the Irish literary canon and mobilise alternative forms of drama and theatre. For example, Melissa Sihra's edited collection of essays *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation* (2007), and Cathy Leeney's ground breaking *Irish Women Playwrights 1900 – 1939* (2010) offered a possibility for new type of historiography of Irish drama by bringing together representations of women and elucidating how "women's artistic energies were the sustaining source for a national theatrical renaissance" (Leeney 2010: 2). More recently, Lisa Fitzpatrick's collected edition *Performing Feminisms in Contemporary Ireland* (2013) examines how women's performance of feminism in everyday life shapes and reshapes ideas of womanhood in contemporary Ireland. Miriam Haughton and Mária Kurdi's collected edition *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices by Women in Ireland* (2015) as well as Siobhán O'Gorman and Charlotte McIvor's collected edition *Devised Performance in Irish Theatre: Histories and Contemporary Practice* (2015) expand the scope of Irish drama and theatre studies by highlighting non-institutional and non-hegemonic collective theatre-makings, often community-based performances, as an alternative mode of challenging the economy of cultural and political power.

In another vein, studies on the junction of memory, history, and performance have also flourished as in Emilie Pine's *The Politics of Irish Memory* (2011), Christopher Collins and Mary P. Caulfield's edition of collected essays, *Ireland, Memory and Performing the Historical Imagination* (2014), and *Irish Studies and the Dynamics of Memory: Transitions and Transformations* (2017) edited by Marguerite Corporaal, Christopher Cusack, and Ruud van den Beuken. Arduously tackling the phenomenon of remembering the past as entailing its precarious double, forgetting, the scholars have investigated problematic realms of Irish modernity and contested the teleological process of history making

variously performed in Ireland's political and cultural landscape. In so doing, these scholars account for the need of performing forgotten memories and histories that will, as Christopher Collins and Mary P. Caulfield affirm, "pluralise past events that are located in the gaps and the fissures of the architecture of Ireland's historical consciousness" (2014: 1).

The work of restoring histories 'located in the gaps and the fissures' of the national architecture, however, becomes complicated when we face women's accounts for women's lives in Ireland: that is, when we witness that drama work by women does not easily present a radical transformation of socially marginalised female characters. The artistic envisioning of emancipation for female characters may be particularly difficult in societies like twentieth-century Ireland where gender identity politics are so entrenched that marginalised women have internalised negativities imposed on female subjects, and where the artistic struggles to envision freedom parallel with difficulties embedded in the process of decolonisation of the formerly colonised nation-state.¹ Such complications may be more noticeable in the arts by women working within Ireland's national theatres that have consciously engaged with national histories from the perspectives of largely masculine subjects.

The analysis of the work by women who worked within, with, and against dominant forms of institution can neither be limited to the political/materialist search for freedom from oppression nor to the psychoanalytic examination of subjective sufferings as singular dynamics of the ego and the unconscious. While investigating the dramatists' conscious and aesthetic engagement with historical losses, thus, this thesis extends the contemporary scholarly restoration of canonical history's lost realms by posing melancholia as a critical tool for case studies. Through the critical lens, I can illuminate the authors' plays as demonstrating that historical losses and sufferings cannot be adequately understood by a positive theory

¹ Gerardine Meaney's *Gender, Ireland, and Cultural Change* (2010) and Geraldine Moane's *Gender and Colonialism* (2010), for example, point out that postcolonial Ireland's desire for masculine identity is deeply rooted in its colonial history – melancholic attachment to the past as a way of covering up the legacy of colonialism by repeating the gendered patterns of domination. Melancholia of postcolonial Ireland has regulated women through "an imposition of a very definite feminine identity as guarantor to the precarious masculinity of the new State" (Meaney 2010: 5).

of transformation based on the linear format of ‘working through’ and liberation from the past, and that liberal ideas of progress and success pervasive in historical narratives should and can be actively countered by melancholic performance that brings to centre stage the breakdown of social/individual rationality and fictions of historical continuity and stability.

In the following sections, I set out the manifold layers of melancholia that run through this thesis. ‘Historical Melancholia’ approaches the modern history of women and nation in the South and the North of Ireland through the lens of postcolonial melancholia. The following section, ‘Performativity, Performance, and Melancholia’ further refines my theoretical use of melancholic performance enmeshing it with Butler’s notion of performativity. In ‘Alterity and Haunting in Melancholia’, the concept of alterity is expounded both as the remainder of melancholic assimilation and the constitutive other of subject formation. On the basis of these theoretical elaborations of the concepts, I challenge in ‘Irish Theatres and Women’ the melancholic loss of work by women in the canon formation in Irish drama and theatre, which is directly followed by the outlines of my case studies in each chapter.

Historical Melancholia

In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud refers to mourning as a normal affect that is accomplished once the subject has withdrawn from his/her attachment with the lost object and displaced it with a new object. On the other hand, melancholia originates in a relentless fixation on loss and culminates in a regressive process of incorporating the lost other. Because it is a process that enacts a primary narcissism, Freud relates it to a pathological disposition. Extending Freud’s concept of melancholia to the socio-political issues of gender, racism, colonialism, and nationalism, cultural theorists have responded to historical processes of domination and subjection and detected melancholia of community or nation. For example, Paul Gilroy’s *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005) illuminates melancholia pervasive in the British culture, the excessive attachment to the privilege

that the history of British imperialism offered to the nation. Gilroy argues against the British nationalism that promotes the history of triumph and rejects facing present problems: he diagnoses the social malady of the British culture as an “inability to face the profound change in circumstances and moods that followed the end of the empire and consequent loss of imperial prestige” (2005: 89-90).

While Gilroy’s argument centres on the British culture, his theory of cultural melancholia grants an insight into the post-colonial condition of Ireland, counter-mirroring melancholia of post-imperial England. Regarding the context of previously colonised nation states, Ranja Khanna states:

the critical response to nation-statehood arises from the secret embedded in nation-state formation: that the concept of nation-statehood was constituted through the colonial relation, and needs to be radically reshaped if it is to survive without colonies, or without a concealed (colonial) other. The spectre of colonialism (and indeed its counter – the spectre of justice) thus hangs over the postcolonial nation-state. The critical melancholic relationship may manifest itself in a form of demetaphorisation, a form of loss of the dynamism of representation necessitated by colonial politics (and this can be extended to capitalist economics). Such systems necessitate revolutionary binarism for subjectivity and the right of representation to be achieved. (2003: 25-6)

In Ireland, the effect of the colonial situation, which continued (at least) till the independence achieved through the revolutionary war (1919-1921), was eradication of the right to represent the self-image of the nation. Trapped in the binary ‘proper’ names of the coloniser and the colonised, the marking degradation of the nation was manifest in Britain’s colonial discourses that located Irishness in the metaphoric interpenetration between race and femininity standing in for each other. As Bronwen Walter remarks, “the Irish were racialised in two distinct ways, each strongly gendered. Masculine images were of uncontrolled subhumans incapable of self-government. Feminine images were of weakness requiring protection. Both representations justified continued British rule whilst bolstering images of the ruling centre as the antithesis of these negative characteristics” (1999: 80).

The native response to the gendering effects of colonial discourse was to enact concepts of nationhood centred on a masculine ethos,

seemingly demonstrative of the capacity for self-control and self-government, and to “disavow the stigma of racial feminization at the cost of forging a critique of the patriarchal brand of colonialism that produced it” (Valente 2011: 98 -9). In the Republic, the inversion of post-imperial melancholia occurred when the postcolonial nation’s desire for masculine identity repeated, rather than deconstructing, the gendered patterns of colonial domination by exploiting the feminised representation of Ireland. That is, “[t]he allegorical identification of Ireland with a woman, variously personified as the Shan Van Vocht, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, or Mother Eire,” as Elizabeth Butler Cullingford points out, “[was] applied by Irish men, [and] it has helped to confine Irish women in a straitjacket of purity and passivity” (1990: 1). She maintains that such an identification was a base of political and cultural construction of patriarchal oppositional hierarchy: “Politically, the land is seen as an object to be possessed, or repossessed: to gender it as female, therefore, is to confirm and reproduce the social arrangements which construct women as material possessions, not as speaking subjects” (1990: 1). The playwrights undertaken in this thesis disintegrate the equation of women with land/home/objects in various ways. Contemporary Ireland’s landscape in Carr’s drama, for example, preserving multiple memories and hidden histories continuously eludes numerous forms of desire for possession, ultimately confronting an epistemological frame that reduces it into a knowable, or exploitable, object.

Women’s position in the Republic’s national discourses was characterized by the oppositional dyad of centrality and marginality: melancholia of postcolonial Ireland has regulated women through “an imposition of a very definite feminine identity as guarantor to the precarious masculinity of the new State” (Meaney 2010: 5). Meanwhile, the very imposition not only produced a destructive imprisonment of women in the domestic sphere but also erased their actuality. The entrapment of women culminated in the 1937 constitution of the Republic (then the Irish Free State), which consolidated various legislations barring women’s participations in the social formation. Socially, politically, and legally excluded from the public sphere and trapped within the domestic, women “could rarely own property due to a persisting patrilineal structure, yet were

held responsible for the moral well-being and upbringing of the children. In effect, the Republic of Ireland's decolonization resulted in a form of cultural imperialism within which Irish women became as oppressed in relation to Irish men as Irish men and the nation had once been in relation to Britain" (Pelan 1999: 247).

Melissa Sihra asserts that constitutional regulations of women in the Republic of Ireland were combined with confining Catholic principles and depended on a "monotheistic patriarchal metanarrative [of the 1937 Constitution]" that "valorised the heterosexual family unit and glorified the role of motherhood while intervening in issues pertaining to sexuality and morality" (2007: 2). The Constitution's seeming ratification of motherhood did not involve the State's practical protection.² It was rather used by Irish legislators to implement restrictive and conservative policies for the following decades. The persistence of the legacy of gendered domination in the contemporary cultural life of Ireland is manifest in the phenomenon wherein the Constitutional 'confusion' of the terms between 'mother' and 'woman' is continued to this day (2), against which Irish women have been fighting to the present of early 2018 through campaigns for the repeal of the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution.³

The encryption of the feminine 'other' into the national ideal thus characterises melancholia of the development of southern Ireland into a sovereign nation state. In Northern Ireland, since its birth *secured* in the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty that led to a brutal civil war between pro-treaty and anti-treaty parties,⁴ melancholia was driven by the severe division of society between the Catholic Republicans longing for one Ireland and the Protestant Unionists/Loyalists defending their link to Britain. Brian Singleton defines the division as a postcolonial condition of Northern Ireland. He states:

² Article 41.2 reads: "In particular the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall therefore endeavor to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home."

³ Article 40.3.3, the Eighth Amendment of 1983, reads: "The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right."

⁴ Six counties of Ulster Province, that is, Antrim, Armagh, Derry/Londonderry, Down, Fermanagh, Tyrone, were officially partitioned to Northern Ireland. Thus, Ulster does not indicate Northern Ireland.

In Northern Ireland, Catholics, in the minority, look to Dublin in their aspirations for reunification with their southern neighbours. Northern Protestants see themselves as the chosen few, settlers on occupied territory, defending their link to the colonial mainland of Britain. Protestant working classes have been instilled with the belief that they are a cut above their Catholic counterparts, when in fact they have more in common with them economically and socially, if not culturally and religiously. (Singleton 2001: 301)

This division, then, marked Northern Ireland's thwarted relation with the notion of the homogenous nation state: the Unionists' strong hold over the state made the state identity ambiguous, defined as 'British but not quite British', and also created visible social discriminations against the Catholic others who identify themselves as Irish. The division led to years of political conflict known as The Troubles spanning roughly the period from 1969 and 1998. The 1960s was a turbulent era in Northern Ireland when, with the rise of Catholic middle class, the civil rights movements exploded entailing the involvement of the British army killing unarmed civilians protesting against internment in 1972. The Troubles was "a complex struggles over culture, history, ethnic identity, territory, civil rights, and the British rule over the North" (Coffey 2016: 6). The brutality of violence, however, was beyond measure inflicting physical and mental injuries on both Catholic and Protestant sides, although the Northern Irish state's Catholic others were more vulnerably exposed to the violence. The Troubles slowly transitioned into the peace process through the 1994 and 1997 ceasefires and the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

Originating from the division and the desire for belonging to a separate 'national' entity, the Northern Irish state assimilated the deeply entrenched sexism in both the Republican and Unionist politics, let alone the class division within Unionist communities (which Singleton tackles in the quotation above). Many scholars who examined the gendered construction of the ethno-nationalist ideologies in Northern Ireland (Ashe, Ward, Sales, Coulter, Racioppi and O'Sullivan See, Stapleton and Wilson) observe that both categories of Unionist and Republican ideology attempt to constitute normative gender identities based on the strict division of the public and the domestic within a wider boundary of nation. Both discourses

attempt to prescribe certain types of behavioural code, roles and activities as appropriate for men and women within the community. In these discourses, women are considered as ‘symbolic border-guards’ (Yuval-Davis 1997) who reproduce the cultural boundaries of the community regarded as distinctive from other communities through the socialization of community members and the safeguarding of moral traditions.

The late twentieth (and early twenty-first century) clearly witnessed an advance of history both in the South and the North. The Good Friday Agreement promised a level of peace in Northern Ireland weakening the border between the North and the South. Although the sectarian division at community levels has not been fully resolved to the present, the North has been engaged in a process of envisioning a brighter and more stable future, redefining its past and attempting to “recast contested space and territory with positive historical occasions” (Coffey 2016: 2). In the Republic, the 1990 election of Mary Robinson as president marked a breakthrough after the years of conservative backlash on women’s movements such as the Irish Women’s Liberation Movement organised under the influence of the international feminist movement and activism.⁵ As Ailbhe Smyth notes, “the tide was on the turn and Irish women were once again signalling their desire for change and their determination to bring it about” (1993: 266). The Republic was quickly opening to the idea of cultural diversity: in 1993 it decriminalized homosexuality and two years later the ban on divorce was removed. This period was also marked by the rapid economic growth with the influx of inward immigration.

However, such economic progress and cultural openness have also produced a sense of deprivation, anxiety, and exile within home, which was deepened by the revelation of historical cruelty and new divisions in society. While Ireland was moving, on the surface at least, towards an inclusive formation of Irishness, this social progress has not led to the profound deconstruction of the conservative notion of national identity. It became evident in a 2004 citizenship referendum in which the Irish public voted for the cancellation of the right to citizenship of children born to non-national

⁵ The Republic’s legislative reaction against women’s movements included the 1983 pro-life amendment to the Constitution and 1986 referendum that upheld the ban on divorce.

parents. Claire Bracken defines it as “regressive amendment” (2016: 5): that is, the vote revealed the public resistance to the unsettling of established certainties, signalling a return to traditionalist mindsets regarding the issues of sovereignty, race, and sexuality. Moreover, the conservative realm of maternity, now combined with the issue of citizenship, continues to be used to define boundaries of Irishness. The use of maternal body as carrying Irish citizenship has now been extended to women of refugees and asylum seekers, as well as women of ethnic minority groups such as Travellers. The Irish maternal body is marked against the threat of the pregnant body of immigrant women.

In her article “Staging the ‘New Irish’” Charlotte McIvor examines how the work of minority-ethnic group artists in Ireland “reframes the parameters of national belonging” (2011: 312). She argues that the post-Celtic Tiger’s Ireland’s interculturalism, aiming at social changes for the integration of diversities and achievement of equality at various social sectors, “is ideally directed not only at immigrants, but towards Irish society as a whole” (2011: 312, 313). Although this thesis centres on twentieth-century Irish drama, my critical engagement with the plays by women can reveal the resonating relationship between women in the ‘inside’ of Irish society and women in the ‘outside’: how the foreign and the illegitimate feminine others have been excluded and contained in the architecture of nation (the Republic) or sectarian communities (the North). The interpretative pursuit of melancholic performance of losses and struggles of the dead in the texts and the theatres can provide a site in which the working of larger structure of society (coupled with the limits of imaginary Irishness) is revealed. It also demands a widening of historical and social perspectives through the performative disintegration of the boundaries between the past and the present, as well as the inside/confined and the outside/ejected.

Performativity, Performance and Melancholia

In contrast to melancholic performance, denoting throughout the thesis an aesthetic and interpretative mode that interrogates conditions of alterity and abjection through the repeated performance of loss, I use the

term performativity to refer to a broad individuated and collective force in society. As has been theorised by Judith Butler, performative identity, whether individual or collective, indicates a compelled and repeated enactment of regulatory regimes of intelligible (gender) identities. This notion of discursive performativity is a punitive (yet, engendering resistance at the same time) process of becoming 'body', which involves a constant reiteration of the accumulated convention of actions, styles, and thoughts in society.

Thus there is no 'I' who stands behind discourse and executes its volition or will through discourse. On the contrary, the 'I' only comes into being through being called, named, interpellated, to use the Althusserian terms, and this discursive constitution takes place prior to the 'I'; it is the transitive invocation of the 'I'. Indeed, I can only say 'I' to the extent that I have first been addressed, and that address has mobilised my place in speech; paradoxically, the discursive condition of social recognition precedes and conditions the formation of the subject: recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms the subject. Further, the impossibility of a full recognition, that is, of ever fully inhabiting the name by which one's social identity is inaugurated and mobilised, implies the instability and incompleteness of subject-formation. The 'I' is thus a citation of the place of the 'I' in speech, where that place has a certain priority and anonymity with respect to the life it animates: it is the historically revisable possibility of a name that precedes and exceeds me, but without which I cannot speak. (1993: 171)

While the subject is subjected to social norms, the social terms in themselves are dependent on being continually cited, whereby a failure of naming the original, the first cause that defines a 'true' identity, is revealed in the rupture between the condition of production (utterances/ interpellations) and its effect. For Butler, any resistance to or subversion of hegemonic power is not achieved from the throwing off of power but from the reworking of it through improper (wrong) citations, which becomes possible due to the instability of power that cannot fully constitute the subject through subjection. For example, Butler states how the resignification of the injurious name 'queer' occurs through a performance of 'queering' the terms of sexual legitimacy, which is close to a melancholic performance that is an 'acting out' of loss of intelligibility and recognition in society:

the subject who is queered into public discourse through homophobic interpellations of various kinds *takes up* or *cites* that very terms as the discursive basis for an opposition. This kind of citation will emerge as *theatrical* to the extent that it *mimes* and *renders hyperbolic* the discursive convention that it also *reverses*. The hyperbolic gesture is crucial to the exposure of the homophobic ‘law’ that can no longer control the terms of its own abjecting strategies. (1993: 177; italics in original)

Butler illuminates performance in relation to performativity as a site where a theatrical activism can counter various forms of oppressive norms and politics: according to Janelle Reinelt, as a “site for the emergence of novelty in representation” (2002: 205). Butler suggests drag performance as an exemplary mode of different citations. Playing upon the presence of corporeality, that is, “anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance,” drag performance can displace the meaning of the original, opening up a possibility of reconceiving gender identity not as interiority but as “personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices” (1990: 188). Thus, it is impossible for Butler to oppose the theatrical to the political: gender meanings, taken up by wrong citations (such as parodic styles in drag) of hegemonic and misogynistic culture, are “denaturalized and mobilized though their parodic recontextualisation” (1990: 188).

However, Butler emphasises time and again that such theatrical novelty, or activism, always emerges by not disavowing the notion that gender meanings, or identities, are constituted by the very structures that we attempt to embrace or resist. Hence melancholia is implicated in Butler’s theory of performativity. Butler states that the maintenance of certain identities not only takes place through the citational process but also a narcissistic attachment to the terms that produce an identity:

[...] called by an injurious name, I come into a social being, and because I have a certain inevitable attachment to my existence, because a certain narcissism takes holds of any terms that confer existence, I am led to embrace the terms that injure me. (Butler 1997: 104)

This double bind of performative identity is characterised by the compulsory repetition of social scripts and the passionate attachment to the social interpellation. It also marks a melancholic impasse of subjecthood in which social norms, once naturalised through the psychic and bodily

inscription, exert the power within the subject. The social power is incorporated within the subject as the lost object in the sense that it “vanishes [...] effect[ing] a melancholia that reproduces power as the psychic voice of judgment addressed to (turned upon) oneself, thus modelling reflexivity on subjection” (1997: 198). Butler’s melancholic performativity elucidates the bond of the subject with the social: the subject achieves its power by erasing the genealogy of its subjection to the existing norms – the lost object in this case being the normative social terms.

Drag performance is also elaborated within melancholic performativity: what is performed in drag is heterosexual gender melancholia that socially functions as a norm. Butler states, “What drag exposes [...] is the ‘normal’ constitution of gender presentation in which the gender performed is in many ways constituted by a set of disavowed attachments or identifications that constitutes a different domain of the ‘unperformable’” (1993: 180). Overlapped with drag, melancholic performativity of heterosexual gender (or the constructed gender through reiteration of norms) is related to the double disavowal of loss – loss of love for the same sex parent that is never acknowledged and never grieved in society:

The straight man becomes (mimes, cites, appropriates, assumes the status of) the man he ‘never’ loved and ‘never’ grieved; the straight woman becomes the woman she ‘never’ loved and ‘never’ grieved. It is in this sense, then, that what is most apparently performed as gender is the sign and symptom of a pervasive disavowal (1993: 180)

While it is normative heterosexuality that is deconstructed here, Butler’s theorization enables a reflection on a broader conception of subjectivity in relation to ungrievable/unspeakable loss that requires a space to appear to be publicly avowed: the emergence of grieving in forms of enactment/performativity as crucial to survival and to the reworking of community. In her more recent work, *Notes Towards Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), Butler takes this notion of disavowal and unintelligibility further to the realm of political/social failure, as well as of collective activism that is based on alliances between populations and groups conditioned in terms of precariousness and vulnerability. Butler’s

notion of vulnerability developed in “Violence, Mourning, Politics” (2003), *Precarious Life* (2006), and *Frames of War* (2009) is based, on the one hand, on her existentialist claim that a social being can never be fully recognised and cannot but depend on each other for sustenance: a human condition of corporeal vulnerability calling for an “ethical obligation that is grounded in precarity” (2015: 119). Yet, such precarity “designates politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support more than others, and become differentially exposed to injury, violence and death” (2015: 33). Butler argues that identity politics, the demarcation of borders in the nation-states, or neoliberal privatisation that pursues individual right and responsibility, has failed to provide an understanding of what it means to live together across differences (27).

What is noticeable in *Notes Towards Performative Theory of Assembly* is Butler’s emphasis on the capacity of ‘body’ as a force of performative resignification:

when bodies assemble on the street, in the square, or in other forms of public space (including virtual ones) they are exercising a plural and performative right to appear, one that asserts and instates the body in the midst of the political field, and which, in its expressive and signifying function, delivers a bodily demand for a more livable set of economic, social, and political conditions no longer afflicted by induced forms of precarity. (2015: 11)

By publicly inserting bodies in alliance with others into the sphere of appearance, Butler contends, those who live under conditions of vulnerability can disrupt the very sphere exposing their melancholic conditions as constitutive exclusion. Performative power of the people emerges from the condition of bodies and their connection, and then “speech acts that unfold from there articulate something that is already happening at the level of the plural body” (174).

Andrew Parker and Eve Sedgwick state that one of the consequences of the appreciation of performativity “has been a heightened willingness to credit performative dimension in all ritual, ceremonial, scripted behaviours” (1995: 2), which can include various forms of (theatre) performance. This

thesis proposes that (theatre) performance enables a way of reconsidering forms of performativity in society and power relations by providing plural forms of agency and social practices. It is not through a promotion of inclusion because the discursive politics of inclusion of the recognised others can overlook *remainders* of inclusion/assimilation languishing on the margin. Rather, this thesis argues that drama and theatre can be a public forum where the theatrical enactment of conditions of vulnerability, the affective conditions of pain and suffering of others, exposes performative patterns of domination and oblivion, calling for a different understanding of melancholic relations between the knowing/intelligible subjects and the unknowable/unintelligible others.

Performativity has provided an expansion of understanding of performance in theatre. For example, William Worthen argues that dramatic performance is “not the replaying of an authorising text, a grounding origin, but the potential to construct that origin as a rhetorically powerful effect of performance” (1999: 1101). Dramatic performance is not a singular one-off act subordinated to authority of texts, and to the same degree, play texts are not to be considered as being under sovereign control of authors. Dramatic performance rather depends on the net that enmeshes history with various discourses of socialisation that has already been inscribed into play texts. As Gina Bloom, Anston Bosman, and William N. West assert, performance “does not take place in an instant, as an event, but recalls, lingers, and persists, expanding and even exploding the confines of synchronic temporality, appearing as the ongoing opening of history rather than the closing gates of its departure” (2013: 167-8). This power of performativity-inflected theatre performance opens onto “questions of embodiment, of social relations, of ideological interpellations, of emotional and political effects” as discussable (1996: 5) in relation to historical time that is never a succession of one instant after another, as well as the official performance of memorialising certain historical losses.

Melancholia, performed on theatre stage (in play texts) in the form of “militant refusal” of forgetting or being forgotten (Eng and Kazanjian 2003: 16), challenges any easy sensibilities that buy into the consolidation of cultural affiliations/identifications or the oppositional identifications:

rather, it blurs the binary distinctions between same and difference, real and fictional, subject and object, presence and absence, as well as past and present. By illuminating historical and social crises that are buried within the psyche of the characters, melancholic performance uncovers and works on the impasse of assumed dialectical progress between these terms in society. The understanding of theatre performance as already in the larger citational process, a cycle of constant citations of the accumulated convention of theatre actions, styles, costumes, settings, and repertoires, enables a reflection on the structure of canon in Irish drama and theatre. How can certain play texts and performances become recognised while others remain unmarked? And if the socially encoded scripts of identities/behaviours are operative within the structure of institutionalised theatres, how can women artists and authors offer a dramatic space for negotiations between the normalising force of theatre traditions and the possibility of resistance to conditions generated by dominant cultures?

Alterity and Haunting in Melancholia

In both metaphysical and cultural studies, *alterity* indicates a constitutive element of inassimilable beings disrupting the mastery subject formation. In Emmanuel Levinas's writings, alterity refers to mystical and inassimilable otherness that makes the other truly the Other: a force that profoundly unsettles the subject formation. In Judith Butler's theory, alterity exists as a primary and seething existence within the subject "as its founding reputation" (1993: 3). For these thinkers, alterity, while invisible, is one of the most problematic and yet promising realms for the understanding of, or resistance to, the work of dominant epistemological, political and social formation.

Throughout this thesis, I use the term alterity in relation to melancholia to indicate social remainders of melancholic incorporation of loss: ghostly but present inside the melancholic subject as a profoundly disrupting force. In *The Melancholy of Race* (2001) Anne Cheng formulates alterity in terms of the encryption of the racialised/feminised other within America's white and masculine identity. According to Cheng, this alterity

marks the realm that the nation is unwilling to fully incorporate or entirely abandon: that is, America's racial culture is sustained by placing the racial other in the nation's psychodynamic process of exclusion and retention. Cheng's reformulation of alterity in relation to cultural identity bringing to the fore the psychic dynamism of power is instrumental to interrogate how the process of othering 'undesirable' elements of society has been constitutive of the nation formation in Ireland throughout the century; how the historical baggage of national assimilation of the gendered illegitimate other still lingers in the contemporary Ireland manifest in James Smith's investigation into the precarious life of those incarcerated in religious institutions. In his book, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (2007). Smith's interrogation into the religious, political, and legal collusions with violence defines Irish culture and history as "architecture of containment," which have functioned throughout the century "to confine and render invisible segments of the population whose very existence threatened Ireland's national imaginary" (112). To a crucial extent, alterity, reinterpreted in Cheng's frame of "formative but denied ghosts" (2001: 12) of the nation, encompasses the cultural landscape of assimilation and exclusion in Ireland's nationhood.

Cheng addresses the supposed difficulty of melancholia as a critical concept. She notes that talking about melancholia of the socially marginalised "seems to reinscribe a whole history of affliction or run the risk of naturalising the pain [...] the risk of repeating a tool of containment historically exercised by authority" (2001: 14). However, Cheng asserts that it is "equally harmful" (14) not to talk about pain, the site of loss where a social subject is made into object. In order to discuss melancholic conditions of the marginalised, thus, Cheng suggests shifting a paradigm of conception that assumes agency as sovereign or impermeable to psychodynamics of domination and subordination and overlooks hegemonic power's melancholic attachments with lost objects for its social ideality. For Cheng, this shift of conceptual paradigm entails a reconstruction of melancholic incorporation in terms of exclusion-retention of the lost object for the survival of the ego. The consequence of the psychical drama of melancholic incorporation is:

the multiple layers of denial and exclusion that the melancholic must exercise in order to maintain this elaborate structure of loss-but-not-loss. First, the melancholic must deny loss as loss in order to sustain the fiction of possession. Second, the melancholic would have to make sure that the 'object' never returns, for such a return would surely jeopardise the cannibalistic project that, one might note, is a form of possession more intimate than any material relationship could produce. [...] the melancholic ego is a haunted ego, at once made ghostly and embodied in its ghostliness, but the 'object' is also ghostly – not only because its image has been introjected or incorporated within the melancholic psyche but also because Freud is finally not that interested in what happens to the object or its potential for subjectivity. (2001: 9-10)

Cheng's political reconstruction of melancholia elucidates another dimension of melancholia: the question of what happens to the lost object, which Freud repressed in his writing of melancholia. In so doing, Cheng brings to centre psychological complexities of marginalised people: how they may internalise (or conform to) dominant ideals that negates and humiliates their being in society, or how they struggle to emerge as the subject through and despite such process of internalisation.

However, Cheng's reconceptualisation of internalisation/incorporation rescues the marginalised from the static position of lost object, or cultural object, that is excluded from the meaning-making process. She argues that internalisation, "far from denoting a condition of surrender, embodies a web of negotiation that expresses agency as well as abjection" (2001: 17). Cheng's primary interest is in melancholia of dominant white identity specifically in America producing the racialised and gendered ghostly other. Nevertheless, her reconceptualisation of melancholia offers a powerful frame to examine systems of melancholic exclusion-retention operating in communal and state discourses of the Republic and Northern Ireland. Especially, when read in the web of performativity and strategic performance of gender melancholia, delineated in the previous section, Cheng's theoretical formulation offers a way of reinscribing the potential for negotiating female subjects on the margin of society as a force ghosting and disintegrating Ireland's (postcolonial) state formation.

Based on this revised version of melancholia, in their introduction to the collected edition *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (2003), David Eng and

David Kazanjian seek a possibility of regarding the notion of melancholia as offering “a capaciousness of meaning in relation to losses encompassing the individual and the collective, the spiritual and the material, the psychic and the social, the aesthetic and the political” (3). If the work of mourning loss (and what remains after the loss) becomes possible only through melancholia’s continued engagement with the lost other, melancholic attachment and incorporation (or dwelling on loss) is radically depathologised. Melancholia constitutes a social being as vulnerable and yet, it is a precondition of being, rather than illness, that makes possible the workings of mourning. In melancholia, the relation of the subject formation to social terms can be rearticulated through a complicated dynamics, instead of positing one realm against another. Considering such a perspective, then, melancholia works in two distinct ways. Melancholia is produced by historical process such as colonialism (the force that subjugates and cultivates melancholia) on the one hand. And yet, as a melancholic persistently struggles with its lost objects and the past in the process of emerging as subject, it becomes a constitutive site in which the past can be bridged with the present in a creative way.

Avery Gordon relates alterity to the phenomenon of haunting: a constituent element of modern social life, haunting is “neither pre-modern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import” (2008: 7). Gordon maintains that the ghost is not just a dead but “a social figure,” and it is “one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way [...] Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition” (2008: 8).

The women’s aesthetic investment in melancholia is characterised by various types of haunting: the haunting of the dead, past memories, legendary stories and myths, fantasies, and legacy, which indicates the nature of history that plays itself out in the present. The repetition of haunting enacts the melancholic impasse of the character, denoting not only a condition of their entrapment in a frozen time but also a disintegration of

the signifying power of the progressive time. While the temporal boundaries are all blended to indicate the subject's physical and psychical immobility, the temporal disorder unravels the melancholic subject's spatial topography where affective histories of abjection are kept. Marina Carr's *The Mai* (1994), dramatizing a century-long history of Irish women's life from the Famine to the dawn of Celtic Tiger, is a performative repository of the melancholia's temporal and spatial blending. In the dynamics of enabling interpenetration of generational time, experiences, and emotions of the female characters, Carr's play refuses the separateness of the past from the present condition of life. Christina Reid's *Tea in a China Cup* (1983) also reveals a way in which the present life of (Protestant) women in Northern Ireland is deeply rooted in the past, or struggles of the dead. The play conjures up and materialises the ghosts of former generations through the work of the protagonist memory. Like in *The Mai*, the conjured figures of the dead represent the residue of history-making performed by the Northern Irish state's power. The deformed family life is only one example of damaged history: male members of the family recruited for the British army are lost to the wars, or if survived, they are unable to commit themselves to the family life; impoverished women of the family repeat their sufferings through generations.

The constant reappearance of the dead in the authors' drama is a sign of no escape from the lost other, the dead, and the past. In this aesthetic world of hybridity, as Ewa Ziarek poignantly addresses, "[t]he dead repeat the bloodshed of the living, the living in turn repeat, without knowing, the struggles of the dead. The struggle of the multitudes, the multitude of struggles, the past haunting the present, the present leaving a deadly residue for the past of the future" (2012: 67).

Kristeva's theory that positions women on the boundaries of public discourses can illuminate the strategic mode of women's melancholia, marginalised by the nation's melancholic politics of exclusion and retention – excluded traditionally from the nation's public life but central to the national (moral) ideality. That is, the conditions of women's marginality can disrupt the nation's melancholic performance of identity by making different voices on the margin to subvert fixed ideas of nation and offer

possibilities of envisioning different, or alternative, national communities. Kristeva notes, “women have the luck and the responsibility of being boundary-subjects” (1993: 35). Opening the nation up to differences, for Kristeva, is a crucial and central role of boundary figures: the national identity can be and should be reconfigured through the encounter with otherness, whether internal or external, through the embrace of the return of the repressed other, or melancholic alterity, foreigner within home, the buried, the abject, the semiotics, and the symptoms of melancholia.

However, a question arises whether talking about women’s difference in terms of celebration is desirable or whether it, as many writers such as Reid and Carr were concerned, ghettoise women and women’s art/literature into a certain category. Especially, considering the marginalisation of women’s literature in the canon-making of Irish literary history, such emphasis on women’s differences may perpetuate the erasure of women’s literature from the public life. Nevertheless, it is still important to establish a critical site where to investigate women’s arts that engage with (im)possibilities for marginalised, boundary figures to subvert/transform the existing tradition of narrating (hi)stories in various cultural sectors.

As Juliana Schiesari suggests, melancholia itself has a gendered history. Questioning how “grievous suffering of the melancholic artist is a gendered one,” Schiesari argues that women’s cultural expressions of loss and suffering “is not given the same [...] representational value as those of men within the Western canon of literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis” (1992: 11, 13). A critical reinvestment in melancholia, thus, is to claim women’s right to mourn loss and express sorrow in arts, which is linked to the enabling role of negativity against multiple forms of oppression and which opens to a critical relation with the buried, forgotten others. As Ranjana Khanna states, the work of melancholia “does not merely call for inclusion, assimilation, reparation, or retribution. It calls for a response to the critical work of incorporation, and the ethical demand that such incorporation makes on the future” (Khanna 2003: 25).

Irish Theatres and Women: Melancholia of the Canon

Irish theatre has been a materialised space in which a model of national home and identity could be practiced: that is, a collective identification with certain social terms could be consolidated, contested, and disseminated in the theatre space. The performance space in Irish theatre both in the South and the North has functioned to reimagine and redefine national/communal identity dislocated by colonial and postcolonial history. Accordingly, the formal and thematic mode central to modern Irish drama has revolved around how to address traumatic histories and various sites of historical loss in order to understand the present and imagine possibilities of the nation's future

In an important way, the project of reformulating national identity through the medium of drama and theatre has an inherently melancholic element in the context of Irish cultural history. The initial conception of national theatre was to migrate, or incorporate, the political disappointment and crisis into the realm of modern art of drama and theatre.⁶ This is demonstrated in Gregory's manifesto in commencing Irish Literary Theatre in the late nineteenth century:

We will show that Ireland is no home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us. (*Our Irish Theatre* 9)

Gregory's manifesto reveals a paradoxical self-positioning of the founders of the national theatre as both melancholic modernists and insurgent nationalists: it substitutes supposedly autonomous arts for the death of political possibilities and yet, aims to work against the colonial domination

⁶ The Irish Literary Theatre was founded by Lady Augusta Gregory, W.B. Yeats, and Edward Martyn in 1899 by presenting the first production of Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* and Martyn's *The Heather Field*. In the transitional year of 1902 when the theatre became the Irish National Theatre Society and was joined by the Fay brothers and their group of talented amateur players, the theatre produced *Cathleen ni Houlihan* by Gregory and Yeats. With Miss Annie Horniman's financial help, The Abbey Theatre opened in December 1904 with the premiers of Yeats's *On Baile's Strand* and Gregory's *Spreading the News*. The present Abbey Theatre was opened in 1966, fifteen years after the fire of the old Abbey Theatre. See Christopher Morash's *A History of Irish Theatre 1601–2000* (2002).

through the formation of a counterhegemonic category of homogenous Irishness. This oscillation between modernism and nationalism has been an enabling legacy for Irish culture where national identity employed by actual national communities and audiences could not only be consolidated but also disintegrated: a space where individual plurality could be negotiated with nationalist ideologies, allowing for a possibility of “a positive and productive engagement with mainstream culture and the pleasures generated by a feeling of belonging” (Reynolds 2007: 15).

Although potentially transgressive in its most radical moments as a legitimate public space where marginal voices may disintegrate the assumed totality of audience group, Irish national theatre has been accused of its incapacity of embracing marginalised people expelled from the imagined model of ‘Irishness’. This means that the national stage, as an integral part of national discourses, increasingly tended to promote drama performances that conform to ideal categories of nationhood. Because of this limitation of national cultural institution, David Lloyd is skeptical about the dilemma of how mainstream state culture can offer a space in which the dynamics of “antagonisms, contradictions and social differences” can be played out (1993: 5). Similarly, the editors of *Ireland, Memory and Performing the Historical Imaginations* criticise the Irish theatre’s limited capacity for the embrace of subjectivities and memories that were “lost to the historical consciousness” (2014: 3). They state that “the conservative nature of Irish theatre is due to its conservative historical narrative [...] the desire for human beings to buy consistently into the cultural industry of the historical imagination without pausing to consider how collective memory collides and colludes with the historical consciousness of Irish performance” (2).

The criticisms above indicate that the initial conception of national theatre as offering counterhegemonic narratives against ‘misrepresentation’ of subjugated Irish people has been undermined as the national theatre became a hegemonic institution of national cultures, increasingly unable to offer a critical space for the constitution and reconstitution of social terms regarding Irish identity. Moreover, the project of re-presenting Ireland’s historical moments on the ‘national’ stages has been “determined by masculinist perspectives” (Singleton 2011: 168). The performative

consolidation of the nation's common heritage and tradition in the theatres is principally a practice of institutional canonisation of historical memories, in which a simultaneous process of assimilation and exclusion of differences is normalised. The frequent oppression of women's arts in Irish theatre is one but crucial example of such a process. Eviction of women from the scene of presenting histories has occurred throughout the history of Irish theatre to the present.

The lack of recognition of women's writing may be pervasive in all genres of cultural productions during the twentieth century in Ireland. For example, in *Twentieth-century Fiction by Irish Women: Nation and Gender* (2007), Heather Ingman illuminates the quandary of Irish women (writers) positioned on the margins as "strangers and exiles within the public life of the nation" (49). Ingman suggests that female writers' task of finding home within narratives of the nation inevitably entails a complicated process of contesting, and yet "wishing to remain in dialogue" with the dominant structure of culture norms (49). That is, female writers as boundary subjects who are "never entirely at home in the nation" have endeavoured throughout the century to find possibilities for new signification in the place of loss and alienation by "implicitly or explicitly deal[ing] with women trying to find a place for themselves within the narrative of the Irish nation" (30,1).

Such expressive complexity was made particularly difficult in the male-dominated milieu of Irish theatre-making. My engagement with women's drama, rather than representations of women in Irish literature, has to do with the patriarchal landscape of Irish drama and theatre, on which Eamon Jordan offers a critical comment:

The imagination of Irish theatre practitioners, playwrights especially, has been seriously ideologically loaded, not only in the specific prioritisation of primarily male values, references and aspirations, and in their general scrutiny of, and obsession with, masculinity, but also in their consistent subjugation, marginalisation and objectification of the feminine. (Jordan 2007: 130)

Jordan's poignant indictment of the masculine landscape in Irish drama and theatre questions the limit to representations of the feminine as speaking subjects in male playwrights' drama. Considering the

predominantly masculine canon in Irish drama and theatre, the melancholic fetishisation of the feminine in the representational field had a rare opportunity throughout the twentieth century to be challenged, redressed, or imagined in different ways by women's drama. To a crucial extent, the women playwrights' artistic imagination and interest in the psychological complexity of the female characters is a response to the cultural construction of the feminine as 'fantasy object' of the male sovereignty in both the South and the North. As for the ideological role of theatre in relation to hegemony, Paul Murphy claims that "the classed and gendered subaltern groups were transmogrified by dramatists and politicians into fantasy objects which then formed the 'essence' of the various ideologies competing for hegemony" (2008: 6).

In the North, the Ulster Literary Theatre, founded in 1902, was a counterpart of the Irish Literary Theatre, fostering an original Northern Irish version of cultural movement with production of plays distinct to the Ulster region.⁷ After the partition and foundation of the Northern Irish state, however, the Unionist hold over the political and cultural hegemony in Northern Ireland saw the ideological link of the theatre with the Unionist government. The theatre management in Northern Ireland maintained a policy to avoid plays that critiqued class and sectarian divisions in society, not to mention the disregard of plays dealing with Republicanism or nationalism. As Lionel Pilkington states, "[f]or an 'Ulster theatre' to function as a national theatre, social problems such as religious discrimination in employment and housing had to be represented. Yet even to acknowledge sectarianism as a problem pointed immediately to the contested nature of the Northern Ireland state" (2001: 170).

The emergence of the Lyric Theatre in the 1960s,⁸ distancing from the ideological role of the Ulster theatre and aspiring to its role as an artistic

⁷ Ulster Literary theatre later became the Group Theatre in 1940. Funded by the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (1943), professional theatre in Northern Ireland was subject to the state's censorship and sectarian policy manifest, for example, in the CEMA's insistence that the British national anthem be played before performances, which alienated Catholic audiences.

⁸ The Lyric Theatre was founded by the O'Malley family in 1951 and developed into a professional theatre in 1968. For the history of the theatre's development see Lionel Pilkington's *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (2001).

conscience in the Northern Irish community and beyond, provided different approaches to political and social crises and presented plays by both Catholic and Protestant playwrights. However, while focusing on civil conflicts and violence of the Troubles, the theatre did not show much about the gender issues establishing not only gender stereotypes on stage but also male history of canon including John Boyd, Martin Lynch, and Stuart Parker (Murray 1997: 187-222).

The historical repetition of the erasure of women's arts was manifest in the 2016 Abbey's Easter Rising centenary programme entitled 'Waking the Nation' that consisted almost totally of male writers' works. Considering the theatre's explicit inability to accommodate women's arts, it is not very surprising to encounter a proposition that few women who wrote for Ireland's mainstream theatres achieved prominent success in the history of Irish drama. However, this apparent 'absence' of women in Irish theatre is merely superficial. As listed in Melisa Sihra's edited collection of essays, *Women in Irish Drama* (2007), the number of women who wrote for Irish theatres throughout the century and to the present is beyond measure. Yet, this constellation of women's work is also a paradoxical index for Irish theatre's history of failure to recognise women's work. As for the institutional and cultural marginalisation of women's arts, Brenda Donohue thus writes, "women writing for theatre is not a new phenomenon, but the professional production of their plays is somewhat more of a novelty" (2013: 43).

While recognising the myriad voices of women in Irish drama and theatre, I share Sihra's concern that "it is neither possible nor desirable to explore the full range and depth of work by women in theatre on the island [...], where listing and name-checking would further perpetuate a tokenistic categorization" (2016: 549). Sihra's term "tokenistic categorization" of women's achievements in Irish theatre comes from her critical concern about the canonisation of Irish drama and theatre where "women's work is situated in a negative relationship to the 'canonical' values of the 'classical'" (2016: 547). The canonisation has constantly placed women's artistic achievements on the margin on the one hand; women's successful entry into the existing order, on the other hand, has been regarded as extraordinary and

exceptional. However, even women's successful work was often incorporated into the strictly heterosexual masculine culture's self-representation in a way that they have been subtly effaced textually and performatively. Thus, women's writing, along with other cultural products regarding ethnic, queer, feminist, and racialised group of people, has constituted a *body* of loss in the Irish context.

Significantly, the playwrights examined here represent the melancholic dynamics of loss and incorporation in the canon formation – the borderline body that is both inside ('exceptional' inclusion) and outside (gendered identificational exclusion) the canon of Irish drama and theatre. They are recognised as prominent in Irish drama and theatre. The women's success, however, has been also undermined or marginalised. For example, the discussion of Gregory's contribution has long focused on her ability as administrator/nurturer of the theatre, often coupled with W. B. Yeats's genius as artist; Deevy's later works were systematically rejected by the Abbey board members; Reid's drama has long ceased to be performed in professional theatres. Moreover, besides the rare inclusion of women's work for curriculums in secondary and third-level education, academic works on women's drama are still in the making (and even limited in number and scope) in contrast with the established scholarship on the male tradition of W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge, Sean O'Casey, Tom Murphy, Brian Friel, and numerous other male dramatists.

While Carr alone has seen most continuous and successful productions of her plays since the early 1990s to the present, as Sihra argues, "the problematic positioning of Carr as Ireland's most prolific female playwright [...] continues to determine reductive critical attitudes which inherently naturalise women's place and creativity as secondary to the universal male" (2016: 549). That is, the exclusive focus on the female capacity and success creates another form of "inverted sexism" (Sihra 2016: 549); or worse, it leads to a discourse of post-feminism in which individual female advances in contemporary political and cultural landscape are used to promote an illusive mirage that we have achieved social equality and democracy. In either discourse, the unresolved issues of gender inequity in society are obscured and perpetuated.

The relative prominence of the playwrights under discussion in this thesis arguably makes it difficult to frame the authors and their drama in strict terms of marginality and erasure. Nevertheless, the drama of these writers, approached from a larger context of cultural productions and history, continues to be located in a vulnerable position and subject to elision insofar as the reproduction of hegemonic masculine environments of theatre making and canonical history formation continues.

The critical lens of melancholia that locates the women's success on the threshold of inclusion and exclusion resists neo-liberal or post-feminist discourses that highlight individual successes disregarding the persistence of domination in the larger context of society. At the same time, melancholia enables a cautious awareness of how the focus on the visibility of these women works in another vein: the hasty politicisation of women's arts demanding they ensure a radical claiming of possibility for women's life and agency. Such a discourse generates a narrow view on agency as based on autonomy, thereby understanding the 'subversive' literature in a way that promotes a total escape from the oppressive system and eliding the work of power that absorbs and binds us to the very system we want to overthrow.

Clearly, the *loss*, not absence, of women's writing in Irish cultural productions deepens female writers' anxiety, whether they are successful or not, because they must deal with a sense of impoverishment of the tradition of women's writing while attempting to challenge the myth and prejudice against women's art. The very historical legacy of women's erasure in the field of cultural productions is interconnected with the historical emphasis of women's role as reproducer of the future that has been pervasive both in the South and the North in Ireland. If there exists a general consensus at all regarding "the lack of positive outcomes for many of the female protagonists in plays by women, from all periods of the twentieth century," as Sihra notes, it is a way in which the expression of negativity such as disconnection, rupture, and inability becomes "a potent response to the false legacy" of national history (2007: 2). Writing in 2007, Sihra maintains, "in a society where historical processes of female oppression have only begun to be seriously acknowledged in the social, political and academic for the last

decade or so, painful narratives need to be addressed before transformations can occur” (207).

The recent ‘Waking the Feminists’ movements, formed in protest against the Abbey’s ‘Waking the Nation’ (2015), have mobilised women in cultural (and beyond) sectors to publicly question and expose how women’s arts have been subsumed by the power mechanisms to the present. A research study on gender balance in Irish theatre, “Gender Counts,” published in 2017 by ‘Waking the Feminists’, the Irish Theatre Institute and NUI Galway, provided concrete evidence to the exclusion of women’s arts. The report analysed the ten largest publicly funded theatres in between 2006 and 2015, and found that “the top two funded [theatre] organisations ... have the lowest representation of females in the Author category: the Gate (6%) and the Abbey (17%)” (2017: 26). The immediate impact of the ‘Waking the Feminists’ movements was a demand for Irish theatre’s commitment to gender balance, and there have been great achievements as seen the Abbey theatre’s new directors Graham McLaren and Neil Murray’s 2018 programme reflecting a commitment to women and gender equality, as well as collaborations with a number of Ireland’s independent theatres such as Pan Pan, Anu Productions, Fishamble, and Landmark. Most importantly, the upheaval of the movements initiated a new awareness of how power works on stage and off, and how history plays itself out. Women’s (and artists’) engagement with possibilities for a ‘positive’ future is always embedded in complicated networks of legacy, power, and negotiation both at material and affective levels. The unravelling of these networks, ‘The Politics of Melancholia’ proposes, has been implemented, and yet it requires an on-going participation in the envisioning of a possibility for transformation: *a transformation from within* that does not dispel difficulties of the desire for freedom in the social, political, and cultural formation.

Chapter Outlines

The chapters conduct a focused reading of the selected plays and bring to light various concerns of each playwright with conditions of marginalised people in the historical and cultural context of each time.

These chapters will also reveal how the playwrights rework and embed melancholic states of female subjects structurally and thematically into their work. Although explored on very different aesthetic or semiotic terms, melancholic alterity is a crucial realm that is shared by the playwrights across the temporal borders between them. The playwrights' performative reinscription of alterity not only exposes loss and abjection of female characters but also challenges the reiteration of historical and social terms of assimilation or containment.

Chapter One begins with Gregory, the most visible and successful woman playwright in the Abbey history but subtly buried by her iconographic position as “the Charwoman of the Abbey Theatre” (Pethica 2004: 62),⁹ and thus her centrality to the cultural landscape of Ireland represents the trope of incorporated Irish femininity. Challenging the static, iconographic image of Gregory, the chapter explores how she envisioned and practiced the modernist and nationalist cultural movement of Ireland against the backdrop of the pre-Independence era of the early twentieth century, when a national ideal for new Irishness was being constructed at both political and cultural levels.

While scholarship on Gregory marks melancholia in the sense that it has been developed in attachment with Yeats, focusing on her nurturing roles in the theatre movements, there have been various critical efforts in the last few decades to rescue Gregory's drama from its antiquarian position. This chapter, seeking to illuminate Gregory on her own as an attempt to establish her as an ‘origin’ of melancholic drama of Irish women, draws on academic writings such as Leeney's chapter on Gregory in her *Irish Women Playwrights* (2010), James Pethica's “Lady Gregory's Abbey Theatre Drama: Ireland Real and Ideal” (2004), Lucy McDiarmid's “The Demotic Lady Gregory” (1996), Anne Forgarty's “‘A Woman of the House’: Gender and Nationalism in the Writings of Augusta Gregory” (2000), Michael Jaros's “Image-Makers and Their Discontents: Lady Gregory and the Abbey

⁹ George Bernard Shaw's description of Gregory: though Shaw might have used the term out of admiration for Gregory's energetic involvement with theatre business, the description sharply invokes Gregory's gendered position in the Abbey. See James Pethica's “Lady Gregory's Abbey Theatre Drama: Ireland Real and Ideal,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*, edited by Shaun Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Theatre Audience” (2012), as well as Elizabeth Coxhead’s *Lady Gregory: A Literary Portrait* (1961) and Ann Saddlemyer’s *In Defence of Lady Gregory: Playwright* (1966).

The chapter centres on her plays, *Spreading the News* (1904), a comedy that opened the first night of the Abbey in 1904, and *Grania* (1912), a full-length tragedy that is based on the story of Ireland’s mythic heroes. While Gregory wrote a number of plays, most of which were a substantial part of the Abbey’s repertoire, the plays under consideration offer an important way of looking not only at Gregory’s vision as a female writer and leader of the cultural movement but also her own self-positioning within it. *Spreading the News* has been received and considered to be a simple caricature of Irish rural life fraught with improbable and irrational talks and emotions, or a reproduction of colonial discourse in the form of ‘stage Irishmen.’ I argue, however, that the play demonstrates Gregory’s political ambition to rewrite the stereotyped sentiment of Irish people in terms of ‘authentic’ Irishness separate from Englishness and to channel the apparent anomaly of Irish oral culture into a modern art of drama.

By contrast, *Grania*, illuminates Gregory’s feminist vision on the eponymous protagonist’s reintegration into the patriarchal system, interrogating the masculine social and cultural landscape of the early twentieth-century Ireland. The examination of these two plays challenges the Gregory mythology that has constructed her as maternal nurturer of the Irish Revival, circulated routinely thus far in the cultural landscape of Irish history. The site of loss and erasure, explored for example in *Grania* through a process of dismissal of the protagonist from men’s society, tragic loss/betrayal of her beloved Diarmuid, and final return to her old husband Finn, becomes a creative space for Gregory to imagine woman’s position in Ireland. In this created space, the subject-object relation in the dominant melancholic narratives of gender is reverted and subverted, most powerfully delivered by Grania’s provocative statement that “[In Finn’s bed, Diarmuid] will find me there before him! He will shrink away lonesome and baffled! I will have my turn that time” (418-9). The female protagonist is not erased and incorporated as a ghostly other but emerges as a heroic ‘warrior’ queen,

remaking the self through her powerfully political (and theatrical) act of crowning herself as queen of Ireland.

Chapter Two moves to 1930s Ireland when the newly fledged independent Free State of Ireland was forging its conservative state regulations on the citizens' behaviour in acts particularly oppressive for Irish women. The chapter examines the plays of Deevy, focusing on *In Search of Valour* (1931), *The King of Spain's Daughter* (1935), and *Katie Roche* (1936). These plays present a thematic alliance regarding whether the shift from the era of colonial rule to the establishment of the state provided women with any sense of liberation or improved quality of their daily lives. The plays demonstrate the disillusion with the Irish state during the 1930s by foregrounding the protagonists' claustrophobic sense deriving from the patriarchal State's oppressive regulation on female subjects. In the place of nationalist community or the modernist hope for 'progress' or 'enlightenment,' which was integral to Gregory's work, Deevy's drama features the nation state's anxious attachment to the ideal of patriarchal values played out oppressively in the domestic realm and resulting in the protagonists' withdrawal into the internal world of fantasy.

Scholarship on Deevy's drama is still in the making. Central to my thesis are book chapters and articles such as Leeney's chapter on Deevy in *Irish Women Playwrights* (2010) and "Ireland's Exiled Women Playwrights: Teresa Deevy and Marina Carr" (2004). The chapter also draws on Shaun Richards's "Suffocated in the Green Flag: the Drama of Teresa Deevy and 1930s Ireland" (1995), Anthony Roche's "Woman on the Threshold" (1995) Christie Fox's "Neither Here nor There: The Liminal Position of Teresa Deevy and Her Female Characters" (2000), Lisa Fitzpatrick "Taking Their Own Road: The Female Protagonists in Three Irish Plays by Women" (2007), and Caoilfhionn Ni Bheacháin's "Sexuality, Marriage and Women's Life Narratives in Teresa Deevy's *A Disciple* (1931), *The King of Spain's Daughter* (1935) and *Kate Roche* (1936)" (2012).

Most of the existing scholarship on Deevy has explored how Deevy's drama is a valuable dramatic source that reflects oppressive social conditions of the post-Independence state of Ireland. In this chapter, I seek a possibility of widening our understanding of Deevy's drama by exploring

the protagonists' nourishment of fantasy as a derivation of melancholic incorporation of loss in the external world. That is, the lens of melancholia is productive to understand Deevy's ambiguous representations of protagonists' fantasy. On the one hand, fantasy indicates the protagonists' dream of escape by forgetting perilous conditions originating from illegitimacy and poverty. On the other hand, it refers to Deevy's insight into young women's life as a matter of survival within such oppressive social environments, which cannot be simply regarded as failure of dealing with reality or loss of agency.

Chapter Three examines Reid's *Tea in a China Cup* (1983) and *The Belle of the Belfast City* (1989) for the exploration of the interior space of non-hegemonic groups in relation to national discourses against the backdrop of Northern Ireland's ethno-nationalist political conflicts conventionally known as the 'Troubles.' Reid illuminates how the gendered and classed ideology of the Unionist state of Northern Ireland was particularly oppressive for Protestant working-class women because of its politics of competing identity and patriarchal/hierarchical ordering of space.

Pilkington's *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (2001), Imelda Foley's *The Girls in the Big Picture: Gender in Contemporary Ulster Theatre* (2003), and Tom Maguire's *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland* (2006) have been an insightful source for this chapter, especially for the understanding of the development of theatres in the Northern Irish context. Although I acknowledge Maguire's insistence on the need to look at Northern Irish drama and theatre on a separate plane, I suggest that the reading of Reid's drama along with the drama of Gregory, Deevy, and Carr can illuminate better how different experiences of women across the border, time, and religion, have shared notions of struggles and survivals with each other. Moreover, Maguire's evaluation of Reid's drama as "follow[ing] the dramaturgical traditions of Troubles drama in which women or outsiders are used to offer alternative perspectives" (151) is a limited categorisation. Thus, this chapter integrates articles that read through Reid's politicisation of the domestic and interpreted her work in relation to women dramatists in the Republic. I draw particularly on articles such as Joanna Luft's "Brechtian Gestus and the Politics of Tea in Christina

Reid's *Tea in a China Cup*" (1999), Jozefina Komporaly's "The Troubles and the Family: Women's Theatre as Political Intervention" (2004), Carla J. McDonough's "'I've Never Been Just Me': Rethinking Women's Positions in the Plays of Christina Reid" (2000), Lisa Fitzpatrick's "Disrupting Metanarratives: Anne Devlin, Christina Reid, Marina Carr, and the Irish Dramatic Repertory" (2005), and Megan W. Minogue's "Home-Grown Politics: The Politicisation of the Parlour Room in Contemporary Northern Irish Drama" (2013).

Considering the paucity of literature that deals with conditions of Protestant working-class women against the backdrop of political conflicts in Northern Ireland, the exploration of Reid's drama in this chapter offers an opportunity to advance the understanding of women's drama in Ireland. Delving into the family discourses nourished by women, Reid's plays unveil the melancholic status of loyalist women hidden behind the façade of Protestant supremacy and respectability. The significance of her plays comes from the challenge to the underrepresentation of Protestant women in all aspects of cultural and political life across the islands of Ireland. In Northern Ireland, the Unionist hold over the main cultural institutions was instrumental in legitimating the social divisions and made it impossible to investigate from within the problems of the privileged self-identity of Protestant Unionists. Moreover, Unionists/Loyalists' militant performances on the street such as the Orange Order's triumphalist marches and paramilitary terror campaigns against the IRA resurgence have defined the cultural landscape of Northern Ireland as exclusive, hegemonic, and masculine. Although the establishment of the Lyric Theatre in Belfast in the 1960s offered a way of examining what constitutes the nation in a wider and more inclusive social and political context, the representations of women did not still see a substantial advance. The neglect of women on the stage of the Lyric is partially due to its attempt to redefine the identity of Northern Ireland through representations of significant historical events that were held by masculine perspectives. Emerging from this cultural context, Reid's efforts to deconstruct the realm of femininity and domesticity involve conferring histories to the minor subjects through the characters' memories that are delivered to audiences by means of storytelling, dancing, singing,

and other performances often conflated with the offstage sounds of Orange marches or Loyalist rally. The effect of those performances within the play, while emphasising rich histories of women's experiences, is to bring to light the domestic as deeply inflicted by political struggles: in Reid's politicised and historicised space of home, the characters gain diverse positions of articulation that are often acquired by their incorporation or conscious resistance to political discourses. In so doing, Reid problematises the trope of home as preserving the national security against the threat of 'outsiders,' which was perpetuated at the expense of women and the domestic whose security in reality was constantly violated by military and paramilitary operations.

While Reid's interest was mainly in the political construct of the domestic in order to disrupt the long-standing marginalisation of it from the public recognition, Marina Carr's Midlands plays written in the 1990s delve into the internal landscape of the characters who are located on the margin of Ireland's rapid social change towards the national embracing of global economy and culture. The landscape that often reflects both conditions and possibilities of the protagonists' interiority, is itself a character in Carr's plays that buries and yet preserves memories and losses, thus also marking the margin of the nation's speed-driven progress. Chapter Four considers *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996), and *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998), all of which are concerned with the characters' obsessive attachment with loss and the resulting self-destruction. The tragic sense of the plays derives from the protagonists' fatalism or ontological struggles in which they perceive their existence as 'thrown' into the world and condemned to live in the mode of dereliction and abandonment. However, Carr's delineation of the characters' sufferings in relation to familial and communal legacy and memories makes possible to illuminate the loss of self/other as a process of cultural formation, the conditions of abjection as produced by the nation's exclusive discourse of modernisation. By interlocking the interiority of the protagonists with mythical and symbiotic elements of the country's landscape (the bog and lake/river of the Midlands that preserve the residue of modern progress in the circular time of haunting), Carr's plays allow the forgotten and invisible stories of the society to emerge in order to challenge

the nation's collective amnesia of the repeating patterns of domination and exclusion in modernisation discourses.

There has been an extensive critical engagement with Carr's drama for the last two decades, which saw a number of publications of journal articles on Carr's drama as well as Cathy Leeney and Anna McMullan's edited collection of essays *The Theatre of Marina Carr: '... before rules was made'* (2003) and Rhona Trench's monograph, *Bloody Living: the Loss of Selfhood in the plays of Marina Carr* (2010). A significant number of writings on Carr's drama consider the issues of Irishness in relation to Irish femininity and landscape despite slightly different angles: a cultural and historical meaning of Irish authenticity that is performed in Carr's drama (Clare Wallace), postcolonial approach to Carr's drama in which Carr's (the Abbey's) return to the rural Ireland is seen as a turn away from the writer's (theatre's) public role of interrogation of neo-colonial condition of the nation (Victor Merriman); the question of space in relation to national identity and marginality of non-nationals (Enrica Cerquoni); the positioning of Carr in the tradition of Irish drama associating her deployment of grotesque and black humour with J. M. Synge's drama world and Teresa Deevy. Carr's deployment of grotesque, black humour and exploration of the characters' sense of entrapment within the domestic setting, for example, resulted in a further critical engagement that attempted to position Carr's drama in the tradition of Synge's macabre humour (Bernadette Bourke 2003; Melisa Sihra 2000, 2005, 2007). However, these efforts to position Carr's work in the tradition of Irish drama did not consider how Carr's macabre humour corresponds with Gregory's dark humour in a comedic work such as *Spreading the News*.

The discussion of *The Mai* explores the relationship between the place-making and the narrative-making as a way of seeking possibilities to connect oneself to the world. In the analysis of the play, I suggest that the notion of 'home' as accommodating the self is profoundly disrupted by the legacy of storytelling evoking the uncanny sense of homelessness within home. In the exploration of *Portia Coughlan*, I focus on the eponymous protagonist Portia's narcissistic malady that derives from her desire for the primary oneness with her dead twin brother in search for a connectedness

and belonging while radically rejecting the social norms of gender. The discussion of *By the Bog of Cats*... considers the communal rejection of the Traveller woman Hester against the backdrop of the community's obsessive ownership of land and memories. Challenging the communal desire for the eviction of otherness, the play brings to centre stage the inexorable return of the repressed in a vehement and destructive eruption. Throughout the chapter, I seek to argue that Carr's artistic deployment of melancholic attachment with the (loved) lost other and performative symptoms allows multiple border crossings, which ultimately transforms Midland's realist/ontological home/genre into an uncanny mode of stage. I also argue that haunted stage of Carr's drama, materialising dynamics between presence and absence on stage, disintegrate the purported reality and coherence of time, space, and identity, allowing us to interrogate and envision an alternative view of belonging and connection to the world.

Throughout the thesis, I investigate multiple crossings and migrations of loss in the century-long process of nation-building. My engagement with generational representations of women ultimately aims to enable a reading of history from a perspective of melancholic performativity. Characterised by repeated patterns of assimilation of others while being constantly haunted by 'remainders' of such a process, melancholic performativity reveals how every narrative of history is a retroactive performance of securing memories, involving a forgetting that it produces loss. As Schneider associates it with an "archival drive of history" (2011: 99), the view of melancholic performativity indicates history as inherently a trace of loss. That is, the objects (records/documents) remaining visibly in history are mere indices of disappearance of performance itself (the act of writing according to certain norms and principles). The performative of history, then, compels an unremitting reparticipation, re-enactment and reengagement with what is disappearing from our horizon (losses of a history), which is also a form of making the worlds.

Chapter One: Augusta Gregory (1852 – 1932) Beyond the Gregory Mythology

Troubling the Gregory Mythology

Augusta Gregory's contribution to the shaping of Ireland's national theatre in the period of Irish Renaissance is massive and profound. Since her participation in the movements in the late 1890s, Gregory wrote forty-two plays published or performed in the Abbey, which does not include some co-authored plays such as *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), *The Pot of Broth* (1902) and *The Unicorn from the Stars* (1907). She collected Irish folklore, translated it from Irish to English (mostly using the Kiltartan dialect, a Hiberno-English form that she learned from the country people of the Gort region). She recreated such oral literature in her own imagination and textually represented it, the first major work being *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902) followed by *Gods and Fighting Men* (1904), which inspired both J.M. Synge and W. B. Yeats to work on Irish mythology in their drama. As a guiding director and manager of the Abbey, she was also involved in every aspect of the theatre-making. In her autobiography, *Seventy Years*, published in 1974, Gregory expresses the level of her devotion to the theatre business as follows: "the endless affairs of the Abbey Theatre, almost crushing out, as it seems, other interests; the effort to maintain discipline, the staging, the reading of plays, the choice of plays, the quarrels among players, the suspicion of politicians and of the authorities, anxieties about money" (*Seventy Years* 411).¹⁰

However, as Cathy Leeney notes, such a vast range of activities and achievements "overshadows" her genius as playwright, which is manifest in the neglect of Gregory as dramatist and emphasis on her role as patroness of the Revival (2010: 3). The 'Gregory mythology,' constructed through a combination of neglect of her drama and emphasis on her administration skills as nurturer "behind the scenes" of the Revival (Kohfeldt 1985: 259),

¹⁰ One example of her managerial determination and effort includes her challenge against the British censorship that attempted to ban the production of G. B. Shaw's *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet* in Dublin (summer 1909): "We did not give in one quarter of an inch to Nationalist Ireland at The Playboy time, and we certainly cannot give in one quarter of an inch to the Castle" (*Our Irish Theatre* [1913] 1973: 90).

has been persistently upheld in the tradition of Irish literature up to this day. At the centre of the Gregory mythology is the over-emphasis on her iconic image as an Ascendancy matriarch in Victorian black, “the duchess who says yes or the old lady who says no” (McDiarmid and Waters 1995: xl), or “Yeats’s collaborator and as helpmeet and factotum of the early Abbey Theatre” (Leeney 2010: 3).

The mythology is problematic because the reductive accounts of Gregory’s active role in the cultural life of Ireland revolve around the repression of her position as a writing subject.¹¹ Moreover, it extends to the subtle marginalisation of Gregory in the constellation of male writers who have formed the literary canon of Irish drama and theatre. For example, the Abbey’s 2004 centenary programme did not include any of Gregory’s dramatic work. Indeed, with the few exceptions of *The Gaol Gate* (1906), *The Rising of the Moon* (1907), and *The Workhouse Ward* (1908), which were staged intermittently in the 1940s, most of Gregory’s plays have ceased to be performed in the national theatre since the 1940s. In the academic field, Gregory’s work has not received the same quality of privilege as the canonical work by her contemporaries, Yeats and Synge.

Gregory’s position in the history of Irish drama and theatre exemplifies a melancholic formation of literary canon in Ireland, which sustains her work as “the formative but denied ghost” (Cheng 2001: 12) at the heart of its canon-making. According to Anne Cheng, the canon as a cultural category exercises multiple layers of exclusion for the maintenance of a hierarchical, mainstream cultural structure.¹² In the dynamics of melancholic canon formation, Gregory’s contribution is acknowledged but not without a sense of obligation: she is allowed in the canon only in compromised and textually effacing ways.

¹¹ This partially attributes to descriptions made by her contemporary colleagues and the ongoing illumination of her as the maternal of the Revival in biographies of the male writers such as W. B. Yeats.

¹² The structure of ‘mainstream’ is continued through the fiction of possession where the denial of loss (Gregory as dramatist, for example) is elaborated with the unconscious repression of the return of the lost object: the repression of melancholic alterity as a threatening source for the disintegration of an established order is exercised in the canon formation.

This chapter challenges the constructed Gregory mythology and explores some of Gregory's plays that reflect her authorial vision and energy, particularly focusing on her perception of loss as an enabling source of artistic imagination. As demonstrated in her essays such as "The Felons of Our Land" and "Laughter in Ireland" as well as her autobiography *Seventy Years*, Gregory showed her persistent interest in a way of transforming personal and historical concerns of alienation, loss, and defeat into the field of artistic negotiations, if not freedom. While Gregory's life itself is characterised by constant negotiations between conflicting forces of artistic desire and traditional obligations as an Anglo-Irish female writer, I argue that drama was a crucial forum for Gregory in which she could challenge restrictions placed on her gender and class. A critical lens of melancholia that considers dynamism of construction and deconstruction of the subject illuminates Gregory's drama as an artistic site of negotiations with various historical losses, challenging divisive categorizations that function to flatten the author's drama works and reproduce mythical discourses of Gregory as the maternal of Revivalism. The critical lens also enables a consideration of Gregory's ambition as dramatist in a larger context of the national theatre's project of modernizing traditional performance practices – namely, a project of incorporating the perceived disjointedness of colonized people's bodies and sensibilities into a coherent work of modern arts.

The chapter focuses mainly on *Spreading the News* (1904), a one-act comedy performed on the Abbey's opening night, and *Grania* (1910), a full-act tragedy that was never performed in Gregory's lifetime. Despite differences in genre, style, and tone, these plays offer an important way of examining how Gregory negotiated her position within the cultural movements of early twentieth-century Ireland. *Spreading the News*, one of the most popular plays amongst Gregory's oeuvre along with other comedy pieces such as *Hyacinth Halvey* (1906) and *The Workhouse Ward* (1908), has been treated as a light, farcical caricature of Irish rural life. As James Pethica points out, many critics, then and now, consider that she "compromised her artistry for the theatre's benefit by writing too much" (2004: 70) and regard her comedies to be short of artistic perfection as seen

in Sean O’Casey’s regretful remark – “a good deal of what she did shows hurry” (Qtd. in Pethica 2004: 70). Certainly, Gregory maintained in various writings that she wrote comedies to provide an alternative to Yeats’s poetic drama and to meet the Abbey’s need for a broader repertoire.

However, a reading of *Spreading the News* through the lens of melancholia exposes Gregory’s aesthetic aspiration to the establishment of a new comedic mode that encompasses melancholic alterity of Irishness. While symptoms of melancholia produced by colonialism involve loss of dynamism of representation as explicit in the circulation of stage Irishness, Gregory’s comedy deliberately invokes the eccentricity, incongruity, mismatching speech, and fantasy of stage Irishman challenging the fixed categorisation of colonial politics. In so doing, I argue, Gregory incorporates the Irish sensibility, characteristically defined as melancholy or tragic dignity in her essays, into her creation of comedic mode that can speak to the new Ireland’s evolving sense of nation. At the same time, the play demonstrates Gregory’s appreciation of melancholic Irish popular performance traditions (or oral traditions) that she desired to transform into a legitimate literary form and bring upon the stage with “deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland” (*Our Irish Theatre* 20) for Irish audiences.

Gregory’s 1910 play *Grania*, featuring heroes from Irish folkloric mythology, illuminates the psychological and emotional struggles of the protagonist who persistently refuses her status as ‘invisible’ in the relationships with the male characters. The play demonstrates more directly Gregory’s agency as female writer and leader of the cultural movements: the play delivers the author’s conscious awareness of her position in the cultural landscape and mirrors Gregory’s efforts to make her own way through painful negotiations while remaining within the system. As a subversive dramatisation of passive woman-nation ideal speaking for the empowerment and self-assertion of women, *Grania* takes a specific position in Irish drama. First, it should be noted that various biographical comments on Gregory points out that *Grania* was not performed in her lifetime because she felt it

too autobiographical.¹³ Thus, given that the play echoes Gregory's personal experiences, the play offers a way of dismantling those aspects of the Gregory mythology that centre on the playwright's internalisation of Victorian patriarchal mores or her lack of feminism. Secondly, the play is one of the most compelling feminist works in the era of Irish Revival. Maria-Elena Doyle remarks that "[m]ore interested in redefining the image of the nation – of rejecting a feminine characterisation in order to embrace a masculine one – many Revival writers overlooked the possibility of reconstituting Irishness by rethinking what it might mean to be a woman" (Doyle 1999: 34). Similarly, Rebecca Pelan observes that a feature of the Revival plays is "a fairly constant denial of 'real' women through the portrayal of a feminised/idealised Ireland sacrifice in exchange for sovereignty" (1999: 246-7). These assessments of Revival drama illuminate how the reality of women's life remained invisible in the field of representation, as it was obscured by the literary glorification and idealisation of women. In this context, Gregory's engagement with Irish femininity and mythology is significant to the extent that she rewrites the stereotypical position of mythic women as passive on the one hand, and unruly or destructive on the other hand. In so doing, Gregory seeks a place for women on the Revival stage that does not merely echo their iconic stasis, challenging the devaluation and erasure of women pervasive in historical and cultural discourses of her time.

A number of Irish drama scholars have attempted in the past few decades to rescue Gregory from the 'antiquarian' position and have explored her drama from various angles. Most notable in the critical literature of Gregory's work is an attempt to examine the feminist dimension in Gregory's nationalist aspiration to the rewriting of Irish identity and history. Cathy Leeney, particularly focusing on Gregory's

¹³ In her biography of Gregory, *Lady Gregory: An Irish Life* (2011), Judith Hill states that the play was not performed during her lifetime because she felt "it was too autobiographical to be released in public" (333); Mary Lou Kohfeldt also mentions on this in *Lady Gregory: The Woman Behind the Irish Renaissance* (1985): "Gregory told more about herself in *Grania* than she wanted known" (216). It is also widely known that Yeats opposed to the production of the play for a dubious reason, to which I will return in the latter part of this chapter. For further information on the issue, refer to Hill's *Lady Gregory* (2011: 333) and Cathy Leeney's *Irish Women Playwrights 1900-1939* (2010: 44).

history plays, traces the development of female characters in two different versions of *Kincora* written in 1905 and revised in 1909 as well as Gregory's 1909 play *Grania* in order to present the development of Gregory's ideas about women's position within Irish nationalism. In her book *Irish Women Playwrights, 1900-1939: Gender and Violence on Stage* (2010), Leeney regards the plays as "dramatisations of the clash of concerns between nationalist interrogation of myth and proto-feminist interrogation of gender" (43). In so doing, she positions Gregory as "a key creator of images of Irish women caught in the trap of nationalist, masculinist ideology," and she argues that in *Grania* "the myth of sovereignty is transformed from a trope that traps the woman as image, into a representation of real power that challenges, and penetrates an exclusionary patriarchal structure" (43, 44). Maureen Waters's article, "Lady Gregory's *Grania*: a Feminist voice" (1995), illuminates how *Grania*'s problem of status, characterised by difficulty of asserting authority over her own life and determination to "establish the terms of her reintegration into the community" (21), is in parallel with Gregory's struggle to relocate herself in the history of Ireland's cultural life thus far determined by dominant male groups. In her article "The Demotic Lady Gregory" (1996), Lucy McDiarmid analyses some of Gregory's work based on her relationship with Wilfred Scawen Blunt, with whom she had a short-lived affair in 1882-83. McDiarmid argues that Blunt's imprisonment in Galway Gaol in 1888 provided an inspirational grounding for Gregory to develop her literary world of nationalist felons (literature of rebels) exemplified in her sonnets, her essay "The Felons of Our Land" (1900), and her 1906 play *The Gaol Gate*. McDiarmid's feminist perspective provides that the boundary between the within and the without drawn by the prison walls enabled Gregory's literary trope in which women without the walls had opportunities to achieve a literary power – a kind of subversive reinscription of gendered trope of muse.

Leeney notes that "faced with her [Gregory's] extraordinary achievements in so many fields, and unable to erase her altogether, some critics opt to confine Gregory to her biography, and the roles of W. B. Yeats's patron and ascendancy hostess" (2010: 57). While such a

confinement of Gregory's work characterises the melancholic condition of Gregory's status with the Irish literary canon, these feminist readings of Gregory's work have redirected the author's static image in 'Gregory mythology.' Moreover, Anna Pilz's recent engagement with the Abbey productions of Gregory's plays, particularly in her articles "Lady Gregory's *The Gaol Gate*, Terence MacSwiney and the Abbey Theatre" (2015) and "'A bad master': Religion, Jacobitism, and the Politics of Representation in Lady Gregory's *The White Cockade*" (2016), has illuminated the "flexibility" both of Gregory's plays and theatrical performances and acknowledged the "contemporary potency" and the power of her plays as engendering "dialogue and understanding" between opposing ideas and groups in a particular historical and political context of Ireland (2015: 277; 2016: 152). These scholarly efforts not only made visible Gregory's political and creative intervention in the nation's cultural discourses but also expanded the critical knowledge of Gregory's plays. However, these readings have been rather focused on Gregory's tragedies or historical plays. As a result, Gregory's comedies still remain outside serious feminist concerns. One of the reasons for this neglect may reside in the apparent invisibility of women's will and voices in Gregory's comedies.

However, Gregory's comedies, especially *Spreading the News* demonstrate how Gregory realised limitations deriving from her gender and class and negotiated them with the belief systems of anti-colonial nationalism. As Anne Fogarty notes, Gregory's "interrogation of the persuasive fantasies of social cohesion [in her comedies] is both a result of her realisation of the marginal role of women in nationalist movements and an emanation of her own perspective as an outsider in the national community to which she can never wholly belong" (2000: 107). Besides, Gregory's innovative enterprise of establishing a distinctive genre of Irish comedy brings to the fore her aesthetic negotiations that at once speak to and challenge her assertion of her own writing as apolitical, feminine and supportive, which, as Fogarty argues, "should not be construed as an acceptance of passivity and powerlessness" (110). Thus, the examination of two different genres of drama, I argue, meets the purpose of exploring how Gregory integrates the sense of melancholic loss, both at personal and

communal levels, into the creation of her drama disintegrating both colonial and national fetishistic insistence on the mythology of stereotyped identities.

Gregory's Artistic Negotiations for Women's Place

Augusta Gregory's journal entry on March 8, 1924 describes the Green Room of the Abbey filled with delight due to the success of O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, set in the 1922 Civil War and premiered in the year when the whole nation was still pained by the national division. At the end of the journal entry, as a response to Yeats's rather derogatory comments on O'Casey as a writer whose background limited his writing ability but who "thoroughly understands the vices of the poor" (*The Journals Vol. I* 485), Gregory writes: "But that full house, the packed pit and gallery, the fine play, the call of the mother for the putting away of hatred – 'Give us Thine own eternal love! – made me say to Yeats, 'This is one of the evenings at the Abbey that makes me glad to have been born'" (485).

Gregory here appreciates above all the power of O'Casey's play as emerging from the elevation of Christian humanity achieved by his characterisation of the mother figure, Juno, whose enduring love ultimately works, to Gregory's mind, to cure the traumatic experiences of Irish people. Gregory's response also indicates her appreciation of the potential of theatrical performance as an artistic tool that can build and consolidate an affective national community that may move beyond the limited space of theatre. Gregory's faith in Christian humanity mediated through performance as remedy for social divisions is repeated in the following day's journal. Pointing to Juno's prayer to the mother of Jesus, Gregory says to O'Casey: "That is the prayer we must all use, it is the only thing that will save us, the teaching of Christ'. He [O'Casey] said. 'Of humanity'" (486). Gregory does not write how she responded to O'Casey's quick correction, but she reflects on it in her journal, "But what would that be without the Divine atom?"(486). Here, Gregory affirms Juno's matriarchal resilience that does not give in to the social and political, as well as personal, tragedy by linking it to the Christian self-sacrifice.

Gregory's deep empathy with Juno, expressed explicitly in the journal through self-reflection, offers a window through which to glimpse Gregory's vision of her role in the Irish theatre movement: the construction of her self-image as a "guiding spirit" of the Irish Renaissance (Kohfeldt 1985: 259) through the elevation of feminine and theatrical iconography. Gregory's self-construction of her role and image as 'patroness' of the cultural movement has been often associated with her conservative view of women deriving from her Ascendancy background that embraced Victorian mores of women's silence. In her biography of Gregory, Judith Hill confirms this view by saying that "she believed that women should put men first, or at least be seen to, and so she concealed some of her successes and made her presence felt indirectly. She made no public statements about the role of women in society, and lived her life as though there was no need for change" (2011: viiii-x). Gregory's diary entries manifest, although obliquely, her conception of gender roles as described in Hill's accounts: she does not directly challenge the opinions of the male writers. Rather, she glosses over the point by subtly changing the topic as in the occasion with Yeats, or she silences her voice when facing a confrontation turning it into a reflexive deferral of judgment: in the O'Casey example, Gregory found expression at a later moment of in her journal entry, but only through an elliptical mode of writing.

Gregory's thwarted self-expression may be linked to her personality defined by Hill as "emotionally restrained" and "extremely secretive of her private life" (Hill 2011: x), possibly being a result of "a strict Victorian upbringing which devalued and constrained the activities of women and thus encouraged a certain duplicity to conceal socially unacceptable motives" (Waters 2004: 14). This ambivalent and reflexive mode of speaking and writing manifest in Gregory's journal entries is also characteristic of the style of her autobiography, *Seventy Years*, the opening of which positions her book as devoted to her grandchildren. Notably, in that opening, Gregory sets up herself up as "one of the children of fancy [her grandchildren] read about in their storybooks" (*Seventy Years* 1). As Waters poignantly addresses the issue, Gregory's narrative that interlocks her life with a character of children's fantasy stories is seemingly "the irony

of an immensely successful woman” (2004: 12). Relatedly, Waters notes, the construction of the speaking subject in the third person in the first two chapters of the autobiography also shows “the fundamental problem” of her autobiographical writing. According to Waters, Gregory had difficulty in “writing directly about her own deepest feelings, constructing the personal *I*” (14). Waters’s argument is supported by the fact that throughout Gregory’s autobiography “the focus rarely falls on herself alone. She typically speaks of herself in collaboration with or in the company of another, or as witness or contributor to some larger cultural or political event [...] The narrative elides or denies personal desire” (14).

However, this melancholic loss of ‘I’ in Gregory’s autobiographical works reveals the playwright’s careful construction of narratives where loss becomes a way of engaging with the outside world, negotiating her personal emotions with the creative enterprise. In other words, Gregory’s focus on others in her autobiographical narratives symptomatically suggests that she is conscious about her position subtly marginalised to the outside the realm of cultural and political establishment. Yet, the loss of ‘I’ becomes a narrative strategy in which the conference of privilege on the stories of others refracts any possible accusations of self-importance or egotism. At the same time, by interweaving the personal journey with public events and people she can legitimise her career as successful writer while avoiding the censure of patriarchal social mores. Such negotiations between loss and gain (modesty and self-assertion) most intriguingly characterise Gregory’s lifelong struggles to find a place for women within the era’s cultural movements.

Christopher Murray acknowledges “a special place for women” as significant in Gregory’s work (1997: 55). However, he argues that Gregory was “no radical in favour of women’s emancipation,” and moreover, “[t]he people she most admired were all strong men, not women” (56). For Murray, with the exception of *Grania* which “remains a fascinating curiosity rather than an idea fully and dramatically realised” (59), the special place for women in Gregory’s work is a traditionally feminine one. He contends that, while men of Gregory’s plays take action, women either hold secrets or are significantly silenced. And to resolve a problem of

empowerment, Gregory presents woman as idealised, often functioning as a spiritualising force intervening in a violent and male-dominated world (55-59).

Cathy Leeney, however, discusses the way in which silence can function as a mode of discourse in performance. She notes that the “physical presence of the silent performance on stage creates an embodied dialogue with whoever is speaking, and the audience experiences silence through the visual image, and as a counter to language” (2010: 31). Gregory’s drama is an artistic manifestation of such negotiations where the personal loss and silence is integrated into the display of empowerment and presence, interweaving the clashing interests of characters and highlighting complexities, or even paradoxes, engendered by the limiting scope of women’s position. For example, Gregory’s *The Gaol Gate* negotiates the iconic realm of the maternal that functioned to limit women’s role in the nation-building. The play features a felon, Denis Cahel, who has been hanged for the charge of political activism. Mary Cahel (Denis’s mother) and Mary Cushin (Denis’s wife), whose arrival at the gate of Galway Gaol opens the play, are pained due to the rumour that Denis is an informer, a betrayer of the national cause and the family.

A subtle displacement of gendered centrality and marginality on stage, the death/absence of the son/husband allows the women to grieve their loss and articulate their frustrations and despairs: while Denis never appears onstage throughout the play, the felon’s absence enables the female characters to make their own voices, their grief and frustrations heard onstage. Interestingly, even though both the mother and the daughter-in-law lament on the shame that has befallen their son/husband and themselves, the nature of their grief seems distinctively different. While the mother’s lament is romanticised, the daughter-in-law’s mourning accords with concrete issues that she must face. The young wife’s grief centres not only on her husband’s loneliness in death and the destruction of his ‘good’ name, but most distinctively on her own loss – on hardship that she and her child must suffer in disgrace. Thus, her keening, which is framed by the repeating phrase “what way will I be” (*The Gaol Gate* 8), reproves her husband for

losing the trust of the community and transmitting the shame to the living members of the family.

The balanced dynamism between the voices of the mother and the wife onstage is, however, broken by the arrival of news that Denis died in another man's place rather than inform against him. At this moment, the wife's mourning for her personal loss extends to the larger context of the social injustice: "What justice is there in the world at all?" (9). The wife's keening, thus integrates her sense of loss with the prejudicial power structure of both colonial authorities and the national community that she has to survive. Significantly, this final protest of the wife is subsumed by the mother's eulogy of her son as "the best reaper and the best hurler" (10) and finally as a saviour and a martyr of the nation. By taking control of Denis's story, the mother effectively replaces discourses of treachery with those of heroism and asserts her role as assuring the value of Denis's name in people's memory. Regarding Gregory's inspiration drawn from the imprisonment of men, Lucy McDiarmid contests:

He, the male felon, gets fame, visibility, publicity; she, the female nonfelon, gets literary powers. She is the bearer of his memory, the conduit of his name and sufferings. In other words, the felon is a kind of muse for Lady Gregory – a male muse, of course – and intimate contact with him, especially (but not exclusively) while he is imprisoned, leads to literary production of all kinds: drama, poetry, book reviews, essays and letters to editors. The jail gate's presence precludes physical intimacy and ensures that the felon remains a muse and not lover (1996: loc. 3541).

As a defining trope of Gregory's literary world, the loss of heroic men is an empowering mediation through which "she comes in contact with the source and grounding of her inspiration, and Ireland that is militant, bound, dependant, male" (1996: loc. 3547). The power of *The Gaol Gate* also lies in its presentation of women's conflicting interests in the process of myth-making. While the maternal voice transforms the real (or the erotic) into an artistically/culturally iconic vision of nation and characterises Gregory's literary imagination of the maternal as an enabling force, Gregory subtly puts the realm into a public interrogation by making visible the wife's silence in the final act of the mother's keening. Considering the performative power of silence as a form of embodied language onstage, the

exclusion of the wife's voice in the final scene becomes a potential refusal of melancholic retention of loss, a refusal of the idealisation of the husband's death. Gregory's *The Gaol Gate* "reveals the making of myth rather than presenting myth as truth" (Leeney 2010: 31) making visible the cost of it by presenting the hero's absence and the wife/lover's silence.

Gregory's prose reflections in her autobiography and diary may be read as a site of her melancholic writing that symptomatically delivers Gregory's sense of self, constructed by the internalisation of the gendered social terms of her class. However, my interpretation of *The Gaol Gate* as the author's artistic negotiation for women's place in the context of nationalism and cultural movements complicates any easy categorisation of Gregory's idea of women or her self-assumption of maternal role as the nation's guiding spirit. Moreover, Gregory revisits in *Grania* the silenced realm of the wife/lover's desire, interrogating again the cost of self-assertion and provocatively combining it with explosive forces of emotions and sexuality.

Melancholic Irishness and Street Performances

Gregory's observation of melancholy in Irish people derives from her activity of collecting and studying Irish songs – mostly street ballads – and stories widely sung and told among the country people of her region. Gregory writes, "I find in our Irish country people, who are after all the real nation, the underlying melancholy, the tragic dignity, the poetic imagination I find in the Gaelic writers, old and new" ("Laughter in Ireland" 286). Although Gregory doesn't bring to the fore the political injustice of the British colonialism in her discussion of this affect felt by Irish people, she identifies a series of failed revolutionary movements against colonial rule as a background of deeply entrenched feelings. In her essay "The Felons of Our Land," Gregory links this particular affect to the conception of 'felony' that she regards as having achieved a distinct meaning in the course of long historical conflicts between the Irish rebels and the colonial regime, which has in turn influenced the quality of Irish songs and literature. She writes:

Whether with such a purpose [of comforting trembling and discouraged men], or whether through the nature formed by generations of loss, it is not of conquerors or of victories our poets have written and our people have sung through the last hundred years, but of defeat and of prison and of death (“The Felons of Our Land” 622)

Here, Gregory seems to perpetuate the Victorian discourses of Celticism echoing Mathew Arnold’s romantic portrayal of the Irish: “the Celtic genius had sentiment for its main basis [...] with love of beauty, charm and spirituality for its excellence, ineffectualness and self-will for its defect” (Qtd. in Kiberd 1996: 31). Although a benign attempt on Arnold’s side to reconsider the cultural relations between the English and the Irish, his description of Celtic emotionalism (seen as the subconscious of the Saxon psychology) extended to colonial discourses whose emphasis on ‘racial’ differences was mapped onto gender, promoting the Celtic psyche as feminine, lacking the sane and rational mind crucial to political responsibility. While this colonial discourse had dual purposes of identifying and justifying the coloniser’s positional superiority and of subjugating the colonised, the stereotypical notion of Irishness was not only confined to the coloniser. As Richard Kearny notes, many of the Irish people “also endorsed this portrait of themselves. They internalised the master’s view, donning the masks of stage-Irishry with relish” (1997: 172).

According to Ranjana Khanna, in the context of colonialism a symptom of melancholia is manifest in the loss of dynamism of representation necessitated by colonial politics. Khanna writes that (post)colonial melancholia is characterised by “an emptying out of the process of language and meaning formation from the word,” which she terms “demetaphorsation” (2003: 25). Celticism circulated in the Victorian era could be seen as a cultural phenomenon of antimetaphorical understanding of the colonised, translating and fixating the Irish mind in the uni-dimensional meaning that marks Irishness in the realm of loss or eccentric alterity of the colonial other.

As Khanna notes, such systems of colonialism “necessitate the right of representation to be achieved” (26). However, if ‘demetaphorization’ involves a process of creating racial ideal and naturalising/essentialising it in relation to a notion of inherent lack or disability, how can the breaking of

'demetaphorization' be achieved? W. B. Yeats's 1898 essay "The Celtic Element in Literature" (written two years earlier than Gregory's "The Felons of Our Land") that takes on Arnold's Celticism may provide a case for how the revivalists attempted to transform the injurious language of the coloniser into self-affirming accounts in order to prepare for the re-formulation of Irishness. Yeats writes:

[...] literature dwindles to a mere chronicle of circumstance, or passionless phantasies, and passionless mediations, unless it is constantly flooded with the passions and beliefs of ancient times, [...] the Celtic alone has been for centuries close to the main river of European literature. ("The Celtic Element" 198)

Yeats, rather than refusing Arnold's essentialising and romantic accounts of Celticism, expands the stereotyped category to a wider perspective. Moving beyond the Celt and Saxon binaries "with its universalising scope and in its open acceptance of its own ground" (Welsh 1993: xxiv), Yeats promotes the ancient Celtic tradition as central to European knowledge and literature. Moreover, his emphasis on the potential of knowledge hidden in the ancient Celtic tradition as a source of European imagination justifies the need to open up the imaginative wonder of antiquity as an enabling set of national consciousness, the need to liberate the national imagination.

Gregory shared with other cultural revivalists including Yeats the strategy of unravelling the cultural framework that justified the colonial rule by setting up pre-colonial antiquity of Ireland as utopia: a project that found its possibility of rewriting Irishness by turning to the west of rural Ireland as preserving national purity, by collecting folkloric stories of ancient mythological heroes, by promoting indigenous language and sports, and finally by establishing a cultural space in which to challenge the stage-Irishness that was widely circulated in various forms of representation. The revivalist project, in short, was to bring to light what was possibly buried in the elaborate discourse of the coloniser entailing colonised people's internalisation of the master's view and the resulting abjection. This is demonstrated in Gregory's manifesto in commencing Irish Literary Theatre in the late nineteenth century:

We will show Ireland is no home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us. (*Our Irish Theatre* 9)

Gregory's manifesto reveals a paradoxical self positioning of the founders of the national theatre¹⁴ as both melancholic modernists and insurgent nationalists in an attempt to transform the political crisis into a modern art of drama and performance and yet, providing counterhegemonic accounts against colonialism. The project is inherently melancholic to the extent that the conception of national theatre was to migrate political disappointment into the realm of modern art of drama: a substitution of autonomous arts for the death of political possibilities. Gregory expresses this view on the political and the modern arts in her autobiography:

All the passion of Ireland seemed to be thrown into that fight [the Land War], it obscured the vision beyond it of the rebuilding of a nation. Then, at last, had come the breaking of Parnell's power and his death, the quarrel among his followers that pushed politics into the background, and with the loss of that dominance of his, there came a birth of new hope and interests, as it were, a setting free of the imagination. (*Seventy Years* 306)

Gregory's narratives here manifest her belief that the liberation of imagination, which she links to the founding of Gaelic League and of the Irish Literary Society, has been the radically inclusive antithesis to the divisiveness of Irish politics. If the political failures in Ireland have fractured the national identity producing colonial melancholia, in Gregory's accounts such a sense of loss and failure can be bridged by the literary engagement with that particular affect:

The song-writer, the poet, would find a better mission were he to tell of the meaning of failure, of the gain that may lie in the wake of a lost battle. If he himself possessed the faith that is the evidence of things unseen, he would strive to give spiritual vision to trembling and discouraged men. ("The Felons of Our Land" 622)

Melancholia, as a national symptom exposing the abject underside of Irish

¹⁴ Gregory, Yeats, and Edward Martyn co-founded the Irish Literary Theatre (1899), later the Irish National Theatre Society (1903), which saw the opening of the Abbey theatre in 1904.

people and communities, operates not only as a critical condition directing attention to the psychic impact of colonial history. It also functions, paradoxically, as a generative force shaping a revisionary engagement with cultural history of Ireland. In other words, while melancholia, in the colonial context, is understood to emerge from a certain type of embodiment, excessive figures of colonial and cultural other (the excess of ‘black bile’ and emotion), it becomes a mediation performed by the imagination in constructing national consciousness and self.

Gregory’s formation of the Irish melancholy as a distinct national culture differentiated from the English culture¹⁵ transforms the affect into Ireland’s artistic heritage. In so doing, she simultaneously confers a leading role to writers (including herself) in the construction of national identity and identifies the ballad tradition as an alternative narrative form to official English history. She writes: “Irish history, having been forbidden in the national schools, has lifted up its voice in the streets, and has sung memory of each new movement, and of the men who guided it, into the memory of each new generation” (“The Felons of Our Land” 624). As for Gregory’s focused interests in oral tradition in relation to the creative mind of Irish people, George Cusack notes:

[i]n Gregory’s Ireland, the combination of creativity and oral culture gives communities a nearly limitless ability to create and recreate themselves. Through the power of storytelling, ordinary men become heroes, defeats become victories, and commonplace events become spectacular works of mythology. (2009: 79-80).

However, Gregory’s deep anxiety about the Irish ‘oral culture’ adheres to the underside of her apparent praise of it. Examining a street ballad, she qualifies her admiration, noting that it was “composed by a Dublin street singer, and, in spite of the stilted sounds of one who has learned a style from . . . pub oratory, there is something touching in the conscientious attention to detail” (“The Felons of Our Land” 625). Michael Jaros comments on Gregory’s ambivalence revealed in the passage: “Gregory is anxious, here, to qualify the ‘low’ form of performance for the high sentiments she wishes to examine: ‘ancient idealism’ will lift these voices from the streets to the

¹⁵ Gregory connects English literature and culture to its triumphal history, which she characterises as “respectability, comfort, peace, a settled life” (*Selected Writings* 268).

legitimate, *literary*, theatre house, or the British literary journal” (2012: 60). Put in other terms, Gregory is anxious about the anomalous nature of the ballad tradition, anomalous in the sense that it is lacking legitimacy as a form of national literature especially in the colonial context. Hence, Gregory elevates the writer’s role of channelling the oral performances into a “legitimate performance” (Jaros 2012: 60), which she hoped to consolidate in the literary theatre movements.

Gregory’s anxiety to seek a legitimate stage for the oral tradition of ballads and stories can be linked to the theatre’s project of modernising and civilising Irish sentimentality and citizens attempting to incorporate historical losses for the construction of a more coherent subject position. In some cases, such project is regarded as an inversion of colonial structure replacing it with bourgeois elitism, if not an attempt to restore the ever-declining status of Ascendancy among the nationalist communities. Nevertheless, Gregory’s melancholic engagement with loss creates an art form that does not wholly devour negativity but reveals it in dynamism of carnivalesque humour and political subversion of failures as the case study of *Spreading the News* will demonstrate in the next section.

Spreading the News (1904): The Making of a Public Persona

While writing on Irish folk memory and the long history of nationalist resistance reaching back to 1798, Gregory also wrote a number of comedy plays that are set in the fictional Irish town, Cloon, and centre on the creation of Irish townspeople’s images rising up out of the old, stereotypical stage Irishmanry. Gregory repeatedly expressed her role as a comedy writer in the theatre movement for a broader repertory. For example, Gregory writes, recalling the 1898 meeting with Yeats and Edward Martyn wherein the idea of Ireland’s national theatre was conceived, that her “own comedies were written simply because at the time comedy was so much needed” (*Seventy Years* 316). She writes again in her note on *Spreading the News*: “But comedy and not tragedy was wanted at our theatre to put beside the high poetic work, *The King’s Threshold*, *The*

Shadowy Waters, On Baile's Strand, The Well of the Saints; and I let laughter have its way with the little play" (*The Comedies* 253).

Gregory's open acceptance of the role as a provider of comedies for the theatre has been often regarded as interlocked with her acceptance of the gender codes of her society: "modesty, self-deprecation and dedication to others, or to ideals larger than herself", which, as Leeney notes, "characterized Gregory's life" (2010: 21). Mainly deriving from a hierarchical conception of genre of comedy, each of her comedies was deemed then and even now "a little piece" (Turner 1997: 110) or an add-on for theatre events. The reviews of the premiere of Gregory's first comedy *Spreading the News* reveals this view: "a highly amusing but wholly improbable farce"; "a tripping little piece, founded on a simple idea of modern Irish life [...] comedy"; "pure farce, brilliant [...] with relish" (Turner 1997: 110). The premiere of *Spreading the News* on the opening night of the Abbey in December 1904 shared the bill with Yeats's verse play *On Baile's Strand* in which he dramatises the struggles of Cuchulain, the mythical and symbolic hero of Irish revolutions. While Yeats's play was considered to reflect the colonial situation of Ireland in its highly poetic and tragic tone, *Spreading the News* was admired for its delightful and farcical quality providing audiences with a relief from jagged political issues of the time. Many critics of Irish drama have long reiterated this treatment of the play. However, as James Pethica notes, the "marginalising description" of the play overlooks its political significance (2004: 70). He argues that "[t]he robust farce which predominates in most of [Gregory's comedy] plays, however, masks a subversive political content which quietly parallels the more overt carnivalesque dynamics of *The Rising of the Moon*, and which is long overdue for critical recuperation" (2004: 70).¹⁶

In this discussion of Gregory's *Spreading the News*, I suggest that her play arises from the writer's close examination of an Irish community regulated and profoundly affected by colonial rules. The view that the play

¹⁶ Pethica argues that *The Rising of the Moon* "offers an essentially carnivalesque treatment of serious political issues, with social and ideological faultlines being exposed, and then defused, by the force of humour" (2004: 69). While the Ragged Man seems in appearance to be "a sentimentalized representation of Fenianism," his charm revealed through his humorous stage actions is only a tool that disarms audiences and masks "the potential for real violence lurk[ing] uncomfortably close beneath the surface humour of the action" (69).

is a 'simple' or 'improbable' caricature of Irish life, full of the country people's talks and hurly-burly of a murder case which has never been committed, is undermined by Gregory's use of the dynamics of presence and absence of a ghostly body, blurring the long-standing binary oppositions of the colonial discourse between the rational and irrational. The melancholic model of Celtic identity, deemed ghostly and absent, is invoked in the play when the characters perform the stereotype of chaotic disorder, creating a murder case: both the alleged murderer, Bartley Fallon, and the murder victim, Jack Smith, remain offstage during the time in which the creation of talks predominates the stage and the punitive colonial laws are applied to the fictional murder case. Rather than a site for a total rejection, melancholic Celticism, the feminised realm of Irish identity, creates a discourse on the national stage, opening it up to the "carnavalesque dynamics" to follow Pethica's terms and forcing the polemic of Irish identity to become communal, providing audiences an opportunity to consider the excess to which the characters, or the cultural identity, are distorted and exploited.

Taking place in the small fictional country town of Cloon, the play revolves around the peasant character Bartley Fallon, who pronounces his own pre-destined misfortune, "If there's ever any misfortune coming to this world, it's on myself it pitches" (17) – a prophesy which is fulfilled while he is offstage looking for to return a pitchfork to Jack Smith. While Bartley is off stage, the townsfolk, due to mutual misunderstandings and imaginings, create a story in which Bartley murders Jack in an attempt to run off to America with Jack's wife. Towards the end of the play Jack reappears onstage. However, the once created story seems to have its own life because the villagers prefer to believe the murder story. Equally confused, the English authority, Magistrate, handcuffs both Bartley and Jack believing that he is serving for justice.

Although the play does not involve a literal death,¹⁷ its macabre humour arising as a defence mechanism against the fear of death is manifest

¹⁷ Vivien Mercier notes that "perhaps none of the examples from Robinson, Lady Gregory or Synge is truly macabre, since no death has actually taken place, but they are certainly related to the macabre" (70).

in Bartley's melancholic obsession with his self-claimed tragic doom and the community's inability to resolve the disorder. On one hand, the play causes laughter by providing audiences with a sense of superiority, the position of knowing subjects, so that they can enjoy the pleasure brought by Bartley's innocent fall and the country people's construction of the murder case. On the other hand, the position is undermined because Bartley's innocence does not save him from his doom. The conversation below shows the way in which Bartley becomes a stereotypical comedic fool:

BARTLEY: Red Jack Smith dead! Who was telling you?
SHAWN EARLY: The whole town knows of it by this.
BARTLEY: Do they say what way did he die?
JAMES RYAN: You don't know that yourself, I suppose, Bartley Fallon? You don't know he was followed and that he was laid dead with the stab of a hayfork?
BARTLEY: The stab of a hayfork!
SHAWN EARLY: You don't know, I suppose, that the body was found in the Five Acre Meadow!
BARTLEY: The Five Acre Meadow!
TIM CASEY: It is likely you don't know that the police are after the man that did it?
BARTLEY: The man that did it!
MRS TULLY: You don't know, maybe, that he was made away with for the sake of Kitty Keary, his wife?
BARTLEY: Kitty Keary, his wife! (23-4)

Bartley hears the story of the murder without realising that he is the alleged suspect. The created rhythm through repetitions alternating between Bartley's naïveté and the townsfolk's tone of incredulity reinforces the comedic air sacrificing Bartley's innocence: this comedic air would abound in the stage performance in which Bartley carries the hayfork, the presumed murder weapon, causing a further misconception of the character. At the same time, this creation of comedic fool through repetitive alternations masks a potential violence that has lurked close to the farcical surface in the community. Indeed, before Bartley's return to the stage, audiences have seen how Mrs Tully's accusation of Bartley for having a "mouldering look" (19) was quickly transformed into her insistence on the execution of Bartley by hanging for the murder: "If they [the police] get him, and if they do put a rope around his neck, there is no one can say he does not deserve it!" (22).

However, the following scene where Bartley is handcuffed for the alleged murder is comedic for a different reason – Bartley, instead of denying murder or resisting authority, tumbles into his self-loaded tragic destiny.

BARTLEY: Handcuffs now! Glory be! I always said, if there was ever any misfortune coming to this place it was on myself it would fall. I to be in handcuffs! There's no wonder at all in that. (26)

The humour derived from Bartley's attitude, resembles that of a criminal in Freud's discussion of humour. While being led out to execution, the criminal says: "Well, this week's beginning nicely." (Freud (1927) 1990: 427). Like Bartley, the criminal makes a joke at his own expense. It is a joke that is essentially related to the denegation of his own situation – the denegation of the distinction between the joker's death-day and any other day. It is this sign of indifference about his imminent death that produces laughs. According to Freud, this kind of humour has a liberating quality, "something of grandeur and elevation" (Freud (1927) 1990: 428):

The grandeur in it clearly lies in the triumph of narcissism, the victorious assertion of the ego's invulnerability. The ego refuses to be distressed by the provocations of reality, to let itself be compelled to suffer. It insists that it cannot be affected by the traumas of the external world; it shows, in fact, that such traumas are no more than occasions for it to gain pleasure. (Freud (1927) 1990: 428-9)

For Freud, humour is inseparable from terror – the fear of death – and it is identified as a defensive process that protects the ego from reality, as well as from the compulsion to suffer. If humour has a remarkable power to protect the ego from the reality of death, this power can only be exercised through the production of illusion. In other words, in the interaction between the ego and the super-ego, the latter convinces the former that death is not to be taken seriously, and at this point, the usually severe and brutal master super-ego presents its liberating power – fending off possible sufferings. However, as demonstrated by Freud's positioning humour along with other psychological processes such as neurosis, madness, intoxication, and self-absorption, his idea of humour necessitates the ego's detachment from the

real, external world – and its submission to illusion guided by the parental super-ego.

The humour that Bartley evokes in the final scene stems not from the mere clown-like demeanour, but from the incongruity between the terror of death and the desire to fend it off. Indeed, the peasant life in *Cloon* is led in the shade of death: the play begins with a nearly deaf, old woman on stage alone; Bartley and his wife enter the stage talking about death – “Never fear, Bartley Fallon, but I’ll give you a good burying the day you’ll die” (16); the sheet on the hedge is immediately associated with the sheet for the dead in the townsfolk’s minds; and above all the townsfolk are thrilled by the talk of murder.

Gregory carefully associates the gloomy air of the town with the poverty-stricken peasant life: Bartley speaks, “Indeed, it’s a poor country and a scarce country to be living in” (16). Thus, the wild excess of the townsfolk’s imaginations is generated in a sense by the conditions of a peasant life deprived of opportunity for any political or economic practices: the excessive freeing up of the imagination is melancholic because it has been created, to a crucial extent, by the incorporation of political failures. As Cusack points out, the problem that the villagers experience stems from the fact that “they have no outlet for their hostilities *besides* each other” (2009: 84). This observation is amply demonstrated by a conversation between the English authority, the Magistrate, and Mrs Tarpey:

MAGISTRATE: (shouting) What is the chief business?

MRS. TARPEY: Business, is it? What business would the people here have but to be minding one another’s business?

MAGISTRATE: I mean what trade have they?

MRS. TARPEY: Not a trade. No trade at all but to be talking. (16)

This conversation shows Gregory’s understanding and sympathy for the limited conditions of peasant life combined with her awe for their ability to transform themselves through imagination: “I was moved by the strange contrast between the poverty of the tellers and the splendours of the tales”. Then she continues, “These men who had failed in life, and were old and withered, or sickly, or crippled [...] The stories that they love are of quite visionary things.” (Qtd. in Gillin 1987: 169). In another essay, Gregory

identifies the ‘visionary things’ as phantasmatic stories of, for example, “swans that turn into kings’ daughters, and of castles with crowns over the doors; and lovers’ flights on the backs of eagles” (“Laughter in Ireland” 290). This love of fancy and fantasy of Cloon folks, rather than being a romantic disposition of the people with poetic imagination, is produced by their material and political lack of freedom. Edward Gillin asserts, “[t]hus amid the ‘cattle and sheep and mud’ of the district in *Spreading the News*, where all the local crime is apparently fixed in the English magistrate’s head, what could thrill the romantic longings of the populace more than imagining a murderer in its midst? And, to exercise the imagination further, who more unlikely a felon than Bartley Fallon, the hapless peasant struggling under a pessimism truly glorious in scope?” (1987:169)

While Mrs Tarpey’s assertion of ‘no business but to be talking’ is the playwright’s joke on the country people’s love of stories and the English authority’s ignorance and carelessness. As partially shown in the conversation above, the apparent fall of Bartley and the townsfolk is thematically and structurally surrounded by not only the Magistrate’s inability to understand the Irish imagination but also his use of power to control the obscure enigma. Not only does the Magistrate misunderstand the fluid nature of Mrs Tarpey’s conversation, he attempts to bring a fixed standard of laws to the town – which is seen both in the opening and at the end of the play:

MAGISTRATE. So that is the Fair Green. Cattle and sheep and mud. No system. What a repulsive sight!

POLICEMAN. That is so, indeed.

MAGISTRATE. I suppose there is a good deal of disorder in this place?

POLICEMAN. There is.

MAGISTRATE. Common assault?

POLICEMAN. It’s common enough.

MAGISTRATE. Agrarian crime, no doubt?

POLICEMAN. That is so.

MAGISTRATE. Boycotting? Maiming of cattle? Firing into houses?

POLICEMAN. There was one time, and there might be again.

MAGISTRATE. That is bad. Does it go any farther than that?

POLICEMAN. Far enough, indeed.

MAGISTRATE: Homicide, then! This district has been shamefully neglected! I will change all that. When I was in the Andaman Islands, my system never failed. (15)

The opening conversation between the Policeman and the Magistrate who is visiting the fair of Cloon and previously worked in the colony of the Andaman Islands, conveys an inquisition-like air. Here, Gregory's references to the Irish Land War in the late nineteenth century, along with the Indian Mutiny of 1857 that created the Andaman Islands' colony,¹⁸ highlight where the Magistrate's disapproving and authoritarian attitudes with official directness come from. The Magistrate's fixed understanding of the townspeople as potential lawbreakers and murderers perpetuates the coloniser's myth of native criminality and irrationality, underpinning his pre-existing belief that the town needs to be run exactly like the penal colony of the Andaman Islands. However, the Policeman's short and laid-back responses have an effect of undercutting the Magistrate's strict authority: while the list of local crimes reinforce the Magistrate's prejudices and clichés, the Policeman's re-appropriation of the word "common", for example, exposes the town's relatively quiet reality, yet each of the Policeman's responses is followed by further excesses in the Magistrate's mind. The speeches of the Magistrate and the Policeman, juxtaposed likewise, create a kind of gap into which the audience is invited to discern the excesses of both the authority and the country people that the reification of colonial law causes. It is this kind of gap in their speeches, the "incongruous" ("Laughter in Ireland" 289), that Gregory observed as generating humour for the country people of her time.

The Magistrate's fixed idea that equates the town with the prison colony draws another shadowy layer of death over the townsfolk. Like the inmates of a panoptic prison, the people of Cloon are kept under surveillance and control. While the country people's imagination and communication is illegible to the English authority, this illegibility leads to the incarceration of such 'activity'. Paradoxically, however, the power of English law behind the Magistrate is a force that drives the only "real"

¹⁸ Refer to G. Dennis Shanks, et al., "Malaria's indirect contribution to all-cause mortality in the Andaman Islands during the colonial era," *Lancet Infectious Diseases* 8. 9 (September, 2008), 564. The Andaman Islands' penal colony, located near the Burmese coast in the Bay of Bengal, was established by the British colonial government of India following the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Indian civilian prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment were later transported to this prison colony and most of these prisoners had been convicted of murder.

action in the play and on stage – the action that sees Bartley and Jack arrested. As mentioned previously, Bartley’s doom-ridden humour functions as a tool of escape from the fear of death or death-like reality. In the larger context of community – a community that is an object of discipline under the gaze of authority – the function of the townsfolk’s ‘talking business’ is similar to that of Bartley’s humour. In other words, it is a pleasure produced by the illusory escape of reality – protection of the self from the fear of death in Freudian interpretations. Crucially, the air of death derives from the oppressive force of categorisation and documentarisation of English law, and its miscarriage of justice.

The return of the ‘ghost’ on the stage (Jack, the alleged murder victim) reveals that the stories have been created and spread out by the townspeople. However, Jack’s return does not resolve the once created chaos. His corporeality onstage becomes ghostly because the imagined stories of murder have such a strong hold amongst the villagers. Also, his violent reaction to the townsfolk’s created ‘news’ only takes a form of another potential murder story as he speaks, “I’ll break the head of any man that says that!” (29). Due to his ghostliness in the sense that he mostly lives only in terms of the country people’s stories and his corporeality is not regarded as real, the Magistrate’s charge against him in the final scene for his “false impersonation, a conspiracy to defeat the ends of justice” (29) invokes the absurdity of colonial rule which brings to the community a further confusion. Unlike a conventional farce, therefore, Gregory’s play does not offer audiences a sense of relief achieved by the recovery of order. Instead, the play takes audiences to a darker realm of on-going disorder, ending with Bartley making another gloomy prophesy, “It is what I am thinking, if myself and Jack Smith are put together in the one cell for the night, the handcuffs will be taken off him, and his hands will be free, and murder will be done that time surely!” (29): a colonial allegory that an actual violence takes place under the injustice of the coloniser’s law.

Gregory’s search for a proper style of comedy that has “a base of reality, and an apex of beauty” (*Seventy Years* 317) was one of her important tasks. If the stage Irishry “artificial and superficial, [which] meant for another audience and another market than our own,” had been circulated

in the English popular culture, the invention of Irish comedy “without the contempt or scorn that may hurt what is eternal in us” (“Laughter in Ireland” 292, 294) was to be the national theatre’s project crucial to the restoration of the freedom of expression. She observed and believed that the Irish people’s native imagination which was ‘melancholic’ and ‘tragic’ in nature, did not fit in the conventional type of comedy seen in English literature. Gregory confirms this by introducing the English audience’s response to the production of her play: “Our players still shiver at the recollection of an English provincial audience in which *Spreading the News* was played through without a single laugh” (“Laughter in Ireland” 290). In her anthropological essay, introducing her interviews with the country people and studies, Gregory writes her observations that it was “the incongruous [that] caused [the Irish country people] to laugh and applaud” and also, “it was fantasy, imagination, rather than humour that was the keynote” (289, 290). Then she writes: “[...] poetry and tragedy filling our whole literature; how did we ever get the name of being a humorous people?” (290) For Gregory Irish comedies are the close examination of the tension, “a double personality” to follow Gregory’s terms, and of Irish people between “tragedy and comedy, idealism and common sense, the knight errant and the squire erred, the Don Quixote and the Sancho Panza” (290).

Gregory’s claim that she wrote comedies “at the time comedy was so much needed,” rather than her simple concession to remain as a second-rate writer, came from her awareness and ambition to build a tradition of comedy for Ireland’s own people without harming the ‘tragic dignity’ inherent in their poetic imagination. The incongruous resulting from such tensions can emerge to cause laughter. In this sense, Gregory’s aesthetic sense about comedy belongs to the tradition of macabre comedy that Vivien Mercier in *The Irish Comic Tradition* (1962) identifies, along with fantasy and carnivalesque humour, as a distinct Gaelic tradition, which goes back to the pre-Christian iconography Sheela-na-gig and appears in contemporary Irish drama by, for instance, Marina Carr. In Carr’s Midlands plays, the dead constantly return to provide a sense of continuity between life and death: not only the ghosts of the dead like Joseph murdered by his sister

Hester and her husband Carthage (*By the Bog of Cats...*) or Gabriel who drowned to death (*Portia Coughlan*), but also the female figures representing the threshold between life and death including the protagonists and the older women. The carnivalesque humour created by the tension between incongruous elements of society or the return of the (living) ghost gains an immense power in Carr's dramatization of maternal figures. In particular, Grandma Fraochlán in *The Mai* who has turned one hundred years old represents the excessive female grotesque, crossing death and the erotic: her view on human existence is epitomised in a line "You're born, ya have sex, and then ya die" (*The Mai* 143). The corporeality of explicit irreverence is sensual and shocking; the old grotesque body is also amusing and exciting because of its transgressive quality that challenges the discrete social order around sexuality, reproduction, and motherhood, integrating elements of the obscene. In contrast with Bartley's ghost whose corporeality is denied on stage, Carr's ghosts are resolutely physical and are given a right to articulate their stories and to contradict the properties of conventional category.

One notable element of Gregory's play is the lack of hero. Although Gregory values the importance of cohesive narratives and fluid understanding/ interpretation of stories, in the play there is not a visible and liberating artist or story-teller. Instead, Gregory positions the absence of the anti-hero, Bartley, and the disorder created by the excesses of Law and talking at the centre of the play. In so doing, as Cusack expresses it, Gregory "dismantles the Magistrate's authority" (2009: 92) and the author herself assumes the authority reinforcing the need for an institution/author that can channel the anomalous stories and give meanings to them in the broader context of culture and history. More importantly, Gregory provides the power of speculation to her audiences by giving them a privilege to see the constructedness of narratives as well as the miscarriage of justice. In this regard, Gregory, through the play, reenacts her authorial role with the role of modernised audiences who are empowered by their ability to see through the dynamics of power relationship represented on stage. If Gregory was often confronted by her classed and gendered limit in certain areas of Irish cultural nationalism, she attempts to overcome such a limit through

playwriting by creating a persona for herself as firmly public, an intellectual figure who provides an order to the social anomaly, and thus by affirming her own authorship.

***Grania* (1910): Gregory's Feminism**

Gregory's *Grania* achieves a distinct position in both her oeuvre and Irish drama history as one of the most compelling feminist works. The play centres on the journey and transformation of the title character, the mythic heroine, from the trap of heroic men's love object into the breaking of such conventions by empowering herself and preparing for her own future within the existing power structures. The play has a progressive plot structure threading through the protagonist's love for and elopement with Diarmuid the night before her wedding with Finn, Finn's rage and punishment resulting in Diarmuid's death, Grania's disillusion with the romantic love, and her decision to return to Finn that is followed by her final act of crowning herself. This plot development with a focused examination of the characters' emotional forces allows a reading of the play as concerned with Grania's journey towards self-empowerment and liberation, challenging the trap of patriarchal structure of society. Moreover, the title of the play that dissociates Grania from other male characters reveals the playwright's conscious ambition to rewrite the story of the mythic heroine who explores her own path. In her notes on the play, Gregory exposes her fascination with Grania:

I think I turned to Grania because so many have written about sad, lovely Deirdre, who when overtaken by sorrow made no good battle at the last. Grania had more power of will, and for good or evil twice took the shaping of her life into her own hands. The riddle she asks us through the ages is, "Why did I, having left great grey-haired Finn for comely Diarmuid, turn back to Finn in the end, when he had consented to Diarmuid's death?" And a question tempts one more than the beaten path of authorised history. (*The Tragedies* 286)

Here, Gregory not only justifies her choice of the title character for her play but also obliquely connects the enigma of Grania with "the beaten path of authorised history" as though her project is to examine what the authorised history omitted and rewrite the loss into history. Indeed, Gregory's

dramatisation of Grania disintegrates the conventional association between femininity and frivolous irrationality that was perpetuated in the representation of Grania in folk history. Translated and revised into a play, Grania represented an inadequate model for the nation-woman ideal. In W. B. Yeats and George Moore's *Diarmuid and Grania* (1901), for example, Grania's desire is combined with feminine vanity that distracts the camaraderie of the warrior men, and her reintegration into the power system is blamed and portrayed as deriving from her fickleness regarded again to be an undesirable feminine disposition. Thus, Lucy McDiarmid and Maureen Waters credit "a sustained and explicit feminist perspective" in Gregory's play. They maintain that Gregory "seems determined to revise the romantic stereotype of women as helpless victims of fate. Grania believes she is entitled to a full sexual life [...] she not only demands to be heard, she demands a share in, and transformation of, the male power structure" (1995: xxxii). Gregory's *Grania* confronts the conventional representation of emotionally (or sexually) strong women as untrustworthy, destructive, and dangerous for the established order, "provid[ing] the rationale, missing from the sagas, for Grania's apparent betrayal of her lover" (Doyle 1999: 39). As such, Gregory's revision of the mythic heroine, Grania, challenges the binary vision of women that categorised them into romantic, helpless, lamenting victim or powerful, dangerous, treacherous traitor.

While agreeing with and drawing on the critical views on the play as essentially revealing Gregory's feminism, in this analysis of the play I focus on how Gregory's feminist vision negotiates loss in order to recreate and reorient "the beaten path of authorised history" of Ireland turning it into a theatrical performance. As discussed earlier, Gregory's aesthetic vision is a melancholic one in the sense that she integrates the political and historical failure into her dramatic creation of women's and communal voices. In *The Gaol Gate*, for example, Denis's failure provides the women outside the political struggles with the possibility of articulating their grieves and achieving a transformative moment through the experience of loss. In *Spreading the News* the power of storytelling of ordinary peasant people, deprived of political and economic means, becomes a possibility of recreating, though ironically, their own stories against the destructive

system of British colonialism.

In *Grania*, this question of loss and failure, I argue, is interrogated in a more explicitly and radically gendered form through Grania's struggles to remain and refuse to be erased by the narratives of the male figures, which in turn delivers Gregory's sense of her own position surrounded by the strong male Revivalists who were in a competitive relationship with each other. Christopher Murray, while acknowledging Gregory's feminism exposed in her "revolutionary, if harsh, representation of woman's choice, an escape from the aesthetics and ideology of Victorian high romance," explains Grania's [Gregory's] loss in relation to the archetypal guilt imposed upon women by "a stern, male-dominated theology" (1997: 59,58). Namely, Gregory's female characters, especially in history plays including *Grania*, are guilty of infidelity and suffer from "self-injury and debasement" in an attempt to atone for their wrongdoings and sins. Murray maintains that "Grania seems unfinished, inasmuch as the homoerotic area of the play, coded in the conventions of epic as male bonding and chivalry, is not integrated with the heterosexual main theme" (59).

Murray's criticism may be applied to other history plays, *Kincora* (1905; revised in 1909) and *Dervorgilla* (1907), both of which, like *Grania*, centre on the mythic heroines on whom Irish folk-history places blame for treacherous womanhood. Unlike in the latter, in these plays, despite Gregory's focused dramatisation of their complex emotional energy and struggles, the protagonists either leave the stage with her power diminished and torn between opposing male forces or remain with the guilt-ridden acceptance of isolated life as a way of atoning for her violation of social mores. However, Murray's interpretation of Grania's reintegration into the (male-dominated) power structure as deriving from her sense of guilt, and especially as reflecting Gregory's "guilt over her love for Blunt" (59), not only neglects the historical development in Gregory's efforts to negotiate fixed images of women in the Irish folk history through her dramatic works but also reduces the playwright's dramatic world as deriving from her exploitation of the genre for her personal experiences with Blunt.

This approach to *Grania*, then, revises Murray's criticism in three ways: first, the play is a battleground of a woman who attempts to negotiate

loss rather than a play of atonement and self-injury; second, the dismantling of the guilt paradigm extends the love triangle foregrounded in the play to the larger context of homosocial bonding of the society; third, *Grania*, rather than an unfinished work that could not integrate the male homoerotic bonding into heterosexual main theme, reveals Gregory's acute recognition of how heteronormative patriarchy blocks women's advancement by promoting homosocial bonding between men. It must be noted that the final act of Grania's reintegration into the warrior band reveals Gregory's melancholic vision that the incorporation of loss is necessary in order to achieve a new creation of self within the power structure. However, in Gregory's play this melancholic incorporation is, rather than a simple debasement or abjection, an aggressive means for Grania to challenge and, following Cathy Leeney's terms, to "penetrate an exclusionary patriarchal structure" (2010: 44). Most significantly, the theatrical element that the playwright deploys in the final scene of female empowerment speaks to her advanced sensibility regarding the potential of theatrical performance that might revise the performative reproduction of gender roles within the strictly patriarchal society.

It is noteworthy that Gregory's history plays reveal the change in her voice as an author: a significant shift from the deployment of masculine voice in her collection of Irish saga, *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902), to the challenge against the exclusion of women in public life portrayed in *Grania*. While the establishment of masculine narratives of heroism as an antidote to the feminised realm of Celticism was one of the shared interests amongst the Revivalists, the place of women – their involvement with and exclusion from the forging of national histories – in such narratives was not of primary importance. Any potential complexities of womanhood were erased from the narratives of folk histories, and as a result, the long-standing paradigm of mythic women depending on a narrow iconic image of good and evil was rather conveniently exploited.

Gregory's earlier portrayal of Grania in *Gods and Fighting Men* (1904) was not far from the conventional account: one reason offered for Grania's final decision to go with Finn is "because the mind of a woman changes like the water of a running stream" (Qtd. in Murray 1997: 59). And

as discussed above, even in her history plays such as *Kincora* and *Dervorgilla* that centre on women, Gregory did not push forcibly forward the notion of female empowerment. Thus, where Gregory's femininity was at issue in relation to her class, the criticism on Gregory's rewriting of Ireland's folk history was hostile: she was blamed for her unproblematic identification with martial Celt in an attempt to compromise her femininity and justify the inclusion of Anglo-Irish Ascendancy in the hegemonic national discourses.¹⁹

The appropriation of 'masculine' voice, however, reveals the complicated dynamics of Gregory's aesthetic negotiations where the trope of failure and loss enables an imaginative creation of narratives and stories. For example, in her dedication to *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* Gregory writes: "if there were more respect for things Irish among learned men that live in the college at Dublin, [...] this work would not have been left to a woman of the house, that has to be minding the place, and listening to complaints, and dividing her share of food" (5). Deliberately portraying her primary role as that of "a woman of the house," Gregory insinuates that it is the failure of men to acknowledge the importance of translating/rewriting ancient idealism inherent to Irish mythology but lost to "authorised history" that forced her to step out of the house and to do the men's job. Through this disclaimer, then, Gregory validates her public role in the context of nationalism without violating the limitations placed on her gender. Geraldine Meaney notes that Gregory "undoubtedly ventriloquizes Cuchulain and the text [*Cuchulain of Muirthemne*] consequently allows her to speak as a strong man" (2006: 248). These aesthetic negotiations are inherently melancholic in the sense that Gregory tried to integrate the masculinist rhetoric of nationalism into her writing. Yet at the same time, the strategic appropriation of masculine voice exposes the discontinuity

¹⁹ McDiarmid and Waters's introduction to *Lady Gregory: Selected Writings*, for example, presents the dissatisfaction of Kuno Meyer, a German scholar of Celtic literature, with Gregory's suppression of grotesquely violent and vulgar elements of the original tales; Maureen Hawkins criticises Gregory's unproblematic identification with the interests of her class in "Ascendancy Nationalism, Feminist Nationalism, and Stagecraft in Lady Gregory's Revision of *Kincora*," in *Irish Writers and Politics*, ed. by Okifumi Komesu and Masaru Sekine (Irish Literary Studies, 36) (Savage, MD.: Barnes & Noble, 1990); Cathy Leoney takes on Hawkins's criticism in *Irish Women Playwrights 1900-1939* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

between femininity and authority with which Gregory struggled during her lifetime, marking one important dimension of the dynamics of her play *Grania*.

Considering Gregory's melancholic awareness of the need for negotiations with existing masculine narratives in order to emerge as a public voice, the significance of *Grania* goes beyond the formal and thematic ingenuity. The play not only highlights the painful process of female empowerment within the patriarchal power system but also Gregory's continual "fascination of things difficult" (*The Tragedies*, 286) and efforts to revise and reinterpret, rather than simply reifying, the existing narratives of discontinuity in Irish mythology and national/cultural discourses.

The distinctive quality of Gregory's *Grania*, emerges when it is compared to Yeats's *Diarmuid and Grania*, on which he collaborated with George Moore and which was premiered in the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin in 1901. In Yeats and Moore's text, Grania is not a full-fledged character remaining in the realm of feminine typicality, often overpowered by her emotions and her decision is portrayed in combination with feminine inconsistency and vanity. Cathy Leeney, thus, argues for the possibility that Yeats and Moore "did not understand, or were not prepared to confront dramatically, Grania's motives and feelings" (2010: 53). Gregory's *Grania*, unlike the work by Yeats and Moore, focuses on the three main characters, Grania, Finn and Diarmuid. According to Gregory's notes on the play, Yeats was not convinced from the beginning of Gregory's project of rewriting the Grania mythology. Gregory writes: "When I told Mr Yeats I had but these three persons in the play, he said incredulously, 'They must have a great deal to talk about'" (*The Tragedies*, 286). Undermining Yeats's sceptical remark, however, Gregory's narrowing of focus on the three characters compels the audience to concentrate exclusively on their intimate interactions, confrontations, and psychological battles.

Moreover, the brilliance of Gregory's dramaturgy in exploring the relationships between the characters is revealed in the setting of the play. The characters confront each other within the claustrophobic interior of tents: Act One is set in Finn's "richly decorated tent" where the three

characters encounter with each other (*Grania* 13)²⁰; Act Two in *Grania* and Diarmuid's refuge described to be a "rough tent" (24); Act Three is set in the same tent as in Act II, now occupied by *Grania* and Finn. By setting the actions within the confined interiors, Gregory hints at women's position inside a restricted space let alone "her own position in the world where she is quite literally surrounded and outnumbered by men" (Doyle 1999: 39). And due to the dramaturgical device of containment, her final step out of the interior space towards the public audience on stage and in theatre achieves a dramatic apotheosis.

The playwrights from the next generations continue to represent and challenge the condition of female characters' confinement through the setting on stage. For example, Deevy's expressionist setting of Ms. Maher's parlour in *In Search of Valour* evoking a sense of imprisonment helps to draw attention to the relation of the protagonist Ellie's cultivation of fantasy to the patriarchal power of control over the female desire in the Free State. Similarly, in Reid's *Tea in a China Cup*, the female characters' worldview is closely linked to their home space in which the tradition of obedience of women to the communal sectarian cause of Northern Ireland is incubated and passed down generation after generation. These representations of limitation of the interior space challenge the national inscription of women's role and space within home (both in the South and the North of Ireland). Thus, Carr explores different types of connection for her protagonists outside home, breaking apart (just like *Grania*'s refusal of remaining as hidden wife, or widow, of Diarmuid) the conventionally cherished bonding between mother and daughter or husband and wife.

The erotic male bonding fostered through rivalry based on the exclusion of the other sex is explicitly presented in at least two scenes of *Grania*: first in Act One when *Grania* mistakenly reveals her love for Diarmuid to Finn and in Act Three when Diarmuid regrets his unfaithfulness to Finn on his deathbed. In both scenes, the conflicting forces of desire, loyalty, loss, and jealousy are played out through the power dynamics of silencing and refusal of being silenced.

²⁰ Subsequent citations will be noted parenthetically in the text.

In the first occasion, when Grania has disclosed her love, without knowing it was Finn who was listening to her, Finn's first response is to unleash his jealousy not towards Grania, but Diarmuid. Finn says, "[i]t is the boy lying down and rising with me has betrayed me" (21), and he continues, "[m]y life is a little thing beside what you [Diarmuid] have taken!" (21). Finn's expression of loss resulting from Diarmuid's unfaithfulness, sounding almost like a man who was wounded by a lover's betrayal, becomes even more hysterical when he demands: "[w]as it every whole minute of your life you were false to me?" (21).

Combining the late nineteenth-century conception of female hysteria with manliness in her characterisation of Finn, Gregory here seems to play with the rigid boundaries of gender norms, if not the reversal of gender inscription. Finn's hysteria becomes even more distinct at the end of Act I, when Finn explodes, with his jealousy and anger provoked by Diarmuid's kiss to Grania, saying, "You will give up your life as the charge for that kiss! (23). Finn's vulnerability, masked by his fearsome masculine army that he finally advances against Grania and Diarmuid in the scene, is clearly exposed through Diarmuid's empathetic comment: "It is but a weakness that took hold of him, with the scorching of his jealousy and its flame" (23). In the meantime, Grania's presence is forgotten, and Grania must interrupt their arguments in order to remind them of her existence, crying, "It is not [Diarmuid's] fault! It is mine! It is on me the blame is entirely!" (21). However, her claim is silenced, as her claim is immediately followed by Diarmuid's various oaths of loyalty and fidelity to Finn rather than of love for her: "I will not fail you! [...] I will not forsake her, but I will keep my faith with you [...] It is not as a wife I will bring her, but I will keep my word to you, Finn" (22). And Diarmuid promises that he will send an unbroken loaf of bread each month as token of his faith.

This fidelity that Diarmuid vows to Finn flaws the relationship between Grania and Diarmuid, which is portrayed throughout Act Two. While the couple's wandering life appears to be idyllic at first glance, their marriage has gone through the enforced chastity for seven years, ending with an accidental breaking of the promise caused by Diarmuid's jealousy about the presence of the King of Foreign (an offstage figure, existing only

in the characters' narratives). Diarmid laments over the broken vow of chastity: "It is not fear that is on me, it is shame. Shame because Finn thought me a man would hold to my word, and I have not held to it. I am as if torn and broken with the thought and the memory of Finn" (31). While Diarmuid's sense of jealousy and shame overshadows the couple's life, it is Finn in disguise as a messenger who drives Diarmuid to death through the manipulation of Diarmuid's pride wounded by letting the King of Foreign go. Thus, while interpreting the play in terms of feminine heroism that reverses the archetypal pattern of male heroism, Dawn Duncan notes:

the men in this play seem less than heroic, given Finn's desire to force Grania into a life she will despise, not to mention his deceitfulness toward the two people whom supposedly he has most esteemed. By the end, we also plainly see Diarmuid's lack of regard for the woman who has risked all to love him. [...] Grania is not unfaithful to Finn, whom she has not married. Rather, she keeps faith with herself, her own heart. She is willing to go to her death or to journey alone rather than betray her ideals" (2004: 139)

Indeed, all through the scenes before her decision to be with Finn again, it is only Grania who is faithful to her choice of love. Even when she desires a bigger life, and thus charged by Diarmuid with her change of mind, she can assert that "it is not my mind that changes, it is life that changes me" (28). More explicitly, through the change of Diarmuid's attitude as lover towards her, Grania realises that it is only a fantasy to follow Diarmuid's notion of love, "the luck of those two lovers that carried love entire and unbroken out beyond the rim of sight" (28). She addresses Diarmuid thus: "But here, now, is truth for you. All the years we were with ourselves only, you kept apart from me as if I was a shadow-shape or a hag of the valley. And it was not till you saw another man craving my love, that the like love was born in yourself" (28). Grania is aware that a constitutive element of love is the dynamics of gaze, always involving the third person. She demands that she should have a right to be proud of their love among people: "I will go no more wearing out my time in lonely places, [...] it is to thronged places I will go, where it is not through the eyes of wild startled beasts you will be looking at me, but through the eyes of kings' sons [...]" (28). At this stage, her longing for love and desire for a role larger than Diarmuid's lover in

seclusion are intertwined: an expression of her belief in the possibility of achieving her public dignity without losing her femininity formed in the love relationship with Diarmuid.

Act Three dramatises more forcibly Grania's realisation of love as illusion through Diarmuid's betrayal and her exclusion from the male bonding. On his deathbed after the fatal injury sustained in battle against the King of Foreign, Diarmuid does not recognise or remember Grania at all despite her desperate efforts to remind him of her presence.

DIARMUID: (*turns his head slightly and looks at Finn*). Is that you, my master, Finn? I did not know you were dead along with me.

GRANIA: You are not dead, you are living – my arms are about you. This is my kiss upon your cheek. (*Kisses him*).

DIARMUID: (*not noticing her*). The King of Foreign is dead. [...]
[...]

DIARMUID: (*still speaking to Finn*). There was some word I had to say meeting you – it is gone – I had it in my mind a while ago.

GRANIA: Do you not see me? It is I myself am here – Grania!

DIARMUID: Some wrong I did you, some thing past forgiving. Is it to forgive me you are waiting here for me, and to tell me you are keeping no anger against me after all?

FINN: Come back now, [...] and I will give you full forgiveness for all you have done against me. And I will have done with anger, and jealousy that has been my bedfellow this long time, and I will meddle with you no more, unless in the way of kindness.

DIARMUID: Kindness – you were always kind surely, and I a little lad at your knee. Who at all would be kind to me and you not being kind?

FINN: I will turn back altogether, I will leave you Grania your wife, and all that might come between us from this time.

DIARMUID: What could there be would come between us two? That would be a strange thing indeed.

FINN: [...] and it is beyond the power of any woman to put us asunder, or to turn you against me any more.

DIARMUID: That would be a very foolish man would give up his dear master and his friend for any woman at all. (*He laughs*).

GRANIA: He is laughing – the sense is maybe coming back to him.

DIARMUID: It would be a very foolish thing, any woman at all to have leave to come between yourself and myself. I cannot but laugh at that.

FINN: Rouse yourself up now, and show kindness to the wife that is there at your side.

DIARMUID: [...] I remember – I am remembering now – there was something I begrudged you [...] Something I brought away from you, and kept from you. What wildness came upon me to make me begrudge it? What was it I brought away from you? Was not Hazel my own hound? (*He dies*). (41-2)

In this scene, Gregory reverses the guilt paradigm. It is not Grania who suffers from the sense of guilt but Diarmuid regretful and ashamed of his

betrayal and Finn of his jealousy and anger. Significantly, Grania is now the ‘third person’ watching and observing the passion between the two men, not willingly but only because of Diarmuid’s insistent denial of her presence. Her desperate hope for recognition is embarrassingly crushed by the men’s assertion that ‘nothing at all’ can divide the bonding between them. Grania’s subjectivity is demoted to the status of object that Diarmuid stole from Finn and a ghost on stage. The only option left to Grania in order to deal with her loss and failure is to keen after the death of her husband, leave the clan, and live an isolated life reflecting on her own desire and deed, considered to have brought the death of Diarmuid and the destruction of camaraderie between the men. However, this exclusion of Grania as the third person, her diminished role on stage, invites the revision of the audience’s perception in her change of mind and the appreciation of the moment as her self-realisation and decision-making – her refusal of being erased and her preparation for the self-empowerment, which is shown in her silent movement on stage. Grania begins “*fastening up her hair,*” an action not of keening but of “*preparing for a journey*” (43).

Facing Finn’s demand that she should show her obligation as wife of the dead, Grania reveals to Finn that the journey she is preparing for is not as a mourning wife. It is a journey as a queen of the warrior band. She pronounces, “It is not with Diarmuid I am going out. [...] It is with you I will go to Almuin [Finn’s stronghold]” (43). Finn believes that the weight of loss and grief made Grania go wild, but Grania’s mind is lucid and clear. Grania says:

[...] He had no love for me at any time. It is easy to know it now. I knew it all the while, but I would not give in to believe it. His desire was all the time with you yourself and Almuin [...] Why would I fret after him that so soon forgot his wife, and left her in a wretched way? [...] You are craving to get rid of me now [...] the same as Diarmuid did. But I will not go! I will hold you to your word, I will take my revenge on him! He will think to keep your mind filled with himself and keep me from you, - he will be coming back showing himself as a ghost about Almuin. He will think to come whispering to you, and you alone in the night time. But will find me there before him! He will shrink away lonesome and baffled! I will have my turn that time. It is I will be between him and yourself, and will keep him outside of that lodging forever! [...] and I have no love to give to any man forever. [...] It is the thing I will give him to take notice of, a woman that cared nothing all for his treachery. (44-5)

Conscious of her place between the men but refusing to be quietly dismissed, Grania turns the condition of loss into the site wherein she asserts her self-importance and becomes more than a love object of the men who used her to reproduce the ideal of male images formed through the actions of mirroring and competing with each other. She defines her own being and position, setting herself up as a wedge between them, by neither rejecting the sphere of the patriarchal warrior band nor accepting her role as abject woman-wife.

Questioning how melancholia has been gendered in the historical development, Juliana Schiesari notes that “male fantasy is implicated within the rise of melancholia as a specific cultural as well as pathological phenomenon” (1992: 11). In other words, while the romantic tradition of the concept highlighted an intense and exceptional devotion of affective energy to loss, and the heightened consciousness of melancholia was regarded to confer the melancholic a critical insight into cultural malaise, this realm of melancholia, Schiesari argues, did not account for how “women fit into this ‘creative’ form of mental disturbance” (11). She maintains that in the grievous suffering of the male melancholic, there is “an eroticised nostalgia that recuperates loss in the name of an imaginary unity and that also gives to the melancholic men (the homo melancholicus) a privileged position within literary, philosophical, and artistic canons. This implicitly empowered display of loss and disempowerment converts the personal sorrow of some men into the cultural prestige of inspired artistry and genius” (12).

The bonding between Finn and Diarmuid is kept through their melancholic denial of loss, or their regret of what was lost. Finn’s mourning over Diarmuid’s death delivers a sense that this bonding between the men, “an eroticised nostalgia that recuperates loss in the name of an imaginary unity,” following Schiesari’s terms, is maintained even after Diarmuid’s death. Finn says:

It is a bad story for me you to be dead, and it is in your place I would be well satisfied to be this day; and you had not lived out your time. But as to me, I am tired of all around me, and all the weight of the years is come upon me, and there will be no more joy in anything happens from this day

out forever. And it is as if all the friends ever I had went to nothing, losing you. (43)

Finn's melancholia, expressed in his lament that it is only the memory with Diarmuid that would make him live and be satisfied, confirms their imaginary unity and works to restore Diarmuid's name as a hero of Ireland, publically pronounced by Finn. Significantly, the reinstatement of Diarmuid's name in the warrior band is achieved by mortifying Grania. Finn places blame on Grania for the distraction of the hero's sense and wits, saying that it was "love of a woman brought him down in the end, and sent him astray in the world. And what at all is love, but lies on the lips and drunkenness, and a bad companion on the road?" (43). This debasement and exclusion of Grania in Finn's misogynist public rhetoric makes possible the reestablishment of the privileged position of the men within the system. Thus, it is the melancholic male bonding based on the exclusion of Grania, rather than her sense of guilt over her love for Diarmuid or self-injury as Murray argues, that is foregrounded in the play and prepares for Grania's realisation of her place and choice for a way of living in the world. And her penetration into the bonding, announced in her statement above, dislocates the "empowered display of loss" (Shiesari 1992: 12) between the men. It is not Grania who is going to be lost and turn ghostly; it is Diarmuid who will "shrink away lonesome and baffled," finding Grania in his place.

Elizabeth Coxhead notes that *Grania* was born from Gregory's observation of the social attitude towards women that is pervasive in the heroic Irish sagas and the world around her in which women are relegated to "serfdom" or left to do the "donkey-work" (1961: 145). She argues that *Grania* is:

a play in which a woman is ousted from an emotional relationship between two men [...] a loyalty to the warrior band, [...] Almhuin, the charmed circle of hunters and warriors; its modern equivalent was the masculine society of clubs and bars, of wit and talk and stimulus, from which a woman, through her talent as much a part of the movement as any of them, would be forever excluded. As an artist, needing to share, deserving to share, how could she [Gregory] fail to experience the frustrations that have been sublimated in the character of Grania? (145)

Adrian Frazier asserts, however, that the overt aspiration to masculinity in the society had its own underside – its anxiety about queerness. Tracing the sexual anxiety of the male Revivalists and their self-consciousness about the effeminate character of the new Irish literature, Frazier defines the relationship between W. B. Yeats, George Moore, and Edward Martyn as a homosocial/homoerotic one in which their artistic rivalry and jealousy inspired them to imitate each other’s work. This emulation was inspired by the masculine styles of each writer’s work,²¹ which Frazier describes as “an erotics of literary influence” – “love of the man led to imitation of the work; the imitation revealed to the beloved one’s love” (1997: 22). Frazier maintains that, while this erotic relationship in art between men is “one of the dynamics behind male canon formation during the late nineteenth century,” these men of Revivalist literature “used women to procreate images of their styles” (22).

The characterisation of empowered Grania, then, is Gregory’s affirmation of the rise of the ‘new woman’ who refuses to be caught in the trap of women as procreator of male images and male literature, the assertion of the need of women’s entrance into the world although it may involve a great deal of loss, as figured in Grania’s loss of romantic love. As Leeney notes, “the passionate relationship between Finn and Diarmuid frees Grania painfully from the burden of romantic love [...] But freedom also brings a more pragmatic recognition of desire in terms of power, in terms of participation in the social and the cultural” (2010: 56). In the play, Grania’s entrance into the public world is delivered most remarkably through the theatrical performance of identity. As a response to Finn’s warning about the men’s mockery of her new wedding with him, Grania snatches the crown from his hands and puts it on her head. The repeated off-stage sounds of mocking laughter of the men emphasise the humiliating atmosphere that is oppressively thrust upon Grania. However, like an actor who has to “display the body to the gaze of others” as “a site for speculation and imagination” (Senelick 2000: 8), Gregory’s Grania prepares behind the

²¹ According to Frazier, Martyn’s homosexual tendency, for example, was often noticed and expressed in a derogatory tone by both Yeats and Moore. It is also noteworthy that younger Yeats was attracted by Moore’s masculinity although he often expressed his dislike of Moore’s unsophisticated style.

curtain of the public stage to present her body to audiences and affirms her agency on stage as a self-crowned queen silencing the jeering of her audiences.

Through the theatrical performance of self-crowning, Grania transforms the abjected female desire and the conditions of exclusion into a struggle against external gender antagonisms. In so doing, Grania challenges the social performance of identity, the melancholic impasse of subjecthood that Butler defines as ‘performative’ identity characterised by the compulsory and repeated performance of social scripts. Grania’s performance, moreover, contests the view of her reintegration into the warrior band as a mere acceptance of social mores or an unquestioning integration into the power system. Rather, Grania accomplishes her break out of the mythic containment through the performance providing a possibility of interrogating the cultural logic of national sovereignty from within: a possibility of appreciating Gregory’s “concern for the place of women in the idea of a nation, its culture and systems of representation, and for the relationship between power and gender” (Leeney 2010: 25-6). If *Grania* is a retelling of the author’s personal story, Gregory’s performance as a writer is quite different here from her former ‘drag act’ in *Cuchulain*. Instead of ‘speaking as a strong man’ as in *Cuchulain* (to follow Meaney’s terms), the author of *Grania* speaks as woman about the dejection that women experience in relation to homosocial bonding and the courage to step out of the psychological/material trap of masculine discourses of national culture and society.

Conclusion

It is worthwhile to note again that, while Gregory attempted to assert her authorship and authority within the Revival, her status in the history of Irish drama has marked the margin of it: as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the melancholic other – “the formative but denied ghost” (Cheng 2001:12) – of the canon. However, the plays of Gregory, “a key creator of images of Irish women caught in the trap of nationalist,

masculinist ideology” following Leeney’s appreciation of the playwright (2010: 43), are politically charged, then and now, and for that reason deserve to be regularly revived on the national stage of Ireland. Nevertheless, her plays have long ceased to be produced and are still overshadowed by the Gregory mythology that emphasised her role as nurturer of the Revival.

Her position in the canon leads to melancholia of the culturally and socially marginalised artists, and this chapter examined how Gregory negotiated her class and gender limit in an attempt to rewrite the melancholic conditions of marginalised subjects/artists. Throughout the chapter, I argued that Gregory, instead of seeking a radically reactionary trope that strictly opposes dominant social terms, created an aesthetic site where the intense examination of her society and nation was transformed into a struggle against the established notions of Irishness as well as the woman-nation ideal. Through the playwriting, she could invite audiences to the act of interrogating what it means to be Irish; she could also accomplish her most distinctive voices as nationalist and feminist through the integration of political loss and failure into the imaginative realm of art and performance. For Gregory, drama was an aesthetic means in which to convert her personal limit into the cultural artistry that engages with marginality in relation to the world and offers a vision of overcoming melancholic loss on communal and national levels.

The artistic engagement with loss and marginality is characteristic of the drama of the playwrights that I examine in the following chapters. The female playwrights of the next generation also bring to light a complex dimension of womanhood combining their destructive energy with the psychological ambiguity characterised as a guilt-ridden acceptance of responsibility for the results of their ‘inadequate’ behaviours and resistance to the coercive social mores of feminine chastity. Notably, the playwrights in the following chapters illuminate the trope of feminine marginality in the set of the domestic, reinforcing the role of home discourses in postcolonial Ireland as well as the failure of national home to accommodate women and other marginalised subjects.

Chapter Two brings to light the nation's coercive prescription of womanhood within the domestic against the backdrop of the 1930s Ireland. As in *Grania*, Deevy's plays illuminate the psychological and emotional forces of young female characters that exceed the social terms of domestication, surveillance, and the policing of female desire and sexuality. Without recourse to mythical heroes, however, Deevy's plays establish the issues within a domestic setting of ordinary peasant people. This shift enables a more immediate access to the individual life for an examination of it in relation to the unit of family and community. Moreover, the examination of Deevy's drama will reveal how Gregory's feminist vision, manifest in *Grania*, has become thwarted in the cultural and societal context of the 1930s of Ireland.

Chapter Two: Teresa Deevy (1894 - 1963) Imagination in Exile

Constructing Fantasy and Challenging National Melancholia

This chapter examines the drama of Teresa Deevy (1894-1963), one of the most visible women playwrights of the Abbey in the 1930s. Between 1930 and 1958, Deevy wrote more than twenty plays. Beginning her career as the Abbey's playwright with the production of *The Reapers* in 1930, Deevy subsequently saw five other plays of hers, *In Search of Valour* (1931)²², *Temporal Powers* (1932), *The King of Spain's Daughter* (1935), *Katie Roche* (1936), and *The Wild Goose* (1936), produced on the stage of the Abbey until the theatre's rejection of her 1942 play *Wife to James Whelan*.²³ The conservative managing board of the Abbey in the 1940s continued to reject producing Deevy's plays despite the playwright's hope for a new opportunity to write for the theatre. However, the theatre's rejection did not prevent her from writing plays. She turned to the medium of radio, demonstrating her life-long resilience and passion that defeated her disability.²⁴

²² The title of the play varies. It began life as *A Disciple* when it was staged at the Abbey in 1931. It was published under the title *The Enthusiast* in 1938 and re-published as *In Search of Valour* in 1947. As this essay refers to the 1947 publication, it follows the last version of the title. See Cathy Leeney's *Irish Women Playwrights 1900 – 1939: Gender and Violence on Stage* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

²³ The plays produced on the Abbey stage have been published except for *The Reapers*, the script of which has been lost until now. The most recent publications of Deevy's plays include *Selected Plays of Irish Playwright Teresa Deevy* (2003) edited by Eibhear Walshe and *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed* (2011) in two volumes published by the Mint Theatre Company. As for *The Reapers*, the narrative of the play is only partially construed in reliance on the Abbey production details, some reviews and correspondences. The Teresa Deevy archive in National University of Ireland, Maynooth has digitalised a range of play scripts, production details, and correspondences.

²⁴ Deevy's devotion to radio plays is remarkable considering her disability. Deevy was deaf through her life since the age of nineteen when she got Meniere's disease. She had to quit her university education for the treatment of the disease and started writing plays and stories that came into blossom at her mid-thirties of age. Surviving scripts of Deevy's radio plays include *Polinka* (1946), *Light Falling* (1947), *Dignity* (1947), *Strange Birth* (1947), *Within a Marble City* (1948), *Going beyond Alma's Glory* (1949), most of which were broadcasted on Radio Eireann and/or BBC Northern Ireland Radio. Other typscripts of Deevy's radio plays such as *One Look – and What It Led To*, *Holiday House*, and *In the Cellar of My Friend* do not have creation dates (although they were possibly written in Deevy's later years), and it is unclear whether the plays were produced. Most of these plays have been published in the second

Despite her prominence in the Abbey in her heyday, the position of Deevy in the Irish theatre history marked, in Cathy Leeney's terms, "Ireland's exiled woman playwright," being kept out of the canon of Irish drama throughout the century (2004: 150). It was only in the mid-1990s with the benefit of cultural work informed by feminist awareness of women's place in Ireland's cultural landscape that Deevy's drama began to be rediscovered. The process of recovering Deevy's drama included the revival of *Katie Roche* in 1994 in the Peacock, and the 1995 silver jubilee issue of *Irish University Review* was devoted to Deevy and Irish women playwrights.²⁵ The contribution of the issue to the drama of Deevy established by the scholars such as Leeney, Anthony Roche, Eibhear Walshe, and Christopher Murray, variously illuminates Deevy's dramatic world as an engagement with the possibility for the female agency/autonomy in relation to the national identity and the social contexts of 1930s Ireland. Subsequently published articles and book chapters on Deevy's drama by Shaun Richards, Mary Trotter, Christie Fox, and Lisa Fitzpatrick also draw on the playwright's interest in her contemporary national and social life that she dramatises through the topics of marriage and patriarchal violence imposed on the protagonists. While this chapter is informed by the established scholarly work on Deevy, it is particularly indebted to Leeney's appraisal of Deevy's drama as "thoroughly a drama and a dramaturgy of alienation, of occluded realities, on the margins of the canon of Irish theatrical history, dealing with issues that were effectively sidelined in the social history of the nation too" (2010: 163). For Leeney, a drama of alienation invites us to examine how the already exiled and alienated social subjects make self-expressions through the crossing of boundaries that define their reality of confinement (2004: 150).

Approached from the theoretical terms of melancholia, Leeney's notion of the drama of alienation resonates with the question of how the lost object assimilated and incorporated into the collective identity of nation (or

volume of the Mint Theatre's *Teresa Deevy Reclaimed*. The study of Deevy's later plays is still at an early stage.

²⁵ In this issue, *Wife to James Whelan* was published for the first time. The play, like many other Deevy's plays, had been lost for a long while. Its typescript was found by Martina O'Doherty "amongst old documents" in Deevy's home 'Landscape' in Waterford. Refer to Martina O'Doherty's article, "Teresa Deevy and *Wife to James Whelan*."

the subjects made ghostly by the nation's melancholic incorporation) can emerge from the conditions of repudiation. Drawing on Leeney's concept of drama of alienation in conjunction with melancholia, this chapter explores the ways in which Deevy's plays feature young Irish women in order to illuminate the relationship between their illegitimate origins of birth and their struggles to seize agency in the stifling social conditions of the new Irish state, a condition that derived from the national desire to restore the state, wounded by its colonial history, to health through the 'safeguarding' of women's bodies.²⁶

The chapter focuses on *In Search of Valour* (1931), *The King of Spain's Daughter* (1935), and *Katie Roche* (1936) amongst the six plays that were produced in the Abbey. These plays directly engage with the perilous conditions of the protagonists against the backdrop of a discursive construction of the patriarchal nation state producing material and psychological conditions of exiled female body. The plays illuminate that the nation's attachment to a certain ideal and disavowal of others, based on clear heteronormative regulations, works in tandem with the production of a melancholic inward turn, a narcissistic construction of the national self by projecting its negativity onto the national other and by yearning for the stability which is absent now. Deevy's insight brings to light this psychological dynamics of state-power played out in the familial unit metonymically connected to the nation.

Approaching the topic, the chapter draws a particular attention to Deevy's use of fantasy in the conjunction of the social and the psyche that is often delivered through the protagonists' daydreaming for the idealised version of womanhood. Deevy complicates the conventional notion of fantasy that is understood against the category of the real: namely, fantasy as the violation of what is familiar, rational, legitimate, and possible within the presumably pre-given structure of the world and the perception. In doing

²⁶ Many feminist critics of Irish nationalism criticises the conservative body politic of the early modern Irish nation state which naturalised women's subordination to the conception of organic unity of the nation. For example, Susan Cannon Harris focuses on the conception of national health that was tested and played out on the body of women: the nation's obsession with spiritual and moral purity was closely linked to the domestication of women into a familial space ruled by the family men, which assigned to Irish women "the task of embodying the impossible" (Harris 2002: 229).

so, the playwright demonstrates how the borderline between the real and the phantasmatic becomes thin and how those domains are conflated in various claims for the real.

Judith Butler theorises the relation between those realms by stating that the “production of the real takes place through a restriction of the phantasmatic,” and she maintains that the real is:

a variable construction which is always and only determined in relation to its constitutive outside: fantasy, the unthinkable, the unreal. The positivist version of the real will consign all absence to the unreal, even as it relies on that absence to stabilize its own boundaries. In this sense, the phantasmatic, as precisely such a constitutive exclusion, becomes essential to the construction of the real. (Butler (1990) 2004: 186)

For Butler, fantasy, rather than an indicator of the unreal or a wish-fulfilment of the preexisting subject, is related to the constitutive process of subjectivity formation, in which a certain type of phantasmatic construction passes as ‘the real’ through a repeated posturing and another disavowed as fantasy. As the ‘constitutive outside’ of the real, fantasy refers, rather than a desire for something outside the subject’s reach, to the subject’s embeddedness to the scene of phantasmatic process of identification and exclusion. In a way, Butler’s theorisation of fantasy is in tandem with her logic of melancholic incorporation of the gendered subject, which involves an unconscious process of exclusion (of the undesirable, homosexual desire) and retention of loss as fundamental to the ego – a paradoxical double axis of disavowal and fetishisation of loss. As with melancholia where subject and object become indistinguishable from one another because the lost object has been taken in as the self, in Butler’s melancholic version of fantasy, the phantasmatic, denounced and yet constitutive of the ‘authentic’ self as its founding repudiation, deconstructs the subject’s sense of integrity as well as a notion of the real as opposed to fantasy.

The performative power of fantasy unsettles the notion of the real as an ontological indicator that functions to designate certain events to be real:

To say that something is phantasmatic is not to say that is ‘unreal’ or artificial or dismissable as a consequence. Wielded within political discourse, the real is a syntactically regulated phantasm that has enormous power and efficacy. Fantasy postures *as* the real; it establishes the real

through a repeated and persistent posturing, but it also contains the possibility of suspending and interrogating the ontological claim itself, of reviewing its own productions, as it were, and contesting their claim to the real. (Butler (1990) 2004: 187)

The disintegrated boundary between the real and the phantasmatic, then, invites a question whether what we perceive as ‘reality’ is established on the ground of a dominant epistemological set of the immediate world: whether the reality *effect* derives from a certain representational mechanism that claims for the monopoly of legitimacy as in the state-led national narratives.

Deevy locates the protagonists’ cultivation of fantasy and desire to narrate it in the midst of the patriarchal power of the nation state, revealing its exclusionary practices of controlling and restricting the phantasmatic. Throughout the chapter, I argue that Deevy’s drama illuminates how the nation’s phantasmatic identification with a certain ideal predicates on its anxiety and desire for the achievement of its status as the legitimate real, which in turn fails to accommodate multiple articulations of identity. This exclusionary and restrictive process promotes an idealised national body through a disciplinary device that has been installed in the familial and communal unit. In Deevy’s drama, it is delivered through the communal complicity with the patriarchal power that renders the protagonists’ fantasy and vigour related to illegitimate origin of birth and dangerous to the ‘healthy’ construction of community. Melancholia of community (or nation) in the plays comes from this excessive attachment with and mourning over loss of the ideal, functioning simultaneously to exclude and retain the injured/injurious national others for the sense of integration.

Deevy’s insight into the ‘imagined community’ is revealed in her deft interweaving of the mirroring relationship between the new nation state’s longing for legitimacy and the protagonists’ anxiety about illegitimacy. In the plays, the protagonists variously act out their subjective uncertainty and impasse through phantasmatic identifications with imagined figures as manifest in Ellie’s fantasy of heroism (*In Search of Valour*), Annie’s fantasy of her exotic origin of birth (*The King of Spain’s Daughter*), and Katie’s identification with a spiritual Saint or a woman from an aristocratic background (*Katie Roche*). On the one hand, the

protagonists' fantasies illuminate the social quality of fantasy as deriving from their melancholic incorporation of social norms that prescribe the idealised version of femininity. On the other hand, the fantasies manifest their deviation, a wilful turn away from 'the real' or prescribed norms that denigrate their stories of self: that is, through fantasies the protagonists find their potential for agency, sense of integrity, and ability to constitute their own fiction.

Deevy's aesthetic aspiration to fantasy is deeply bound to her desire to explore Irish life. Leeney points out that "[a]s a playwright Deevy's impulses were national and contemporary" and her plays have been read "as realist enactments of the narrow confinement of socially insignificant women's lives" (Leeney 2010: 169-70). However, the realist appearance of the plays disguises Deevy's deft staging of psychological images and narratives that drive the structure of the plays in parallel with the interrogation of social terms of control of the female subject (169-170). Deevy's settings demonstrate Leeney's point. In *The King of Spain's Daughter*, for example, the minimalist setting on the road with all the traffic closed off reflects the internal life of the characters, reinforcing the dynamism between the claustrophobic atmosphere, the escape through fantasy, collusion with and submission to the power. In *Katie Roche*, the realist setting of a cottage home becomes uncanny by the inhabitants' exaggerated acts or excessive silence, which are often abrupt or repetitive. This theatrical expression of control in relation to the constraints of space as well as naturalised/internalised social order makes visible the inadequacy of the distinction between the normal and the abnormal, as well as the real and the fantastic, challenging the drawn boundaries on womanhood.

Creating Images of the Hidden History of Post-Independence Ireland

It may be arguable to render Deevy as a direct successor of Gregory due to the difference between them in class, religious backgrounds, and positions in the Abbey. Gregory, coming from the background of Protestant

Ascendancy landlords, was at the centre of theatre making while constantly negotiating her positions as practical manager of the theatre, woman playwright, land-owning Protestant nationalist. Whereas, born in Waterford with a middle-class Catholic background, Deevy was, according to Leeney, “on the fringes of Dublin cultural circles” (Leeney 2010: 162). Although Deevy was recognised as the theatre’s young and promising dramatist during her short-lived heyday at the Abbey,²⁷ she often struggled on the margin of the national theatre group while dealing with the conservative operation of the cultural institution.

Despite the differences between the playwrights in terms of privilege for access to the power of these cultural institutions, they share interests in the melancholic function of imagination and the place of women within Irish communities. Moreover, Deevy’s plays, especially *In Search of Valour* (1931), *The King of Spain’s Daughter* (1935), and *Katie Roche* (1936), bring to a focal point the living conditions of young women against the backdrop of the fledging nation state of Ireland. That is, these plays offer a window for examining how Gregory’s concerns regarding women’s position in the nation’s public life have been resolved. Poignantly, if Gregory’s plays deliver to audiences in satirical tones the dynamics between the supposedly excessive imagination of the Irish people and the colonial power of control, Deevy’s portrayal of Irish community in the 1930s lacks such an imaginary flow of Irish people. The community of the Free State of Ireland portrayed in Deevy’s plays has rather integrated the state desire for the control of imagination into a patriarchal order of society. Thus, while the imagination in Gregory’s drama gains its force through Irish people’s talk regenerating further imaginative talks, in Deevy’s drama the excess, most forcibly delivered through the protagonists’ fantasising of their origin and life, is immediately pathologised and punished by the patriarchal authority.

²⁷ Deevy’s *Temporal Powers* (1931) won the first prize in the play competition promoted by the Abbey, and *Katie Roche* (1936) was included in Messrs Gollancz’s Famous Plays series. This latter occasion is much celebrated in an article of the Irish Times as an exceptional case because her play was not “famous” in metropolitan cities such as New York or London. According to the newspaper column, *Katie Roche* was the first Irish play that was included in the series, and this inclusion of her play “demonstrate[d] that fame may occasionally be achieved in other places [than in New York and London], and that Dublin [was] one of those places” (“Irishman’s Diary,” *Irish Times*, June 25, 1936). Subsequently, the Abbey’s 1937 US tour included *Katie Roche* in its repertoire.

Leeney points out that Deevy's work "creates images of the hidden history of those whose access to citizenship was barred by illegitimacy, poverty, gender, or other disadvantage" (Leeney 2010: 171). For Leeney, this is a "decisive aspect in analysing her work for twenty-first century audiences" who are "ghosted by normalized injustices committed on vulnerable individuals by the institutions of the Catholic Church and the State" (171), which is well captured in contemporary women's drama, especially in Marina Carr's Midlands plays.

Ireland in the 1930s was, according to Susan Cannon Harris, "characterised by a strange combination of turbulence and stagnation" (Harris 2002: 227). Politically, Ireland perched on consuming debates between the two opposed political camps, the Fianna Fáil and Cumann na nGaedheal (later Fine Gael), and it was also surrounded by the fascist atmosphere of European wars. Economically, the policy of national capitalism aspiring to economic self-sufficiency was facing failure, as Ireland "lacked a large internal market and industrial entrepreneurs [and] inherited bureaucratic and centralised state apparatus from the British" (Kearney 1997: 8). Culturally, it was also a time when the gendering of nationalist discourses was being consolidated through various legislations in an attempt to achieve the new nation state's stability through the preservation of the family and the upholding of Catholic values.

The State's anxious conservatism effected an increasing erosion of women's political and civil rights: the 1927 Juries Bill (exclusion of women from the jury duty), the 1932 public service marriage bar (exclusion of married women from employment in the field of civil service sectors and national schools), the 1934 Criminal Law Bill (section 17, which prevented the sale and importation of birth control devices in the State), the 1935 Conditions of Employment Bill (section 16, which allowed the government to limit the number of women in given sectors in order to protect the work of men), and then the Constitution of 1937 which defined the family as "the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law" (article 41.1), confining women's role as wife and mother within their home and the State (Ingman 2007: 10-11).

This promotion of family as central in the life of the Irish nation state meant, on the one hand, that the family became a trope in which national hierarchy was sanctioned and naturalised as a unity of domestic interests. On the other hand, the iconographic position of family tended to dehistoricise and depoliticise the unit, and as it was excluded from the discourses of power, the subordination of women and children to the law of family and nation was viewed as natural. Regarding this series of changes effected by the gendered legislations, Margaret Ward and Maryann G. Valiulis note that:

the political gains that women made before and during the Rising were eroded. As the men in government forged a new nation, it became important for them to reassert their masculinity through the imposition of traditional views of Irish femininity. Women who once fought for the franchise, women's equality, and Ireland's freedom were now asked to return home and take their "proper" place as wives and mothers. (Qtd. in Fox 2000: 195)

Lisa Fitzpatrick's article "Taking on Their Own Road" (2007) addresses this political and cultural change in relation to women's position, while examining early twentieth Irish women's plays, especially Augusta Gregory's *Grania* (1910), Margaret O'Leary's *The Woman* (1929), and Deevy's *The King of Spain's Daughter* (1935). Fitzpatrick argues that these plays are reflecting women's status of each time period. She maintains that the female characters' attempts to explore their sexual identities and develop careers (or other social/institutional opportunities) are represented "in more and more oppressive terms as the century unravels and the Irish state establishes its increasingly male-dominated power structures" (2007: 84).

Most compelling is the contrast between the ends of Gregory's *Grania* and Deevy's *Katie Roche* and *The King of Spain's Daughter*. Both playwrights examine how women's submission to power happens. In Gregory's play, Grania endures a sense of humiliation and loss caused by the betrayal of her husband Diarmaid and her choice of remaining with Finn within the male-dominated power structure, but her pride overpowers the derision of Finn and his men. In Deevy's plays, however, the protagonists' self-assertion is stifled by the patriarchal will: Annie chooses a loveless marriage under her father's threat, and Katie gives in to her

husband's plan to discipline and domesticate her desire and behaviours. Significantly, in Deevy's drama the protagonists' loss and their subjugation to power are compensated for by their further fantasy-making about their future life. Through the protagonists' predicament, Deevy exposes the milieu of the time when the life force was crushed by the State's demand for conformity to the national norms. Thus, in a way, the seeming compromise of Annie and Katie with the patriarchal power is the playwright's attack upon a conservative machinery of control, often represented through the sterile or petrified masculinity. This contrast between *Grania* and Deevy's plays in exploring women's search for agency is indeed noteworthy as the 1910 *Grania*'s hope or vision for equal citizenship is taken over by Katie and Annie's disillusioned 'vision', their melancholic awareness that difference or freedom can be nurtured only in fantasy.

Teresa Deevy's Public Voice

Ireland's national theatre was in no position to fend off the fundamentalist ideas of national politics and Catholicism. Although the Censorship of Publications Act in 1929 did not cover stage performances, the theatre's efforts for innovation were often hampered by the prevailing phobia of degeneracy. For example, the theatre's 1935 attempt to stage O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* that they previously rejected producing in 1928, was "accused of 'indecent' and blasphemy'" (Morash 2002: 189). Subsequently, the Catholic authorities' call for a law to ban all of O'Casey's plays made the Abbey's only Catholic director Brinsley MacNamara resign in protest, and the play survived only a brief run. As Christopher Morash writes, "[i]t was clearly not the time for a fight" (190).

Women's involvement in the theatre making was also diminishing. Christopher Murray notes that "to be a woman", in the early years of the twentieth century when the theatre was part of the nation's cultural movement, "was no obstacle to success in the Irish theatre" (1995: 1). It was partially because women who were actively involved in national and suffrage movements used theatre as a means to highlight their cause, the most well known example of which is 'Daughters of Erin', a movement

founded by Maud Gonne to produce plays and offer young women a chance of participating in national causes. As to the gradual decline in the number of women playwrights in the 1930s, Murray states, “it is not easy to say why there are so few women playwrights after Lady Gregory” (1995: 3).²⁸ But Murray does offer an example of Maura Laverty, the last female playwright of the Gate Theatre in the 1950s, in which he remarks how she was exploited in male-dominated theatre practices: though the success of her plays virtually saved the theatre from the financial difficulty in the 1950s, she “was always the last to be compensated for plays which paid their bills and usually had to press and beg for royalties due” (1995:3). This reluctance to recognise women’s work, of course, gains its justification from the forcible national ideology combined with the prevailing Catholic morality, which positioned women within home and prevented women from participating in the public realm.

In this cultural climate Deevy’s contribution to the Abbey was notable. As one of the prominent Abbey playwrights, Deevy was forging a distinctive public and theatrical voice, which reflected her critical observation of the contemporary national society. She also attempted to participate in the shaping of public opinions. In a public letter to the *Irish Times*, for example, Deevy wrote against the censorship board’s decision to ban Sean O’Faolain’s 1936 novel, *Bird Alone*, charged with “general indecency.” Questioning whether the real objection to the book did not come from the intolerance of the authorities to the author’s treatment of religious faith, Deevy demands:

Have we come to such a pass in Ireland that men in a position so responsible as that of censors will publicly declare a man’s work indecent because they disapprove of the philosophy of the characters he has created? [...] If, in Ireland we are not to be allowed to read of those whose faith differs from ours – if we are not to be allowed to read any criticism of priests or religious orders – let that be said. But let us have an end to insults – lowering to those who offer them and to the nation that tolerates such practices. (“The Censorship”)

²⁸ There were Mary Manning and Christine Countess Longford at the Gate Theatre in the 1930s, and then Maura Laverty in the 1950s, who was the last woman playwright who wrote for the Gate for the next 30 years (Murray 1995: 3).

While Deevy's personality is mostly remembered in words such as "gentle soul, a kindly and timid person of genius" ("Obituary," *Irish Times*, 21 January 1963: 7), the above letter delivers her strong public voice, criticising the narrow vision of the nationally sanctioned Catholic mores that disavows any non-conformity. Considering that her plays *The King of Spain's Daughter* and *Katie Roche* were written around the time she wrote this letter, these plays are an artistic version of the playwright's social critique based on her sensibility in the matter of how the presentation of difference is not tolerated at the social level.

Despite Deevy's active engagement with the theatre, however, her relationship with it was not a very comfortable one. In a 1935 letter to her friend Florence Hackett, Deevy wrote: "Something will have to be done about the theatre in Ireland. It's appalling" (Morash, "Teresa Deevy: an Introduction"). It is not clear what exactly was the source of her discomfort, but her experiences with the theatre since 1939 seem to indicate that part of her discomfort is related to the conservative and arbitrary administration of the theatre. This was perhaps not very different from the unjust treatment of Maura Laverty in the Gate theatre. For example, in May 1939 Deevy wrote a publicly open letter to the editor of the *Irish Times* in order to make a correction to their previous report on the Abbey's rejection of her new play, *Holiday House*. In that short letter, she states that it was not a rejection of the play as such that mattered, but a cancellation of the previous year's contract for the production of the play. Apparently, none of the reasons for the cancellation were sufficient for Deevy, as she complains that all her enquiries were met "with evasive replies" ("The White Steed," *Irish Times*, 8 May 1939: 8).

Deevy's troubled connection with the Abbey culminated in the theatre's rejection of her play *Wife to James Whelan* in 1942, which effectively ended her career as the Abbey playwright. The official reason for the rejection was that it "would not be financially viable as its characters resembled those in a previous play and [Ernest Blythe, the managing director of the Abbey] also clearly stated that he had no further use for any of her work" (O'Doherty 1995: 27). While the blame for the rejection is directed at the "shamelessly conservative and commercial managing

director,” Martina O’Doherty asserts that the play is the “most significant [one] in Deevy’s repertoire,” marking the playwright’s “originality, sensitivity, and deep understanding of human nature” (27-8).

The theatre’s rejection of her plays was clear evidence, as Leeney also notes, of “the enduring power of the Abbey as a cultural institution to act as unrivalled arbiter of playwrights’ careers” (Leeney 2010: 164). However, such a treatment of her plays did not stop Deevy from writing stage plays. Although her aspiration to write for the Abbey was greater, partially due to their capacity to produce plays with fine actors, Deevy began to write plays for the radio (BBC Northern Ireland and Radio Éireann) and television (BBC Northern Ireland), which also brought her great success. This change of her writing career was an adventurous journey for Deevy, choosing the medium (radio) to which she could not gain a direct access because she had been completely deaf since 1917. Regarding this adventurousness and resilience of the playwright, Morash writes, “her life began to echo the situation of a character like Katie Roche, insofar as a vivid life of the imagination became a necessity in a world of material constraints” (Morash, “Teresa Deevy: an Introduction”).

***In Search of Valour* (1931) and *The King of the Spain’s Daughter* (1935): Idealised Femininity and Repudiated Identification**

Deevy’s *In Search of Valour* (1931) and *The King of Spain’s Daughter* (1935) explore the female protagonists’ desire for a heroic life in the conditions where material constraints do not allow their search for the heroic outside their designated space. As one-act plays, these works establish in succinct terms the predicaments and traps that female characters face in an enclosed society. *In Search of Valour* features a young protagonist Ellie who, faced with the lack of role models for women’s heroic life, attempts to gain access to such a life through ‘adventures’ of others apparently heroised in the mass media: for example, Ellie passionately follows and admires the marital adventures of Mr. Glitterton, a rich celebrity, and the stories of savagery of a local renegade, Jack the Scalp. Annie, the protagonist of *The King of Spain’s Daughter*, also seeks

an imaginative liberation in the image of a bride. However, in the process of her identification with the bride (or a feminine beauty), Annie is caught in a trap because of her troubled relationship with her own gender, experiencing an increasing difficulty to articulate her wishes and desires projected onto the bride. In both occasions, Deevy represents the protagonists' loss and impossibility of achieving their own heroism in a milieu wherein idealised social values demand of the protagonists a certain type of identification. At the same time, the playwright problematises such identifications as profoundly gendered, which in turn makes the protagonists fail to construct and perform their own version of identity.

Leeney suggests that the protagonists' predicaments derive from the gendered "identification trap" (2010: 173). Leeney means by the terms that women's point of view is often baffled in a patriarchal context because the male gaze, often internalised by women themselves through the historically repeated habit and training, functions as the universal in every aspect of cultural life. Lost in the process of identification in a culture where "women's experience is defined as applying to a subset of humanity" (7), both men and women infected by the identification trap find it "puzzling, partial, or entirely inaccessible" (7) to appreciate, or even to acknowledge, the values of women's experiences represented/performed whether onstage or offstage. Leeney's notion of identification trap is deeply connected to melancholic gender identifications that Judith Butler theorises in her seminal works. In *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997), for example, Butler conceptualises gender identifications as a melancholic activity, a repetitive "acting out of unresolved grief," which is compelled by "a set of culturally prevalent prohibitions [...] the internalisation of the ungrieved and ungrievable homosexual cathexis" (1997: 167, 139). According to Butler, the heterosexual melancholy explains a masculine gender as "formed from the refusal to grieve the masculine as possibility of love; a feminine gender is formed (taken on, assumed) through the incorporative fantasy by which the feminine is excluded as a possible object of love, an exclusion never grieved, but 'preserved' through heightened feminine identification" (1997: 146). The identification trap women experience, then, derives from the repudiation of identifications that stray from the constitutive identification,

that is, the identification with ideals that are not inhabited by anyone, forcing the constitutive loss of certain attachments.

Here, I examine how Deevy's plays explore this realm of repudiated identification from women's perspectives. The characters, locked in the gendered epistemological frame of society, repudiate the feminine at various levels: it is unruly, unspeakable, unrepresentable, untrustworthy, insane, dreadful, and fearful. The protagonists also have difficulties in articulating their own identifications with the heroic as they are already outside the closed domain of social norms: they are both illegitimate children with no mothers speaking to the condition of repudiated identification in the melancholic logic of heterosexual femininity. In that condition, what is available for the protagonists is to long for the masculine valour (Ellie in *In Search of Valour*) or to subjugate the feminine vitality to the social dread of it (Annie in *The King of Spain's Daughter*). As discussed earlier, Deevy's exploration of female fantasies of identity in relation to the material conditions has to do with the social context of the 1930s Ireland. Around the time when these plays were premiered in the Abbey, the nation state was increasingly consolidating conservative social mores through a series of legislations in which the subordination of women's interests and values became natural. The question of national health and unity was measured in terms of female sexuality, which functioned to domesticate women's various energies and to deprive them of social and institutional opportunities in the public realm. Deevy's plays present these social conditions and interrogate how the collective identification with masculine and patriarchal values is endemic to the nation state's melancholically passionate attachment with the 'national imaginary,' heightened at the cost of femininity. "If melancholia appears at first to be a form of containment, a way of internalising an attachment that is barred from the world," as Butler argues, "it also establishes the psychic conditions for regarding 'the world' itself as contingently organised through certain kinds of foreclosures" (Butler 1997: 143).

Both *In Search of Valour* and *The King of Spain's Daughter*, the protagonists are deprived of proper social and cultural status as a domestic servant or economic dependent. Yet, they struggle to attain their dreams of

escaping the wasteland they have inhabited. Deevy highlights the culturally claustrophobic environment by setting the protagonists' vitality against the grotesquely enclosed space: a parlour of Mrs Maher's run-down house in the former play, currently used as an employment agency for female domestics, wherein a sixteen-year-old girl, Ellie, works as a servant; a road, the desolate space, blocked by "road-barriers with notices, 'No Traffic' and 'Road Closed'" in the latter play (*KSD* 18).²⁹ The minimalist setting without changes in these one-act plays helps to draw a more focused attention to the mood, images, internal struggles, and dreams accumulated by the characters' dialogues and actions. Bert O. States argues that "the stage space and the stage event are one and the same thing; they are reciprocal entities, [...] the scene 'permeates' the speech and the speech illuminates the setting" (States 1987: 50). In Deevy's plays, the setting onstage is not just a background 'scenery' of the play. Instead, it is a constructed world that reflects the surrounding milieu of the characters, the stifling conditions of imprisoned life, both driving and containing the dialogues between the characters. Like in Gregory's *Spreading the News*, the world of which is characterised by the colonial panoptical surveillance, Deevy's dramatic world onstage framed in the patriarchal order engenders the actions of fantasising, "confer[ring] on the living space [onstage] the status of a prison" (States 1987: 645).

In *In Search of Valour*, Mrs Maher's parlour is described as "*an ill-kept room in a tumble-down house. The walls are slanting and uneven, and in places the paper is coming off the walls*" (*ISV* 5). The grim image of the setting conveys a grotesque mood of the underworld when loud noises are heard from outside "as of zinc striking on zinc" (*ISV* 5). This alarming sound, evoking a sense of imprisonment in the mood of Gothic literature, is soon identified to be a noise coming from a heavy metal gate that slams shut. Anne Williams notes that "what is sometimes called Gothic 'ambience' might be understood as a foregrounding of the 'female' spaces within the Symbolic and thus as an expansion of that system to accommodate the Semiotic." (Williams 1995: 71). Drawing on the notion of

²⁹ Subsequently the plays will be cited in text as *KSD* for *The King of Spain's Daughter* and *ISV* for *In Search of Valour*.

the Semiotic which Julia Kristeva links with “the repressed, maternal, feminine “other” of signification” (57), Williams argues that such a Gothic setting can disrupt the naturalised order of the patriarchal Symbolic. The underworld-like images of Mrs Maher’s parlour, as Williams would argue, defamiliarises any comfortable notion of the domestic promoted by Éamon de Valera’s vision of “self-sufficient, rural” Ireland. (Brown 2004: 131). Ellie clearly sees grotesqueness hidden behind such a naturalised order:

ELLIE: Often I looks at the ones that come here: women with life in them, and all they ask to be took till they’re too old to be took at all. Then to draw the old age, and sit on the bench. (*ISV* 6).

A sense of grotesqueness derives from the contingency of the women’s life with death, with their vitality confined and suppressed until it finally withers away. This superimposition of women’s bodily conditions and labour directly challenges the nation-state’s ideal equation of women with nation’s spirituality, materialised in de Valera’s 1937 Constitution which deceptively promised women’s freedom from labour for economic necessity by confining women’s status in the maternal role.³⁰ Therefore, Mrs Maher’s parlour signifies, on the one hand, the perilous space into which women were designated by the nation state as the unemployed mother and wife. On the other hand, the author’s theatrical treatment of the place as dingy and grim highlights women’s estrangement and hopelessness, in which materialistic preoccupation precedes the religious faith.

ELLIE: Spirit I likes more than prayer!

MRS. MAHLER: Spirit! That’s a queer word to be saying to your mistress. What need any Christian ask but to say their prayers, and make a bit of money in their life. (*ISV* 6)

Mrs Maher’s disregard of the spiritual life and promotion of materialism seem to mark the author’s wry joke about the disparity between the national ideal and reality: the mother figure who is symbolically regarded to represent the nation’s spirit is poverty-stricken and the Church’s emphasis on spirituality is replaced with her religious pretence or gesture.

³⁰ Melisa Sihra remarks the enduring effect of the constitutional status of women in Ireland: “the words of woman and mother are, to this day, used interchangeably” (Sihra 2007: 211).

In contrast with Gregory's Cloon where townspeople's communications, although mismatching, are fluid and create uncontrollable energies, Deevy's stage embodies the foreclosure of such creative flows of different energies by patriarchal figures. The desolate space closed off to the other part of the world in Deevy's plays is a symbolic expression of the nation-state's failing policies of conservative protectionism. The stage space of *The King of Spain's Daughter* is crowded by two male labourers – Peter Kinsella, Annie's father and Jim Harris, Annie's potential fiancé – and the figure of 'phallic mother' Mrs Marks. The menacing and hostile mood of the stage setting becomes further illuminated by the conversations of the characters onstage inveigling against Annie's 'unruly' behaviour. Before Annie enters the stage, the audience is informed that she is out at a wedding, enjoys flirting with Roddy Mann, and neglects her duty as daughter by forgetting the father's dinner. Increasingly, their conversations become impossible to separate from the stage imagery, infecting the stage world with the air of threat and violence. These visual and aural events carrying the air of suppressed fury and menace, then, explode at the moment of Annie's entry on the stage when her father hits out at her with the dinner tin.

The barren road barricaded by the 'walls' of protection, thus, functions as a site in which the allegedly unregulated female body is exposed to ruthless violence of the Father's order. A violent aspect of the national ideal of protectionism is indeed highlighted when the matter of the nation's purity is projected onto the female body. As Maria Luddy explores, the need to regulate the female body was used as "a rationale for moral regulation" (2007: 89) of the nation in post-independence Ireland. While promoting national morality, thus, the nationalist rhetoric regarded unmarried mothers and illegitimate children as a threat to national health. And it is not surprising that the rhetoric of protection and regulation entailed discussions on prostitution and venereal disease. Luddy notes that the worst offender in relation to sexual transgression of female subjects was considered to be "the 'amateur', identified as a young woman who engaged in sexual activity without looking for monetary gain" (85). Luddy maintains that "the focus on the 'amateur' allied a young woman's sexuality with that of the stigmatised prostitute" and turned her into a potential bearer of

venereal disease and a threat to national health and morals (85). In this sense, the nationalist narratives equate control over the nation with paternal control over the female body.

In Deevy's plays, such a precarious position of female subjects within nationalist narratives, oscillating between a national icon and a potential threat to the nation at once, is represented in the absence of mothers, which reinforces the sense of illegitimacy of the young female protagonists. And the voiceless mother is replaced by the surrogate mother figures such as Mrs Maher and Mrs Marks who have internalised the ethos of patriarchal order. Thus, although Mrs Marks is aware of the conflicts imposed on women by marital life (she says to Annie: "Did you think you needn't suffer like the rest of the world?"), her ultimate perspective on woman's life is demonstrated in her advice given to Annie: "Be a good wife to him [Jim] now. Don't give him the bad time you gave your poor father" (*KSD* 35, 34). Deevy's plays then portray the world where the mother, who can speak of and for female experiences, is absent or silenced.

The material and ideological constraints of the external world, embodied in the established walls of 'protection,' are the source of female fantasies for the 'heroic', something that compensates for their stifling conditions. At one level, the young female protagonists' fantasies of heroic life is to emphasise the impossibility of escaping cultural systems of control (if at all, the possibility is open only in fantasy). On the other hand, their fantasies function as theatrical interventions in the naturalised order of the Symbolic. In both plays, the protagonists paradoxically find a potential to seize agency through narrating their fantasies, which in turn profoundly upsets husband/father figures. This work of fantasies in Deevy's drama also functions to mirror the colonial condition of Cloon in Gregory's play where the interconnection between colonised people's emptied language and their force of imagination unsettles the rigid grammar of the coloniser's language and behaviour. At the same time, the mirroring effect enables an interpretation of society in Devvy's time – how the Free State devoured the diverse and revolutionary energies repeating the colonial domination.

In *In Search of Valour*, Ellie, culturally and socially deprived of possible access to heroic achievements on her own, projects her desire onto

the figures like the Glitterons whose stories of divorce cover the newspapers. For Ellie, the couple embodies glamorous vitality. When the Glitterons arrive in Mrs. Maher's parlour, however, Ellie's illusion is shattered as she realises the trivial and unworthy aspects of their life and personalities. Then, she becomes enthusiastic again when the fugitive murderer Jack the Scalp arrives in the parlour. Overly excited with Jack's reputation of savagery – sign of a masculine hero for Ellie, she attempts to seduce him, at which point Ellie's fantasy is compounded with the expression of her desire. Deevy's stage direction about Ellie's desire is direct and open: Ellie moves close to Jack the Scalp "*feasting her eyes on him*" (ISV 15), which Ellie finally speaks out – "Wherever you'll be I'll be there: [...] I will share your food, I will share your bed." (ISV 15) However, Ellie is immediately rejected by Jack the Scalp: "Keep back from me!" he says, and at this stage he significantly lowers the gun aimed at Ellie. And he continues. "I'm a *respectable* man. [...] I'm willin' to shoot whoever you'd like but – I was brought up respectable!" (ISV 15). The murderer Jack is terrified of Ellie – more specifically, of her body/desire and the potential violation it signifies in the national imaginary. For Jack the Scalp, Ellie's expression of sexual desire is more sinful and degenerate than his association with murder. With fear of such influence and contamination, Jack the Scalp chooses to surrender to the police, and the play ends with Ellie's expression of anger about this dreadful and unheroic nature of reality.

Notably, this play shared the bill on its premiere production with Yeats's and Gregory's *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, which arguably contributed to naturalising the woman as a national icon and the sacrifice of domestic life for romantic ideal of national heroism. If *Kathleen ni Houlihan* offers a phantasmatic vision of the nation emerging by taking as metaphor the transformation of an old hag into a beautiful young woman, Deevy's 1931 version of "writing back" in the use of the same sub-genre of one-act play contests the very iconic notion of woman by providing the audience with a critique of material conditions of woman, the nation-state's failure to live up to the model of idealism, as well as the limitations of its ideal. One of the reviews of the production grasped this point but was still quite blind to the

implication of staging those plays on the same night. A reviewer of the *Irish Times* writes about those two productions:

Fantasy in the single-act form should be plainly fantastic; there is no need for the vesture of reality to clothe its dancing skeleton . . . disappointing. It got many laughs, which were mainly contrived by good acting, but it is not likely to enhance its author's reputation.

[. . .]

In *Kathleen ni Houlihan* is also romance based upon reality, but Mr. Yeats managed to have romance spring actually and spontaneously from the political reality of his characters and audience. If the appeal of the delightful little play be not as powerful as it once was, the change is due to events beyond the poet's control; it remains one of the most appealing plays in the Abbey repertory. ("A Disciple: New Play at the Abbey Theatre," *Irish Times*, 25 August 1931: 8)

In this review of the plays, we notice that this reviewer expresses his discomfort with Deevy's genre troubling deployment of fantasy: fantasy as grounding in reality. At the same time, while acknowledging the political importance of romantic idealism revealed in *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, the reviewer dismisses the possible critique of the social delivered by Deevy's mode of fantasy: the possibility of the fantastical mode to rewrite the mystique of masculine heroism and the way how the woman's will to valour is thwarted by the existing gendered social norms. The playwright's conscious effort to redefine the female subject's condition and possibility in relation to the social context is demonstrated in a series of name change of the play: it was premiered under the title of *A Disciple* in 1931, published in 1938 as *The Enthusiast*, and finally re-published in 1947 as *In Search of Valour*. The shifts in the focus of the titles from a sardonic emphasis on Ellie's illusion towards her thwarted desire for heroism through the hyperbole of the title make visible the inadequacy and limitation of the social system to accommodate women's search for the heroic.

The King of Spain's Daughter also portrays Annie's predicament. Annie is caught by a sense of entrapment in which she has little choice but either to 'settle down' by marrying Jim – which is "*a knell to her*" (KSD 32) – or to work in the factory. Fearing the unheroic nature of her destiny, Annie dreams of moving to London: "I dunno could I ever get into service in a place in London?" (KSD 32) This immediately causes Jim a great deal of fury: "*(in fury)* If your father heard you were at the crossroad last night

... dancin' on the road, an' restin' in the ditch with your cheek agen mine and your body pressed to me" (*KSD* 32). Jim's fury comes from his anxiety that he is losing his control over Annie. In his mind, Annie's independent nature – "the bold wild thing" – is associated with sexual transgression from which he holds himself exempt. Jim's anxiety parallels with Jack the Scalp's fear of Ellie's open expression of her desire, which is the introjection of the national anxiety about the corruption of morality caused by the woman's sexual transgression. Moreover, the emigration of female subjects to England signifies a "threat to the perpetuation of Irish domesticity" (Richards 2003: vii).

While Annie's daydreaming of escape is the expression of her impasse (little opportunity for her to pursue an independent life), the absurd quality of Annie's daydreaming is manifest in her romantic accounts of a bride at a wedding party:

She looked lovely passin' along, her hand restin' in his, and her body swayin' beside him down the path. . . . everything was white or burnin' red, but she was dressed in pale, pale gold and – (*hands to breast*) – two red flowers were crushed up agen her here. . . . It is myself I seen in her – sailin' out into the sun, and to adventure" (*KSD* 28)

In her fantasy Annie is the King of Spain's daughter 'sailin' out into the sun', and she is transfixed at a sight of the bride. Annie constantly fetishises the bride's body and costume as shown in the diverse versions of her reports on the bride to different people: she says to Roddy Mann that the bride "was like a livin' flame passin' down by us . . . dressed in flamin' red from top to toe" and to Mrs Marks that "she was dressed . . . in shimmerin' green from head to foot" (*KSD* 23, 26). Maria Kurdi asserts that this fantasising results from Annie's longing for freedom. While her movements are controlled by the male value system, for Annie, "the bride incarnates freedom of movement, distinction and the transforming power of love." (Kurdi 2010: 26).

Deevy expresses this discrepancy between Annie's reality and her fantasy world through the contrast between the barren, blocked road and the colourful visual images invoked by her accounts. While this fetishistic fantasising of the bride thus is the expression of Annie's originality and

creativity, a source of her joy, its ironical aspect lies in that her identification with the bride counters her longing for escape from the marriage (a trap of conventional femininity). More significantly, Annie's articulation of such a fantastical imagination is rejected and categorised as inauthentic or perverse.

While fetishism in classical psychoanalysis is connected to fantasy in the ego's melancholic obsession with the compensation for absence, Anne McClintock's cultural reading of it asserts that the fetish emerged from "the abrupt encounter of two radically heterogeneous worlds", as a "quintessential problem-object" onto which "the psychic, economic and historical perturbation thrown up by [the] crisis of value was projected"(1995: 186-7). She maintains that in much Enlightenment thinking the fetish embodied "errors of logic, of analytical reasoning, of aesthetic judgment, of economic progress and of political legitimacy" (187), thereby Enlightenment thinkers could undervalue and negate difference as deviant. Thus, McClintock understands fetishism as an imperialist discourse in which the fetish "was seen as a direct obstacle to progressive market forces and marked these groups [people with other cultures] for direct imperial intervention and conquest" (188). McClintock argues that this imperial discourse, however, "unwittingly revealed their own fetishistic proclivities" as represented, for example, in "the multicoloured, colonial map of the world" which constantly enchanted imperial men (188-9). To follow the concept of fetishism drawn by McClintock, Annie's fetishism can be seen as emerging from the conflicts of different systems of value: Annie's multiple reports on the bride's body and costume are considered as 'errors of logic' instead of expressions of difference.

In the national value system, Annie's accounts represent feminine malady, typicality, inhabiting anachronistic space whose enigmatic nature is unruly and never trustworthy. Thus, the phallic mother, Mrs Marks, advises Jim against Annie: "don't believe one word she'll tell you" (*KSD* 26), and Jim aggressively contorts Annie's reports on the bride and interrogates her: "She was dressed in grey. Tell the truth!" (*KSD* 28) These accounts disempower Annie's difference and reduces her to permanent Other, which in turn reveal the national community's own fetishistic desire to map out the

Other within the logic of the same. Deevy, thus, reveals the perverse desire of national discourse to contain women and their sexuality by means of deploying dramaturgical excess, which is manifest, for instance, in Annie's fetishistic and repeated accounts on the bride. From a different angle, Annie's fetishism dislodges the classical psychoanalytic notion of fetishism in which women are never subjects but objects inhabiting pre-Symbolic, "permanently threatening the male Symbolic with our painted faces and unruly hair." (McClintock 1995: 193).

In *In Search of Valour*, Deevy further explores the theme of adventure and desire for heroism. However, in a very dark but farcical tone, the playwright exhibits the impossibility of Ellie being a hero, with her conditions stuck in a gendered discourse of nationalism, ultimately revealing the failure of masculinity in the discourse. Ellie goes through a confused identification with Martius Coriolanus, a Roman hero of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. Ellie recalls vividly how the performance of Miss Charlotta Burke as Coriolanus in a convent-run school production affected her: "She rose my heart in one hour till I seen the scum we are." (*ISV* 10) As Leeney notes, "seeing Coriolanus played by a woman, she [Ellie] sees herself in the same, real-life role" (Leeney 2010: 175). It is noteworthy that Deevy offers a performative aspect of gender roles, which is elaborated in terms of 'drag' decades later by Judith Butler. According to Butler, gender is 'performative', thereby implying that gender is a series of mimetic, socially constructed 'acts' which operate discursively and are naturalised only through a process of constant repetition. Butler also argues that drag is potentially deconstructive insofar as it 'promote[s] a subversive laughter in the pastiche effects of parodic practices in which the authentic and the real themselves are constituted as effects" (Butler (1990) 1999: 146). From this point of view, drag marks a subversive repetition which reveals that the authentic – the original – is already an 'act.'

As an actor performing drag, Charlotta confuses the boundaries between femininity and masculinity. The Shakespearean hero, Coriolanus is a figure who is also confused in terms of his identity: he is a fierce and absolute hero on the battlefield but feels emasculated in the political arena. Interestingly, Coriolanus imagines himself as an actor impersonating

feminine roles (a eunuch or a virgin) indicative of degradation for the hero: “Like a dull actor now/ I have forgotten my part and I am out,/ Even to a full disgrace” (Coriolanus, V. iii. 40 – 2). In Deevy’s play, however, the identification of the female protagonist with the hero makes the issue rather complicated. For both Ellie and Charlotta, masculinity is the norm and the original, and femininity is always a false impersonation (‘drag’), as Shakespeare’s Coriolanus perceives. Thus, although Ellie appears to admire Charlotta Burke, what she really longs for is to possess masculinity. This is so particularly because within a patriarchal culture the position of ‘speaking subject’ is implicitly and explicitly masculine, and as Adrienne Rich writes, “women – privileged or not – are trained to identify with men” (Qtd. in Leeney 2010: 175).

In this cycle of the identification trap, while women (including audiences) assume the masculine subject position, the femininity the protagonists represent onstage remains repudiated and is possibly reintegrated into the realm of abjected spectres: Ellie is abandoned and for survival Annie is forced to compromise her vitality with the patriarchal structure for survival. However, the plays demonstrate the possibility of performance on both levels of theatrical and social as resistance to the dominant gaze of audiences and to the social perceptions of gendered other, establishing a powerful diagnosis of what becomes lost and rejected in the process of insisting on coherent identifications with arbitrarily drawn ideals of national identity: a dramatic exploration of Butler’s argument that “what cannot be avowed as a constitutive identification for any given subject position runs the risk not only of becoming externalised in a degraded form, but repeatedly repudiated and subject to a policy of disavowal” (Butler 1997: 149).

Katie Roche (1936): Melancholic Negotiations on the Threshold

Katie Roche dramatises a process in which the imaginative vitality of a socially marginalised young girl is disciplined and domesticated by the patriarchal power structures of 1930s Irish society. Drawing on the final scene that is perceived to be a compromise of female agency on both levels

of character and author, this analysis of the play explores how Deevy creates an aesthetic space in which to destabilise the epistemological framework for the understanding of agency.

Katie is not quite twenty yet and has been employed in Stan's sister Amelia's house. Her reputation as an illegitimate child is widespread in the town. The stage direction describes Katie as a girl keeping "*a sort of inward glow, which she continually tries to smother and which breaks out either in delight or desperation according to circumstances*" (40). She easily laughs, flirts with a country boy Michael, longs to dance at a seasonal festival. After she accepts Stan's proposal to marry him, the play discloses Katie's alienation in her marital life and her resistance to it. Towards the end of the play, when Stan decides to take her away to a foreign country – an act of punishment for Katie's unruly behaviour – Katie sobs full of sorrow and "self-pity" (122), mourning for her loss. The next minute, however, Katie undergoes a sudden change in her mood, if not a transformation, and decides to be a brave, great beauty.

AMELIA: Katie, you must be brave.
KATIE: Brave is it? (*bitter*). There's no grandeur in this! Taken away . . . my own fault. (*Covers her face with her hands.*)
AMELIA: If you're brave, you can make it grand. My dear, you must!
KATIE: (*gazes at her for a moment, then*). I think you're right! . . . (*Pause.*) I'm a great beauty . . . after all my talk – crying now . . . (*grows exultant*). I will be brave!
[...]
KATIE: I was looking for something great to do – sure now I have it. (122)

Katie's final 'brave' action is often interpreted as a realisation of the conventional Irish womanhood of the time who accepts the prescribed role of woman as subservient to the patriarchal authority. This ending is regarded as problematic, as it tidies away the complicated dynamics between the individual, subversive energy and the social constraints that Deevy intensely explores throughout the play. For example, the director of the 1994 production of the play, Judy Friel expresses the frustration felt by the actors in the rehearsals of the play: she says, faced with "a decisive

moment in the narrative and naturally, in the rehearsals, there was a sense of disbelief at Katie's predicament here" (Friel 1995: 122). For Friel, the ending is considered to be a "whitewash," in which the playwright's vision is compromised and "unresolved" (123). Relating the perceived limit of the play to the social conditions of the 1930s, Friel maintains "Deevy's experience as a woman in the nineteen thirties told her to survive by submission and do it with grace" (123). The creation of Katie thus, in Friel's interpretation, mirrors not only the social limit but also the playwright's consciousness about "the danger her drama would lead her into indecent or immodest or even blasphemous territory" (1995: 125).

Friel's account is potent: it addresses Katie's final submission to patriarchal authority in relation to the playwright's dilemma of how to integrate and transform the devalourised pain and sufferings of subjugated women into the aesthetic realm that contests the destructive effects of hegemonic social terms of the time. The unsatisfactory plot resolution is then regarded to be an externalisation not only of the character's inability to achieve an autonomous vision of self and confront the threat of the external reality, but also of the playwright's anxiety about repudiating the social mores that increasingly naturalised women's subjugation to the patriarchal power. While this view offers a way of reading the play as an aperture to understand the oppressive social milieu of Ireland in the 1930s, it does not fully account for the playwright's aesthetic task of inventing a space where she experimentally seeks the possibility or impossibility of a mute subject moving beyond the entrenched antagonisms pervasive in social and cultural life.

This analysis of the play offers a reading of Katie's subjection in relation to her act of fantasising or daydreaming through the lens of melancholia. Throughout the play, Katie's fantasy is played out through her identification with a spiritual Saint, a heroic woman of an aristocratic background, a wild lover, or an obedient wife. At crucial moments of crisis or decision making, Katie often escapes into her phantasmatic daydreams, as a result, transforming the naturalist setting of the rural cottage into a psychological space where the protagonist's subjective pain, anxiety, desire, or hope is both expressed and thwarted. However, Deevy does not posture

Katie's fantasy in the frame of the external world versus the individual wherein the fantasiser's abandonment of the suffocating, unimaginative, and settled living in a community for a visionary and unknowable future is often understood as a wish fulfilment and freedom. Instead, Katie's fantasy at the junction of the real and the unreal (or the theatrical) questions how her subjecthood is constituted by the internalisation of the social terms of feminine ideality, which locates her subjecthood in a struggle against both the antagonisms of the external world and the internal conflicts of desire and subordination of that desire.

I also suggest that, by intertwining Katie's fantasy, theatricality, and agency with the restrictive boundary of social order and realism, Deevy integrates the invisible work of melancholia of the mute subject (the internalisation of the social terms,) into the structure of her play. And this is most powerfully articulated in her deployment of fragmentation, ellipsis, silence, and discordant change of mood and tone, which will be further discussed in the latter part of this analysis.

This formal construction of struggles, constantly twisting and suspending plot resolution, externalises the subjective incorporation of the social terms, or the melancholic dilemma of the mute subject who is haunted by the impossibility of achieving the socially prescribed ideals of the feminine. While this frustrates audiences' possible assumptions of the interconnection between women's liberation and redemption, the melancholic dramaturgy deployed by Deevy, I argue, exposes the dilemma of how the mute subject can emerge from the history of exclusion and turns the play itself as a battleground. In other words, the play manifests that the melancholic fantasy, defined as the incorporation of social terms and then possession of it in her own fantasy, ironically helps her to emerge as a subject. This approach to Katie's fantasy then shifts an interpretive paradigm for her play from that of subjugation and liberation towards that of tensions between opposing forces of the unworkable melancholia (impermeable sufferings of the mute subject) and the possibility of signifying such unspeakable, unnamable conditions of melancholic survival through the structure of play.

In a traditional psychoanalytic approach, melancholia is produced by the ego's failure in mourning loss, and through the incorporation of the lost object within the ego the melancholic subject sustains a fictional possession of the object. Anne Cheng reconceptualises the melancholic incorporation of the other in terms of the cultural dynamics of exclusion and retention of the lost object. She notes that the consequence of the psychical drama of melancholic incorporation is "the multiple layers of denial and exclusion" (Cheng 2001: 9): that is, the melancholic denial of loss in order to sustain the fiction of possession and the repression of the return of the lost object in order to maintain the sense of self. Cheng maintains that:

the melancholic ego is a haunted ego, at once made ghostly and embodied in its ghostliness, but the 'object' is also ghostly – not only because its image has been introjected or incorporated within the melancholic psyche but also because Freud is finally not that interested in what happens to the object or its potential for subjectivity. (Cheng 2001:10).

Although Cheng's primary interest is in melancholia of dominant white identity in America producing the racialised ghostly other, her insight into the system of melancholic retention offers a powerful tool to examine Deevy's drama as an interrogation of the alienating force of the "mystique of Irishness" (Sullivan 2008: 262), excluding and containing social differences for a form of idealised and glorified national identity. In the play, the nation's attachment to a certain ideal and disavowal of others, based on heteronormative regulations, works in tandem with the production of a melancholic inward turn of the national self by projecting its negativity onto the nation's illegitimate other and by containing the illegitimate elements for a crystalised ideality of the nation. Thus, the nation's imagined stability is achieved by the oppression of the return of the incorporated/assimilated other. Deevy's insight, while bringing to light these psychological dynamics of power played out in the familial unit metonymically connected to the nation, qualifies the nation State's melancholic inwardness itself as an imaginary turn away from facing the reality (through the yearning for the idealised image of woman-nation and the excessive mourning of historical loss of authenticity produced by colonisation).

The national anxiety about the return of the repressed is dramatised, for example, by the patriarchal society's brutality that inflicts mental and physical injuries upon the protagonist (and works to disempower her). For example, there is Katie's father, Reuben, an executor of the state 'law' carrying stick of 'discipline' whose physical violence against his daughter is normalised. Katie's elderly husband Stan also has a stick of discipline. He constantly chides and corrects Katie for her bad manner and grammar; he neglects or silences Katie's expressions of desire and wish. Either way, Stan's sophisticated way of repressing Katie's desire and life obliquely indicates to what extent the patriarchal repression of women's imagination, creativity and art work in the cultural field was pervasive: women's language and art as a cultural object that lacks integrity and has to be revised.

Deevy's criticism extends to a community where all the communal members are in collusion with the maintenance of patriarchal hostility. For example, Stan's married sister Margaret Drybone constantly spies on Katie and disapproves of Katie's marriage to Stan. Michael's mother (an offstage figure) never allows her son to bring Katie into their house. Michael who has internalised the society's view of an illegitimate child says to Stan, "What chance has she? Sure there's no one round here would think of her – for want of a name" (61). Adding to an extremely disadvantaged status with no rights, no education, no economic means, Katie's illegitimacy marks her as a potentially dangerous and uncontrollable femininity, and the communal and familial exclusion marks the condition of her being as nobody of the society, a denied and contained object of the melancholic nation and community.

Poignantly, the communal politics of collusion and exclusion is a significant realm of representation in the drama by the next generation's women. For example, Reid reveals how the idea of Protestant supremacy in Northern has been maintained through the communal performances and the generational passing down of harmful legacy. Likewise, Carr's plays, *By the Bog of Cats...* in particular, demonstrate the communal exclusion of undesirable elements – the ethnic and cultural others such as Traveller

woman, neglectful mother, illegitimate children. And the repetition of such exclusion is symbolically drawn through the generational history of incest

The quote from Cheng above sheds a light on another dimension of melancholia: that is, what happens to the lost object made ghostly in the nation's melancholic incorporation? Cheng makes focal the site in which the marginalised subject internalises dominant ideals, potentially harmful given the social ideality that negates and humiliates social subjects who do not conform to that prescription of ideals. Similarly, discussing the impasse of melancholic subjects, Ewa Ziarek points out that the melancholic substitution of social and political antagonisms by internal suffering is "more likely to strike those gendered and racialised peoples who are excluded from the hegemonic subject positions determined by heteronormativity, whiteness, and Western imperialism" (2010: 445). Ranjana Khanna relates this impasse of the internal suffering of the melancholic subjects (although she discusses in the context of colonialism exploring the culture of formerly colonised countries) to the impasse of representation, which she calls a process of "demetaphorization" defined as "an emptying out of the process of language and meaning formation from the word" (2005: 25). Excluded from the meaning-making process and deprived of an opportunity for grieving their sense of loss, socially marginalised subjects made into the ghostly object of melancholic authority may be unable to confront the injurious terms of the social.

Deevy's play allows melancholia of marginality to emerge in its complexity featuring loss of ideality, whether imaginative or not, often leading to the self-denial, self-denigration, and sufferings from the dilemma whereby the characters must subordinate in one form or another in order to achieve their agency. For example, the sense of loss and absence (nobody) of the main character is foregrounded by her illegitimate origin of birth, which Deevy illuminates through the visibility of Katie's desire and sexuality as deviant. In a crucial sense, Deevy's marriage plot framing Katie's internal sufferings illuminates that Katie's marriage is itself a melancholic condition of the illegitimate girl: through the ritual incorporation of the social mores that domesticates her sexuality, Katie acquires a legitimate social status. However, Katie's status as 'nobody' in

the home of the community and nation continues to mark her as ‘untrustworthy’ and ‘nonsensical’, and her vitality remains in the patriarchal structures of discipline and punishment.

Having no proper language either to articulate her sufferings or affirm her selfhood, Katie continues to falter in expressing her agency. In moments where Katie is about to achieve her powerful agency through the expression of her desire or anger, she falls back into a self-censorship, and her will for action remains unspoken or is replaced by an apparently irrelevant series of action. For example, Act II begins with Katie’s strong demand that Stan the architect should finish drawing his plan of a house. It is a moment at which Katie asserts her self-importance as Stan’s ‘equal’ partner, and faced with Stan’s repudiation with his usual treatment of her as a ‘good child’, Katie stands against his power with rage explicitly challenging his status both as architect and husband: she claims his plan is “rotten bad” (72) and should be put in the fire, also revealing that their marriage has not been consummated in three months’ marital life. Deevy’s stage directions throughout the scene feature Michael’s concertina music heard from offstage and Katie’s constant act of looking into the fire. The atmosphere throughout the scene is intense, which is created by the offstage sound of music, Katie’s raging voices on the stage, invocative gestures, and loss of communication between the characters. When Katie is left alone on the stage silence falls, and all that audiences see is Katie’s act of locking herself in, which is followed by elliptical expressions of her future action and her will:

(Katie swiftly crosses the room, turns the key in the door, comes back, puts the key on the mantelpiece – and gazes into the fire again. Music comes nearer. Katie moves, hesitates – then)

I will . . . I will. “Great deeds were never done by little hearts.”

(Goes to the front door, opens it, goes a little way out. Her hair and skirt are blown by the wind. She looks to the left, waves, comes back into the room – holding the door. Michael Maguire appears). (73)

This is one of the few scenes in which Katie expresses her will. But her expression of will here is fragmented. The result is that the reader or audience cannot easily frame the realm of unspoken will: is this an expression of her will to destroy her husband’s rotten plan or seduce

Michael? Is this an expression of her will to reject the confinement of cold marital life? Or, is this a will for a self-destruction? What ‘great deeds’ is she thinking of in her mind?

The following action, in which Katie opens the door and goes “a little way out,” indicates that she would have had an enhancing moment of selfhood with a thought of rebellion (like Nora Burke in Synge’s *The Shadow of the Glen*). However, instead of dissolving the entangled impulses, Deevy takes the moment to a further tension demonstrated in a pause of action in which Katie looks out beyond the performance space towards a space of potentially transformative possibility. Significantly, at this moment of pause, she is standing at the door, invoking a sense that she is a threshold (liminal) figure mediating or negotiating the known onstage place and the unknowable space of future possibility as well as the external and the internal.

There is another twist: Deevy absorbs this moment of (un)resolution into a ‘theatrical’ performance. Here, Katie assumes a role of wild lover for Michael, which is met with a rigid and violent reaction of patriarchal authority. Upon seeing Katie’s flirtation with Michael, Reuben, “*with surprising vigour, raises his stick, hits her across the shoulders.*” (79). Deevy’s deployment of the theatrical in relation to Katie’s fantasy is crucial to the extent that, while Katie’s phantasmatic identification with the imagined identity is thwarted by the patriarchal power (as nonsensical), she attains a means to express her agency through the theatrical performance of identity. For example, when Reuben reveals that he is her biological father, Katie, overjoyed by the fact, simultaneously covers up the pain caused by his violence and her illegitimate status by taking part in her imaginative creation of her ‘greatness’:

KATIE: Well, what was I born for? . . . A great thing, surely . . . (*Then gazing at him, grows tender*) . . . Reuben . . . my father, . . . you that were grand and now like this . . . You have trampled the world under your feet!
REUBEN: I’ve told you as a warning . . . Remember now –
KATIE: Oh - you’re a great man! . . . You’re a saint! –
REUBEN: Be good now. Be a good wife.
KATIE: Good is it? (*Laughs, wildly excited.*) I’ll be a great woman. I’ll make my own goodness. (81)

This moment is Deevy's most conscious creation of female agency and desire against the patriarchal power. While Katie still falters as she expresses her emotions, it is at the edge of this social materiality of absence that Katie's phantasmatic imagination achieves its power. It exposes that her individuality is constituted by both an active internalisation of the social fantasy of greatness and deviation from it making a strong claim for her own way of constructing greatness and her rejection of patriarchal demand and humiliation, a claim that echoes Grania's action of self-crowning in Gregory's *Grania*. On the one hand, her fantasy illuminates its social quality – it is a production of the subject's incorporation of social norms that prescribe the ideal body or role for women: that is, fantasy as a production of her subjection to the social terms. On the other hand, it manifests her deviation, a wilful turn away from 'the real' or norms that denigrate her stories of self. That is, her phantasmatic construction of self-images as a saint or a heroic lover is a site whereby she reveals not only her melancholic abjection coming from her inability to fulfil such ideality but also her agency to challenge her status as an obedient wife.

Katie's fantasy as having a dual force verifies Cheng's reconceptualisation of internalisation/incorporation, which rescues the marginalised from the static position of lost object excluded from the meaning-making process. Cheng argues, "internalisation, far from denoting a condition of surrender, embodies a web of negotiation that expresses agency as well as abjection" (2001: 17). Approaching from this view, Katie is not only a melancholic object incorporated and retained for the legitimate self-image of the nation but also a melancholic subject who constantly negotiates with the social terms. Katie's fantasy is located in the middle of this process of melancholic negotiations. If this scene of self-affirmation is resonant with the final scene discussed in the opening part of this section, Katie's final subjection to the notion of 'great beauty' does not simply express her surrender. Rather, it offers a possibility of Katie surviving the brutal reality of the external world through her constant and painful negotiations with the social.

Deevy articulates her criticism on the rigid patriarchal power by dramatising the male characters' inability to understand the power of the

theatrical or fantasy. For example, in the process of interrogating the nature of Katie's flirtation with Michael, Stan utters the word 'theatrical' in order to chide Katie's behaviour:

STAN: Very unnecessary – offering drink to Michael.

KATIE: *looks at him for a moment then laughs, excited – wanting now to rouse him – full of thought that she is 'different'* [...]

STAN: Did you take some of that?

KATIE: Only my lips to his glass – like all true lovers.

STAN: I see. Very romantic. You are not taking part in theatricals. (82)

It is ironical that Stan addresses theatricality in Katie's expression (action), not only because Katie has been actually performing the role of Michael's lover but also because he does not understand the full weight of the words he has spoken. While Stan uses the word to flatten Katie's vital energy, he is unable to grasp the meaning of Katie's 'difference' that comes from the power of her own agency achieved by theatrical performance of identity and fantasy making. Even prior to the conversations begin she feels powerful because of the sense that she can do things in her own way: "*she is full of power and joy, delighted with her own way of doing everything*" (81).

Meanwhile, for Reuben, Katie's expression of her will or agency has to be punished and humiliated. Reuben says:

REUBEN: (*turns to Stan.*). I'd give her a flogging. . . She'll make her own goodness. What does that mean? . . . She's not to be depended on. What she needs is humiliation, – if she was thoroughly humbled she might begin to learn. (115-6).

In Reuben's remarks, Katie's agency is associated with the reductive understanding of fantasy as nonsensical, or even dangerous as it makes her too proud of herself. This transforms the wanderer Reuben from a visionary, God figure of redemption that has been another fantasy of Katie, into a symbol of wrath of the patriarchal nation against a threat to the domestic/national stability (the return of the repressed).

Amelia also performs the fantasy of identity in a theatrical way. For example, when Katie asks Amelia for help in desperation, Amelia retreats into her stereotypical gender role.

KATIE: We're going away! He says we must – this very minute – though I want to stop here.

AMELIA: This very minute . . . oh dear . . . Won't you stay for tea? (120).

The comic effect of Amelia's response to Katie's crisis arises from its untimeliness. As a quiet, understanding, and obedient single woman who attends mass every day, Amelia is the only character who is sympathetic with Katie and provides a possible role model to Katie. However, the excess of her tea-offering also provides Deevy's wry and satirical voice about the role of women. While Amelia appears at the centre throughout the play as a sympathetic mentor for Katie, she does so in an odd way as though her existence as a character is achieved through the tea-making and tea-offering. Thus, a reviewer of the *New York Times*, Neil Genzlinger, begins his review of the 2013 Mint Theatre's production of the play by saying, "Not since that incident at Boston Harbor in 1773 has tea been as central to a dispute as it is in *Katie Roche*" ("A Young Woman's Choice"). Amelia's disjointed presence is also delivered through the description of her appearance: "*an odd little woman of something over fifty, dressed with careful neatness, in dark things – a long dark coat and a black hat that not all her care can ever keep quite straight*" (53). Combined with this odd-looking appearance, Amelia's act of offering tea seems like Deevy's conscious and satirical portrayal of gender roles within a family structure. Amelia is silent, and yet loud offering tea constantly to the others, which makes her seem obsessed with tea. Because of its excess, Amelia's repeated act of offering tea increasingly evokes a sense of absurdity or implausibility, which undercuts the realism of the act and the social convention of the gender role.

Deevy's drama of melancholia is a powerful diagnosis of the condition of the melancholic other of the Irish community in the 1930s caused by the migration of the social crisis or antagonism into the subject. At the same time, in her drama, the sense of connectedness with the other (and the world) is reinforced in an inverted version: the need of connectedness becomes visible through her isolation and alienation. If connectedness indicates a relational belonging to the world, Deevy's play shows how the search of belonging might involve the painful processes of subjection and resistance to it, which does not mean loss or failure of agency.

Also, Deevy's dramaturgy externalises Katie's psychic disintegration and her struggles to seize agency within the dynamics of domination and subjection through ellipsis and fragmentation of expressions whereby the subjective incorporation of social ideality and antagonism attains its structural form. By externalising the subjective pain into the character's language, the dramaturgy produces a further sense of loss and dissonance in intersubjective relations. However, this formal construction of melancholia, often in combination with a tone of incompleteness, or lack of resolution, followed by abrupt changes of mood, allows the tension between epistemological frame and illegibility of mute sufferings to emerge, which simultaneously invites the audience's speculation and confronts the work of knowledge to read Katie as a body of text.

Conclusion

The contemporary significance of approaching Deevy's drama as a form of melancholic aesthetics lies in that it requires we shift our understanding of her work from the binary paradigm of liberation and subjection. Deevy's plays undermine the conventional idea that the liberation of female desire, or the free expression of a subjective will, is equivalent to the achievement of autonomous agency, and thus acquiring the supreme virtue in itself. Deevy's protagonists in the plays discussed above are acutely aware of this as Katie says to Stan, for example, "I don't think we can start fresh. I don't think anyone can. Won't we bring ourselves with us? (*tearful*) (119). A ghost-free liberation is nowhere possible in Deevy's dramatic world. Rather, Deevy's drama opens up a space in which the melancholic incorporation of loss and absence is constitutive of subject formation functioning as a battlefield where both individual and communal sense of self is questioned and negotiated.

Deevy's use of fantasy in the exploration of the young protagonists' life conditions is significant as it sheds light on a level of melancholia that encompasses a communal/national construction of social ideality. That is, melancholia of the new nation state is delivered through the patriarchal community's excessive mourning of loss of the feminine ideal, which in

turn functions to exclude and retain the illegitimate other of the nation. Moreover, the protagonists' fantasising of their birth origins that compensates for their illegitimacy, poverty, and other handicaps is interwoven, though obliquely, into the new nation state's anxiety about and longing for legitimacy. Fantasy as a mediating force between the real and the unreal, or the pathological and the healthy, enables an examination of the mirroring relationship between the illegitimate young girls' anxiety and the new nation state's restrictive and violent control over social bodies and boundaries.

At the centre of the protagonists' illegitimacy is the absence of motherhood. Substituted by the phallic mothers, the loss of motherhood in Deevy's plays not only reinforces the protagonists' placelessness and marginality within the community but also indicates the explicit exclusion of women from the public life of the nation. The domestic, allegorically referring to the space of the nation, is controlled by the patriarchal power that attempts to fend off any elements threatening to the integrity of the order. The political implication of Deevy's plays is manifest in her interrogation of the multiply damaging process of the discursive creation of national home that effectively locked up women within the patriarchal structure of containment in the post-independence Ireland. Christina Reid's plays in the following chapter more explicitly illuminate the home space that is embedded in the social and political structure: the plays portraying the traditional family structure of the Protestant community in Northern Ireland unveil how it functions to nurture citizens conforming to the dominant ideology in the context of social and political disorder.

Notably, Reid's plays centre on memories and histories of mothers while the position of paternity is weakened. The diminished role of the paternal in the family reflects on the political conditions of Northern Ireland in which men were exclusively involved in various military and paramilitary wars and women were nurturers of home removed from the Northern Irish state's political struggles. Although Reid's drama does not feature a frightening patriarchal figure such as Reuben and Peter, the male characters in her drama are bearers of the Protestant state's conservative values causing the reproduction of melancholic replacement of social, political struggles

with domestic and internal struggles. Both Deevy and Reid, from different cultural, religious, and temporal backgrounds, create images of those marginalised by the nation state's enforcement for stability and explore possibilities for them to achieve agency within the system. In so doing, the dramatists offer for consideration a possibility that an alternative vision of the feminine and family might be conceived of through the performance of fantasies or personal memories.

Chapter Three: Christina Reid (1942 – 2015)

Politicising Domestic Melancholia in Northern Ireland

Speaking from Within

This chapter examines Christina Reid's best-known plays *Tea in a China Cup* (1983) and *The Belle of the Belfast City* (1989), both of which were premiered in The Lyric Theatre, Belfast. Because of the cultural and political complexity of the Northern Irish state and the theatre's development in the specific cultural context, some Irish theatre scholars such as Tom Maguire argue that drama and theatre of Northern Ireland should be discussed on a separate plane. Maguire's argument is at large related to his concern with "a tendency to regard Northern Irish dramatic output as a minor chapter in the canon of Irish dramatic literature" (Maguire 2006: 7). In agreement with Maguire's point, I nevertheless suggest that an examination of marginality of women's experiences in association with other dramatists under discussion in this thesis may also illuminate the politico-cultural specificity, the "ideological functions of cultural representation" in Northern Ireland without falling into a trap of marginalising certain experiences in "the relationship between culture and conflict" (Maguire 2006: 3). That is, Reid's drama has long been neglected even in the writings on Northern Irish drama and theatre. For example, although her drama explicitly addresses the impact of ethno-political conflicts (known as the Troubles) on the individuals, D.E.S. Maxwell's 1990 article positioned her *Tea in a China Cup* as a play that assumes political wars as background, thus affording its omission from his discussion of Northern Ireland's political drama. Similarly, Maguire offers a sweeping account about Reid's drama in his chapter on representations of women and women's drama in the context of political conflicts: that is, he categorises Reid's drama as a stereotypical Troubles play that appropriates Sean O'Casey's model of humanism 'using' the maternal or outsider figures for remedy or escape from an engagement with political issues.

My analysis of Reid's drama, focusing on how she responds to the issue of marginality in the context of Northern Irish history, challenges such neglect. Moreover, as the analysis of her plays reveals, the melancholic

history of incorporation of women's experiences in Northern Ireland is not very different from that which women experienced in the other part of Ireland despite the cultural specificity. Thus, while considering the "duality of the Northern Irish state" (Maguire 2006: 3), both English and Irish, the chapter demonstrates how Reid's vision as Protestant woman encompasses Irish women's experiences of marginalisation from the nation's public life. The chapter also contests the idea that Reid exploits humanism as a way of distancing from the political struggles. Rather, I argue that her drama complicates the realm of humanism (or the use of the domestic and the maternal as saviour from politics) through her aesthetic deployment of loyalist music and performance devices. In *Tea in a China Cup*, for example, the loyalist music, traditionally taken for granted by men in the public sphere, haunts women's memories and the domestic ritual of tea-making, registering the domestic as profoundly influenced by political discourses and outside political performances. In *The Belle of the Belfast City*, Reid deploys women's performances and songs that unite their life and exceed the rigid ideology of Loyalism. As such the plays foreground the limit of such performances (or women's domestic ritual) in the melancholic social context showing that women are not free from the work of historical melancholia, the process of (un)conscious internalisation of the state ideologies and antagonisms.

Born in 1942 in a Protestant working-class family in Belfast, Christina Reid is one of the leading representative playwrights of the Northern Irish literary landscape of the final two decades of the twentieth century. Writing in the years when the identity of the Protestant Northern Irish state was severely contested, Reid constantly tried to challenge the bigotry bred within the Protestant society that desired to maintain the sectarian *status quo* through the masculinist, triumphalist, (para)military operations against the Catholic others within the society. Brian Singleton provides a terse account about melancholia of the Protestant working class in Northern Ireland:

Northern Protestants see themselves as the chosen few, settlers on occupied territory, defending their link to the colonial mainland of Britain.

Protestant working classes have been instilled with the belief that they are a cut above their Catholic counterparts, when in fact they have more in common with them economically and socially, if not culturally and religiously. (2001: 301)

The incorporation of sectarian antagonisms for the phantasmatic possession of hegemony within the society, thus, marks and marks out melancholia of the Protestant working class people, which was “manipulated by political leaders and by economically powerful [...] by calling on loyalism to override class divisions” (Singleton 2011: 161). Reid’s plays, especially *Tea in a China Cup* and *The Belle of the Belfast City*, delving into the domestic life in the context of political conflicts in Northern Ireland, demonstrate that the state ideology of Protestant supremacy was particularly oppressive to Protestant working-class women because of its rigidly patriarchal and hierarchical ordering of social norms. Within that anxiously defensive and inward-looking community, Reid’s characters suffer from the inability to talk about their sense of loss and deprivation because they have been socialised to be ‘good’ Protestant women: goodness characterised by sacrifice, submission to the political cause, maintenance of an obedient family unit, and the silencing of personal sufferings and pain for Protestant respectability.

Exploring how the female protagonist’s vital energy is trapped within the rhetoric of national sovereign power promoting masculine heroism and feminine conformity, Reid’s precursors, Gregory and Deevy, challenged the national melancholia. For both Gregory and Deevy, the national melancholia derives from the desire to achieve a univocal and controllable society, which propagates the institutional or communal control over the gendered other. Gregory, for example, explores the theme in the colonial context through the dramatisation of Ireland’s fictional rural town of Cloon in *Spreading the News* whereby the British magistrate seeks to categorise the incomprehensible force of the villagers’ imagination into a stereotype of the colonised. While Gregory had a vision of the national ideal as equivalent to the cultural endeavour of channelling the wild and melancholic imagination of the Irish town people, her play *Grania* brings to its centre the emergence of public woman who could take over such a task

by disrupting the melancholic force of male dominated homo-social bonding. Deevy's examination of the independent Free State, however, illuminates the loss of vision that Gregory imagined. The State that Deevy's young protagonists inhabit in *The King of Spain's Daughter* as well as in *Katie Roche* is unable to accommodate the protagonists' imagination. Instead, the forcible control of the Free State appearing in the brutal power of patriarchy, rather, pursues to tame the protagonists' dissident energy resulting in the creation of phantasmatic psychic worlds of their own. Decades later, this question of communal surveillance over gendered subjects reappear in Carr's Midlands plays in which the playwright examines the generational legacy of the stigmatised and marginalised family history, delving into the dark enmeshment of the social and the psychological.

Likewise, Reid's exploration of the domestic illuminates how the Northern state's political and ideological purpose of sustaining the *status quo* is embodied not only in its hateful discourses against outsiders but also in the familial surveillance and control over the gendered other. Just as Deevy explored how the nation-state's melancholia derives from its fictional fantasy for national purity and authenticity 'devouring' the national other within the economy of sameness, Reid also examines how the Protestant Northern state is melancholic in its anxiety to continue the Unionist/Loyalist/Protestant supremacy through the injunction of exclusive identification with the gendered state ideal. In Reid's plays, the Protestant community's aspiration to loyalty and respectability is constructed as a Northern Irish version of national melancholia operated by the myth of unity that elides the class and gender divides within the society. Reid remarks in an interview how this state ideology was internalised and fostered by those discriminated and disenfranchised men and women in Protestant communities of Northern Ireland:

People seem to think that all the Protestants are rich and all the Catholics are poor. But there is a massive Protestant working class who were a totally loyal workforce because they were told that, if they went on strike, they would let the Nationalists in. It's a perfect example of divide and rule. So you had this Loyalist workforce who worked in appalling conditions in the mills and factories for bad wages. (Qtd. in Delgado 1997: xix)

For Reid, loyalism is a national ideology that manipulates the Protestant hegemony through their anxiety about the threat from the Catholic nationalist other and naturalises social divides through the maintenance of muted subjects. Reid's assessment of the loyalist men's hegemony in relation to their social reality corresponds with Brian Singleton's assessment of loyalism as "the social and cultural processes" in which class boundaries were elided into an exclusive Protestant supremacy resulting in the creation of "a ready-made compliant working class of Protestants that was elevated because of their religion" (Singleton 2011: 161). The emphasis on the contested hegemony of loyalist men by Reid and Singleton disrupts the monolithic mythology of the masculine Protestant state.

The significance of Reid's plays lies in the challenge to the underrepresentation of Protestant women in all aspects of cultural and political life across the islands of Ireland. Especially, the coercive demand for women's sacrifice and silence within Protestant communities made it impossible to investigate the political and emotional complexities of the domestic realm. Indeed, the social status of Protestant family as backbone of the State naturalised the erasure of women's material conditions in their roles of supporting loyalist men and maintaining a traditional Protestant culture of decency and respectability of the home. According to Sara McDowell, women in Unionist/Loyalist discourses were expected to "support Ulster's Loyal Sons," pertaining to "the ideal that (Protestant) women were primarily dutiful wives and mothers and were secondary to their husbands who were solely responsible for safeguarding the Union" (McDowell 2008: 338). In so doing, Reid deploys the loyalist music and lyrics as a poignant element of her drama allowing them functional space to mediate their present life with the past memories. Such loyalist music was traditionally performed by men in the public sphere celebrating the Unionist triumphalist ideology and barring women from participation, a symbolic marker of spatial and ideological division between femininity and masculinity as well as between Loyalists/Unionists and Republicans. In Reid's drama the heavily ideology-laden music, however, gains a meaning as melancholic performance that expresses the subjective history of

internalisation of social and political divisions, while concomitantly disclosing the paucity of cultural diversity, through which women nurtured their sensibility and education. The melancholic struggles of women towards which the author is never rude or blind but recognises it as a tradition of women's experiences in the loyalist environments to be both embraced and challenged.

For Reid, the social function of the family as incubating citizens compliant with social norms is closely linked to the State's militarised performance of loyalism. Reid's *Tea* and *Belle*, thus, expose the extent to which the social control of the domestic is essential to the operation of the State by unveiling the melancholic status of loyalist women hidden behind the façade of Protestant respectability: the status marking the lost other of national melancholia. Corresponding with the function of women within conservative nationalist narratives, the loyalist/unionist narratives place women in the trope of retention for the nation-state's stability (central) and yet of repression within the backroom of society (excluded).

Approaching Reid's plays from this perspective, this chapter explores the ways in which Reid's plays challenge the gendered spatial discourse of the Northern Irish state which has normalised the subjugation of the domestic and the personal to the Northern State's ideal of unity. Representing how the State's ethno-national ideal of staunch Unionism/Loyalism is haunted by its neglected and gendered other, Reid's plays bring to light the playwright's particular sense of feminism. Reid's representation of gendered politics is resonant with Susan Moller Okin's perception that the continuation of spatial dichotomy enables the neglect of "the political nature of the family, the relevance of justice in personal life and, as a consequence, a major part of the inequalities of gender" (Okin 1991: 69). In the plays, Reid therefore blurs the boundary between the public and the personal by bringing to centre stage the personal experiences and memories as entangled with institutional and ideological imperatives of the state. In so doing, Reid offers an insight that "neither the realm of domestic life, nor the realm of non-domestic, economic and political life, can be understood or interpreted in isolation from the other" (Okin 1991: 77).

Regarding Reid's representation of the domestic as deliberately political, Jozefina Komporaly draws attention to Reid's contention against "the dominant tendency in contemporary Irish drama to 'portray Ireland through its violence'" (Komporaly 2004: 68). Komporaly maintains that "it is to counteract this practice that [Reid] dwells on the domestic – generally involving several generations of women – and locates men on the periphery, showing them as incidental to women's lives, much as women would often have been represented in terms of men's lives until recently" (68). Komporaly's critical elucidation of Reid's drama derives from the fact that the plays, especially *Tea* and *Belle*, portray the political conflicts during the era of the Troubles through narrations focusing on women's stories and memories, making visible women's struggles thus far veiled by the political war on the streets.

However, the illumination of the plays solely in terms of women's stories set in the domestic that counteracts violent representations of the Troubles seems to contribute to the reproduction of the gendered binary of space, promoting the domestic as feminine, humane, private and free from violent political conflicts of the public men. Rather than 'located on the periphery' of the plays and 'incidental to women's lives', Reid's male characters often function as the State's subjects by bearing its traditional and conservative values that structure family life and inflict loss and trauma on women's lives – injury, exile, death, poverty, and the containment of female body. Moreover, Reid reveals that these state-values are also ingrained in feminine subjectivity, which is often represented through older generations. To this extent, the domestic in Reid's dramatic world is neither an entirely politics-free zone nor a simply celebratory space; instead, it is often a space where state values are articulated, examined, and contested among the characters who desire to escape confinement.

Christina Reid as Playwright at the Lyric Theatre, Belfast

The conception of a modern nation as an 'imagined community' has been widely discussed and accepted by a number of scholars of cultural studies since Benedict Anderson's influential 1983 book *Imagined*

Communities wherein he emphasises the role of social narratives through which people are collectively identified as a homogenous community. In Ireland, since the Cultural Revivalism at the turn of the twentieth century, theatres have occupied a specific role as a place in which people gathered and identified themselves as the imagined community of nation through stage representations: the conscious rewriting of “national myths, thus promoting an ideology of common heritage, tradition, and belief” (Trotter 2001: xi). If the Abbey theatre was established in close association with the ‘imagined’ vision of Ireland’s independent nation-statehood, the Ulster Group Theatre (1940-1959), the Northern counterpart of the Abbey, which took over the early twentieth-century Ulster Literary Theatre’s project of northern revival, had a thwarted relationship with the term ‘nation’: as it were, the imagined homogeneity of a nation community was contested from the outset because of “the duality of the Northern Irish state” – both Irish and British (Maguire 2006: 7).

The conflicting aspiration to different national identities, masked by a religious difference between Protestants and Catholics, marked the Northern state as a community in which two different ethnic groups were “forced to live together” (Doyle 2003: 107), perpetuating communal division rather than unity. Although both Unionist and Nationalist communities equally propagated antagonisms against each other at the levels of ideas and individual actions, the economically and politically powerful Protestant Unionists controlled over the social and political structure of the Northern State generating Catholic working-class ghettos. Moreover, the Unionist hold over the main cultural institutions meant that the “self-identity of the Northern Ireland state was dominated by an overwhelming unionist political perspective” (Pilkington 2001: 167). In this cultural and political context, the ‘national’ theatre in Northern Ireland, under the sponsorship/censorship of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), became instrumental in legitimating the social divisions rather than investigating the problems ensuring the privileged relationship of Protestant Unionists with the State.

The establishment by Pearce and Mary O’Malley in 1960 of the Lyric Players Group Trust, a leading theatre in Northern Ireland over the

last half-century to the present, was a cultural project aspiring to the creation of performance space that would include diverse voices going beyond the sectarian division of Northern Ireland. Coinciding with the rise of a Catholic middle class and the civil rights movement against discrimination in the late 1960s, the Lyric Theatre sought to be “the theatrical conscience of a divided society” (Singleton 2011: 167), strategically claiming for “a Yeatsian model of the theatre as existing outside of immediate political concerns” in order to “protect its autonomy from what was perceived as an all-pervasive atmosphere of unionist consensus” (Pilkington 2001: 187). Thus, while avoiding direct control of the state, the Lyric Theatre contributed greatly to the representation of Northern Ireland’s self-identity in a wider context of the Irish nation. The Theatre’s stance of ‘independence politics,’ however, functioned in the 1970s “less as a means of resisting unionist political control, and more as a way of distancing the increasingly militant politics of working-class republicanism” (Pilkington 2001: 203). Nevertheless, the Lyric Theatre’s contribution is important because of its conscious inclusiveness: the theatre encompassed nationalist self-expressions, hitherto disregarded in the cultural landscape of Ireland, while offering a space for investigations into Protestant Unionist hegemony. Stewart Parker’s *Northern Star*, premiered in the Lyric Theatre in 1984, for example, remains one of the Lyric’s great plays that contested the Protestant hegemonic masculinities linked tightly with loyalists’ militant performances on the street such as the Orange Order’s triumphalist marches and paramilitary terror campaigns against the IRA resurgence.

While public performances on the Lyric Theatre’s stage offered wider social and political views that allowed the self-expression of contested national identities of Northern Ireland, the representations of women did not see substantial advancement: ‘women’s issues’ still remained absent in the cultural landscape, and the representation of women and sexuality on the stage was repressed. The marginalisation of women on the stage was related to the Lyric Theatre’s project of re-presenting historical moments in Irish history in an attempt to redefine the nation-state’s identity. As Brian Singleton points out, “re-presenting the history of

significant events in political and revolutionary struggle, of course, determined a masculinist perspective” (Singleton 2011: 167-8). Moreover, the political instability in Northern Ireland following the civil rights movement in 1968 and 1969 made the representation of nation in theatre a challenging political issue. Most significantly, as one of the impacts of the militant political conflicts on the literary landscape the trope of home as preserving the national security against the threat of violent conflicts was once again emphasised. For example, John Boyd’s 1971 play *The Flat,s* produced in the Lyric Theatre, used what Lionel Pilkington calls an “O’Casey-like formula” in which “domestic security and the security of the state are mutually dependent and [...] both are threatened by the emergence of indiscriminate republican paramilitary violence” (Pilkington 2001: 208). As a result, sectarian and political divisions in Northern Ireland as pervasive in the ordinary life were effectively erased at the expense of women and the domestic whose security in reality was constantly violated by military and paramilitary operations.

In this cultural context, the emergence of Christina Reid as a writer in residence at the Lyric Theatre in 1983-4 is significant in the sense that she achieved a prominent role in the male-dominated cultural landscape. Moreover, Reid also wrote plays that re-present the ‘O’Casey-like formula” in order to disrupt the romantic portrayal of the domestic as a preserve of universal humanity. Rewriting the vision that the security of home may help to transcend the anarchy of the national conflicts, the corpus of Reid’s work published collectively in *Christina Reid: Plays 1* (1997) examines how the ordinary lives of the inhabitants of home are circumscribed and determined by the violent military and paramilitary conflicts. Reid’s literary engagement with the social, political and cultural underpinnings of the Northern Irish state is extensively demonstrated in the corpus of her work. The question of sectarian bigotry and reconciliation is explored in *Did you Hear the One about the Irishman?* through the dramatisation of the loyalist and the nationalist families who support the imprisoned sons; *Tea in a China Cup* (1983) and *My Name, Shall I Tell You My Name?* (1986) examine traumas of the First World War and a numbing impact of Unionism/Loyalism on the younger generation; Reid’s 1989 play *The Belle*

of the Belfast City explores the ways in which women's multiple experiences and voices can counteract the rigid and violent narratives of the political world against the backdrop of the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement; *Joyriders* (1986) presents the State's futile efforts to retain Catholic teenagers within the Youth Training Programme; and finally, its sequel *Clowns* (1996), set on the eve of the IRA ceasefire, deals with the haunting legacy of the traumatic past, yet exploring the possibility of coming to terms with it.

However, Reid's interest does not focus on the victimhood of the marginalised group of people. Rather, the playwright constantly tackles social issues such as gender norms, discriminatory sectarianism, entrenched bigotry and prejudice, constructions of cultural and historical memory, and class divisions as intimately experienced in the individual life of people and as constructed at that very individual level through the socially and politically structural machinery of incorporation and exclusion. Thus, in Reid's representation of the tension between the domestic and the political, which re-appropriates a model of O'Casey to whom Reid paid tribute in her *Joyriders* (1986) in the form of a play within the play,³¹ the domestic alienated in the name of national security acquires its visibility through the characters' search for agency beyond the State's desire to subordinate the domestic order to the national ideal of unity.

***Tea in a China Cup* (1983): Fragmenting the Melancholic Bind of the Domestic with the State Ideology**

This discussion of Christina Reid's *Tea in a China Cup* examines the ways in which the playwright engages with the gendering of social life in Northern Ireland in relation to the contested cultural supremacy of Protestant Unionism. The drama is set in Belfast in the home front of Beth and her family, a Protestant working-class woman. The drama unfolds the

³¹ *Joyriders* begins with a scene in which the socially marginalised group of teenagers watch Sean O'Casey's *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923) and discuss the play, and ends with a scene in which Maureen is killed by accident on the street represented in an analogous reference to Minnie Powell's death in O'Casey's play.

family history of three generations spanning a few decades from 1939 to 1972, roughly coinciding with Beth's birth and her mother Sarah's death. The play illuminates the individual characters' lives and deaths against the backdrop of historical events such as the two World Wars and the political conflicts conventionally known as the Troubles. In doing so, Reid not only shows her recognition of the importance of such historical events in the formation of the Protestant identity in Northern Ireland but also critically questions the utopia of communal unity and continuity that is sustained by collective attachment with the state's militarised ideal, anxiety, or instability, which in turn fosters the ideal of individual sacrifice in exchange for the pride of the Protestant community. By examining the individual, familial conversations, memories, conflicts, and prejudices in conjunction with the historically important events, the play portrays how melancholia of the domestic is cultivated by the political structure of exclusion pervasive within the society of Northern Ireland.

Lorraine Dowler has recently criticised the gendering aspect of the nation-state's hegemonic norms especially in the process of societal militarisation. She defines militarisation as "a process that gives rise to a societal belief-system that violence and war are appropriate ways to resolve conflicts" (Dowler 2012: 491). Dowler maintains that the militarisation of every day life is "central to the extension of state power into the daily and, even intimate, interactions of its governed population" (491), creating hegemonic narratives which construct some experiences as legitimate while eliding others into a muted realm. Most critically, militarisation as a malevolent process lurking in our every day life is "a process perpetuated and maintained by society" rather than "a dictate of the state" (491).

This paranoid encryption of others in the militarisation process often takes a form of gendered language, rendering violence as a masculine and legitimate form of the public arena (sanctioned by the State) and resisting any pursuit of difference, non-violence, and dis-identification as feminine. Moreover, such a process of militarization not only creates unfair standards for men that aspire to 'hegemonic masculinity' in R. W. Connell's terms, but also militarises women's bodies, Dowler argues, as "they are visible, invisible or hyper-visible depending on the needs of the sovereign" (494).

While in the nationalist discourse of Ireland this concept of the militarised woman's body is captured in the personification of nation-state as mother, old hag or young woman to be protected, Northern Ireland's unionist discourse involves the eclipse of women's experiences designating them to the role of maintaining the home front as peacemakers and backbones of the community. In both discourses, "gender tropes function to recreate and secure women's position as non-combatants and that of men as warriors" (Dowler 1998: 160), which influences the pervasive cultural representation of women in power as a dehumanised, and often highly sexualised, figure.

Reid's play brings the spatial construction of gender in a time of war onto the stage through the lens of a young working-class Protestant woman. A notable aspect of the play is that Reid deftly re-engages with the militarised gender trope by deliberately juxtaposing and inter-linking the binary distinctions pervasive in Northern Ireland between the Protestant Us and the Catholic Other, the masculine and the feminine, and the public commemoration and the personal memories. Exploring these intersections will bring to light the Protestant community's obsessive maintenance of gender and cultural identity as linked to the community's melancholic bind between loss, denial, and incorporation of loss into the formation of the communal identity. This melancholic process is often expressed in the militaristic, gendered vocabulary of triumphalist commemoration of wars as in Orange marches (the ethno-political performances of the Unionists, which celebrate victory in history and anxiously defend their sense of loss).

The playwright deconstructs the centrality of the masculine public arena as it relates to the private/domestic in two important ways. First, the play demonstrates an expanded notion of domestic space in which a particular sense of belonging in terms of the feminine tradition might be cherished and yet, the melancholic landscape of the community is also nurtured by the social agents' participation in the nation-state's rhetoric of exclusion in the name of solidarity – the participation that is propelled by melancholic compliance, that is the introjection of the social norms protecting one order (loyalism) against all forms of contamination from the other. The process of the State's exclusion leads to the creation of the subservient subjects who transform loss (the sense that something has been

lost) into the negation of the other. Reid's drama shows that, in the case of the subjects who have been already marginalised, this logic of exclusion and the introjection of loss and negation turns back into the self in a form of self-negation. The self-negation appears in the female characters' transgenerational passing of shame and rejection of body/sexual difference as causing troubles and frustrations. Second, the play illuminates the significance of individual memories as complex conduits to the most private, yet essentially communal unit not only of the family but also of the Northern Irish state. The State's militarised political discourse has been constitutive of the formation of its citizens as melancholically compliant with the State norm: melancholically compliant in the sense that citizens conform to the prescribed norms through the internalisation social antagonisms, often causing a psychological dejection of self-denial and self-injury as seen in the female characters of the older generation in the play. Thus, the staging of individual memories, no matter how personal, maintains a critical validity: it not only reveals how remembering creates a socially or politically organised chain of tradition but also how the possibility for transformation emerges from diversity, or even deviation from the mainstream space, or act, of remembering.

Premiered at the Lyric Theatre in 1983, the play received favourable reviews. Ray Rosenfeld in the *Irish Times* credited the play for its "finely judged, beautifully written scenes with well-drawn characters", and characterised the playwright's talent as "acutely perceptive and gently voiced" (14 Nov. 1983). Anthony Masters commented about the London production in 1984 as "moving and passionate without ever needing to raise its voice." (Qtd. in Roll-Hansen 1987: 391). Significantly, the comments by both Rosenfeld and Masters focus on the play's gendered quality of voice, removed from the swell of political violence of the day. Reid's play is indeed replete with women's talks and narrations bounded to the act of drinking tea. However, while the stage is fraught with domestic sounds of chattering and clattering, the very feminised stage is often, and at crucial moments of the play, surrounded by different off-stage sounds emerging from the Orange marches, people's cheering for military recruitments, and the disturbance on the street during the year of the Troubles. This

dramaturgical juxtaposition of the sounds from the divided spheres brings politics closer to domestic realities, revealing “how deeply implicated domestic life is with wider socio-economic structure” (McDonald 2001: 239), and undermines the commentators’ emphasis on the ‘gentle’ voice of the play.

Offstage sounds in the play mark the male dominated public events in the history of Northern Ireland such as the commemoration of the triumphalist history of William of Orange and the sound of disorder on the street during the years of the Trouble. In the militarised conflict narratives in Northern Ireland, these events claim an exclusive importance subjugating other social issues to the dominant narratives, and masculine values come to define the State. In the play, Reid places these events out of the sight (offstage) and brings to centre stage the historically and politically elided others – the centrality of individual citizen members’ sacrifice to the public events by staging the memories of women as well as exiled, or dead, individual soldiers who remain as functional elements in the State’s Unionist ideal. The private ritual of memorialising the dead is no longer subsidiary to the public ritual of commemoration marches: rather, it challenges the implication of militarised commemoration in the Unionist politics and the monolithic hegemony of masculinity that overrides the class divisions.

By blurring the distinctive boundaries between outside/offstage and inside/onstage, Reid also makes visible women’s talks in the private sphere as a type of politically constructed discourse, to which the playwright gives authority that equates with the performative “outside” discourse. The gendered spatial discourse of conflict narratives centres on the present absence of women’s experiences and space privileging the key roles of paramilitary men in the making of nation and history. Eilish Rooney exposes this absence of women in the conflict narratives as a “precarious” one because the invisibility can neither disturb the dominant form of discourse nor challenge the stereotyped status of women:

For the most part they are an invisible presence. On occasion the female figure is hailed into prominence and functions in a symbolic way that neither disturbs the dominant masculinity of these discourses nor questions

women's stereotypical depiction as victim or peace-maker. This precarious role is also vital as it sustains a narrative fiction that conflicts are gender-free. (Qtd. in Graff-McRae 2016: 5)

Reid's drama, thus, engages with this precarious location of women as present absence (the lost other of national melancholia) through the exposure of the process in which women and their space (the domestic) becomes ghostly in the utopian attachment with the communal unity. The public agenda driving the Orange Order is perpetuated in the home discourses that have introjected and naturalised the loyalist ideology of individual/communal sacrifice for the political cause as well as Protestant decency. The home is a site where girls and boys are nurtured to be 'good' citizens of the militarised Protestant state according to the coercive gender norms: boys grow to be 'good' public men and girls to become 'good' wives. The analogy between the public Orange order and private domestic order is quite apparent. As Joanna Luft points out, "[b]oth orders promote the stability of the Ulster state by moulding its children into proper Protestant men and women" (Luft 1999: 217). Thus for Luft, women's private ritual of tea-drinking through which "the social and political workings of domestic space and discourse" are exposed is analogous to the Orange marches (217): both orders work to sustain the illusionary utopia of communal unity and continuity which in turn perpetuates the armed and conservative maintenance of the State. Reid's exploration of the precarious position of women within the domestic destabilises the State's discursive construction of boundaries between oppositions of the public and the private. Furthermore, Reid's investigation of the process in which the State's melancholically compliant subjects participate in the construction of communal discourses brings to light how the subjects are at once effected by the state power and constitutes such power, a process through which the dynamics of retention-yet-exclusion of loss is regenerated. However, Reid's exploration of the dynamics, rather than regenerating the process, questions how it can be contested and resisted through the act of revealing the inside-stories.

The conflation of the domestic order and the Orange Order is established from the play's very beginning in which Beth's mother Sarah is

listening to the Orange bands practicing for the Twelfth march, while dying of cancer. Sarah's final wish is to see the Orange march before her death. Listening to the bands, Sarah says: "It's the sound of the flute bands ... always gets the old Protestant blood going. I tell you, a daily dose of the True Blue Defenders would do me more good than them hateful transfusions they give me up at the hospital" (8). Depicting the extent to which her whole life has been lived in the context of the Loyalist cause and performances, Sarah's nostalgic attachment to the Protestant blood elides the hardship that she experienced as a working-class Protestant woman.

This nostalgic memory of the pride, however, is reflected with irony as it is delivered by Beth's mature voice that at once maintains a strong bond with her mother and challenges the mother's fervent belief in the traditional Protestant values. For instance, Sarah's memory of the Twelfth parade, which has been a communal memory of the whole family as it passed down to the next generation through stories, includes the moment at which then young Sarah was patted on her head by an upper-class Orangeman for being "a backbone of Ulster" (10). Sarah's memory is testimony to the extent to which the political and militaristic performance of Protestant supremacy has acquired the meaning as a communal event of celebration. Beth's narration, however, opens up the problematic of the performance: it is essentially a performance of hegemonic masculinity of the Orange Order excluding the participation of women, children, and men 'unfit' for the parade (Singleton 2010: 158-9). While the parade is performed to secure the unity of Protestant Ulster, the performance itself is a demonstration of the divisions within the Unionist community marked by gender and class.

Brian Singleton notes how Loyalism is a culturally promoted process in which Protestant hegemony is proclaimed as uniting the acute divisions within the State. Singleton states:

What asserted Protestant hegemony most of all, and emboldened the Protestant land-owners and industry leaders were the social and cultural processes of loyalism, that cut across class boundaries ostensibly, but because of their exclusivity created a ready-made compliant working-class of Protestants that was elevated socially because of their religion. (Singleton 2010: 161)

Singleton's critical diagnosis of the militarised masculine performance of the Orange Order illuminates the historical myth-making processes that obscure unstable political conditions and suppress threatening voices within the Protestant community. The historical myth-making that elides individual sacrifice with the loyalist cause is symbolically drawn in the play by the portraits of the family men in uniform hung on the wall of Sarah's living room. Presenting the loyalist tradition of sacrifice and honour, they are the portraits of the grandfather who fought in the Great War and bore a piece of shrapnel in his legs all his life, Sarah's brother who died in the Second World War, and Sarah's son, a soldier for the British army, who is now in exile because of the political conflicts. To a crucial extent, the portraits of the men carry the same quality as the Orange marches in the sense that they represent the maintenance of militaristic past in the form of commemoration that ossifies into a rigid sectarian identity culture and disavows a critical interrogation.

Reid reveals the underside of this culture of commemoration in the scene that immediately follows Sarah's memory of the parade by conjuring the grandfather and Sarah's brother Samuel onto the stage. Surrounded by the sounds of the Orange band's music, the scene conveys a celebratory mood of the community as the Protestant boys, including Samuel, are being recruited for the war. The grandfather's pride in the generational service for the British monarchy, no matter how it is uncritically constructed, is so profound that he is not able to recognise the family's grief, which is revealed again later when he talks about the compensation money after receiving news of Samuel's death. As a traumatic loss to the family, the play reveals how inhumanely the British government treats Samuel's death, making an absurdity of Protestant loyalism. Beth speaks to audiences:

Eventually the army sorted out how much Samuel had saved while he was in France. They added up all the seven shillingses [the amount Samuel saved per week] and deducted an amount to cover the cost of the kit he'd lost on the beaches of Dunkirk. There was no pension. He was not considered old enough to have any dependent relatives. The Army did provide, free of charge, a war grave in a Belfast cemetery. My

grandmother scrubbed boards in a bakery to pay for the white marble headstone and surround. (*Tea* 20-1)

Performed in the years when the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985) was being processed, this reconfiguration of the erasure of the young Protestant soldier's death into a mere official business gains a significant relevance to the contemporary issues regarding the ironical status of Loyalism as alienated in the political process and yet asserting the belief in the tradition of Unionism. The official callousness in dealing with Samuel's death speaks not only to the ghostliness of the loyalist men's death for the cause but also to the framing of the past in political and ideological terms. The official callousness is intensified when it echoes Samuel's wish to be remembered which he previously expressed in his letter to Sarah. Before death, Samuel is shown on stage writing a letter "*in an army billet somewhere in France*" (14). Although the letter delivers his pride as a Protestant boy, the brightened stage light on him emphasises the sense of isolation reflecting his situation removed from his own community and from the grand cause of the war. Moreover, as Sarah performs the reading while Samuel is writing (and at the end the voices of Samuel and Sarah merge into one voice), the condition of conflicts and isolation is felt more immediate. In other words, Reid articulates the ghost of the past to make him heard and visible from an angle different from that of public commemoration.

Bringing together both Sarah and Samuel on stage has another crucial significance in relation to the gendering of social life because it shows the way in which Protestant men and women enter into the social life according to the separate gendered social code. Immediately following the news of Samuel's death, Sarah appears on stage fully pregnant with Beth. Although Sarah is suffering from her economic hardship and the carelessness of her husband, she is reluctant to reveal the hardship even to her own mother. In the following scene in which the family women converse with each other over tea, it becomes clear that Sarah's reluctance to share her struggles with any one has resides in the traditional Protestant values that require endurance and silence for the purpose of Protestant respectability. Grandmother says to eleven-year-old Beth: "No matter how

poor we are, child, we work hard and keep ourselves and our homes clean and respectable” (25). Resonant with Sarah’s scrubbing to pay for the headstone, cleanliness here is a surface for Protestant pride and respectability. However, but underneath the guise of respectability is Sarah’s economic hardship – respectability as constructed ideology serves to foster muted subjects and hide the class divide within the Protestant community, showing the state’s persistently melancholic process of retention-yet-exclusion. The loyalist pride that the family men acquire through their military services and sacrifice is here linked to the way the women of the family sustain their domestic life through the regulatory frame, whereby the stability of the loyalist Ulster state is promoted. And this “moulding [of the] children into proper Protestant men and women” (Luft 1999: 217), is repeated through generations as Reid dramatises through the link between Beth’s entry to domestic life as wife and her brother Sammy’s entry to militaristic life.

Notably, this link between the separate entry of women and men to the domestic and the public is constructed on the basis of gendered ritual, that is, parades and tea-drinking. While the Orange band’s parades perform the supremacy of Protestant masculinity with highly militaristic hues, Reid’s drama introduces another tradition, more feminine, of the Protestant family - the tradition of having ‘tea in a china cup’. Possessing “a bit of fine bone china and a good table linen” (25) is essentially linked to the Protestant family’s pride and respectability, the apotheosis of which is exemplified by the Belleek china set that Beth acquires through her marriage into a middle-class Protestant family. Throughout the play, the act of drinking tea is portrayed as a ritual of feminine tradition, underlying women’s solidarity and continuity because tea is a substantial medium for caring and for cutting across the generational conflicts between women. Joanna Luft, however, rightly asserts:

In *Tea* Reid demands that we engage with her references to tea as something more than a simple prop or activity to highlight the domesticity of the play. Rather, Reid constructs tea as a *gestus* that enables us to enter the play’s realm of signification and read the social and political commentary conducted there. (Luft 1999: 216)

In Luft's reading of the play, the feminine ritual of tea-drinking carries distinctive social manners deeply rooted in the Northern Irish loyalist belief. Indeed, throughout the play tea is a dynamic site where a social discourse becomes visible through the family women's conversations often carrying the hostile, intolerant, and unjust demand for conformity to Protestant values. Luft maintains that, although the space where women drink tea and talk "is physically private, the discourse that surrounds it is an entirely social and political one. By insisting on a conformity to traditional values in a language characterised by hostile oppositionality, the discourse of tea and china works to secure the solidarity of Ulster's Protestant faction" (215). Analogous to the formal and masculine organisation of the Orange Order, the domestic discourse propagates the conservative functioning of the State by attaching to its regulatory ideal of ensuring unity performed through the denial of social divisions and the perpetuation of exclusion.

Through the family members' vocabulary of grievance, Reid shows the extent to which the political discourses of exclusion are constitutive of the domestic order deflecting attention away from a critical look at the social impoverishment. The affirmation of values of self-respect and dignity as exclusively integral to the Protestant identity revolves around the constant denegation of the Catholic Other as lacking moral integration and threatening the Protestant supremacy. In one instance, Beth's aunt Maisie reveals her hatred towards the Catholic neighbours, Theresa's family, when she finds that Theresa, Beth's friend, has a better possibility for education than Beth. Although the real family issue is related to the financial difficulty ensued by the lack of support by the State, the women's talks obscure the issue by blaming the Catholics about taking education and job opportunities from the Protestants:

What I want to know is why kids like Theresa Duffy can get their fees paid to go to a Fenian grammar school, and one of ours has to miss out [. . . .], the Catholics will beg, borrow and steal the money to get their kids a fancy education. This country'll suffer for it in years to come when well-qualified Catholics start to pour out of our Queen's University expecting the top jobs, wantin' a say in the runnin' of the country. (*Tea* 31)

The introjection of the State's rhetoric of exclusion within the domestic order is clearly expressed here, and the anxiety of losing the hegemonic supremacy is the undercurrent of the bigotry. The pathological aspect of this introjection emerges from the prospect that the language of grievance is legislated, without a chance to examine the source of viciousness towards the social other, in order to maintain the sense of self and belonging, which in turn fortifies the maintenance of the conservative State norms. In this malicious circle of cultural identity formation whereby the social other is made ghostly in the sense that they exist only in order to promote the Protestant supremacy, the individual agents of the community are nurtured in impoverishment.

In the previous chapter, I examined how Deevy dramatizes the difficulty experienced by the marginalised female characters in achieving their sense of agency captured in a crisis of capacity for creating meanings through language. Disavowed by the strictly hetero-patriarchal norms of the new Free State, Deevy's protagonists reside in the realm of fantasy in which they continue to identify with feminine ideals that are prescribed by the social. Similarly, Reid links the melancholic nurturance of self in impoverishment to the lack of language for women's sexuality deriving from the silencing norm of the militarised State. Going through the formative years of adolescence, Beth struggles to find a source for the understanding of bodily functions, to which her female elders cannot offer any proper answers. Beth is educated that babies are "a gift from God to married women" (*Tea* 28). When Beth asks Maisie "why God gives more gifts to the Catholics if the Protestants of Ulster were his chosen people," Maisie says that "it [is] because the Catholics [are] greedy. They [are] always looking for something for nothing" (28). Delivered in a mood of rueful laughs, the inability to engage with the question of sexuality becomes increasingly hopeless when Sarah's attempt to explain menstruation to Beth fails with more confusion and embarrassment for both mother and daughter. In Sarah's explanation, female genitalia become "'you know where you go to the toilet ... down there,'" and menstruation is described as: "Well, once a month ... you get ... you get ... a drop of blood comes out of there" (28). Sarah's attempt to explain menstruation is eclipsed by embarrassing

euphemisms, and it is immediately replaced by her instruction about the young girl's behaviour: "[Y]ou don't talk to men about that sort of thing, it's not nice . . . and another thing, Beth, when you do get older and maybe go out with boys ... don't ever let them do anything that's not nice ... " (29). Here, Sarah's instruction operates on the basis of narrowly constructed parameters of morality in which the young girl's behaviour is judged only in terms of being "nice" or "not nice". This discourse of womanhood obscures female sexuality as shameful, something that also has to be silenced. Women's sexuality as troublesome is delivered by Sarah's response to Beth's menstruation: "God help you child, this is the start of all your troubles" (30). Resonating with the political troubles in Northern Ireland, Sarah's initiation of menstruation as women's troubles is suggestive of woman's body as a site of political and social struggles, which recalls Dowler's idea how militarised nation-state also militarises woman's body making it highly visible or invisible according to the State's needs. In this militarised home discourse of woman's body, the absence of a proper language to express the female sexuality is replaced with the gender discourse instilled in the notion of respectable womanhood.

In other words, menstrual blood, marking the limit of 'proper' 'good' subjecthood of Protestant blood, embodies the repetition of failed and painful experience of women's social entry (humiliation and shame). It marks the bodily incommensurability of sexual difference whereby the body becomes an object of domestication in the realm of either illegitimacy or loss and erasure. With no language for it, as Sarah's suffering manifests, the body becomes a phantom, which in turn speaks to the inheritance of the female identity that is constructed on denial, prohibition, marginalisation, loss, and exclusion.

Reid expresses in an interview her discomfort about a female collusion in sustaining the state's traditional value systems. Relating to *Tea in a China Cup*, Reid states:

It's about women generally, and how they uphold traditions and beliefs which are positively harmful and damaging to themselves, because they've had it instilled in them that it's safer to do this, that this is what women should do, and no matter how unhappy women's lives are, they

tend to re-create the same thing for their daughters; they're not truthful to their daughters. (Qtd. in Foley 2003: 65)

The talks of women about sexuality only participate in the mystification of woman's body in the same way as the mystifying process of sectarian identity. Within this discourse of home, girls are socially regulated to grow to be 'nice' Protestant women. As Judith Butler puts it, "the girl is 'girded,' brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender" (Butler 1993: 7-8), and this interpellation is reiterated and reinforced by various authorities. In Beth's home, the elder female members act as authorities ensuring that the female member of the family is 'girded' properly and conforms to the interpellation of the gendered social code.

In the play, one of the "traditions and beliefs which are positively harmful and damaging to" women that Reid addresses, appears to be the "silencing of the female members of the family unit to safeguard against shameful revelations" in Lisa Fitzpatrick's terms (Fitzpatrick 2005: 330). Beth is brought up to inherit this tradition of Protestant women, and the adolescent girl's curiosity and questions are continually rebuked. Beth's grandmother responds to her questions regarding the Protestant values of keeping silent about the family hardship: "Because it's family business and it's private. No matter how hard times are, you don't let yourself down in front of the neighbours" (25).

Considering this mystification of the 'family business' in terms of privacy in relation to the subjugation of the young girls into the fixed social codes, Lisa Fitzpatrick argues that "[t]he adult Beth's public speech, therefore, and her revelation of family secrets in her role as the author/narrator of the drama, are a profound betrayal. They are not only a betrayal of the family, but of the community as well, revealing the carefully constructed facade of respectability to be only a front." (Fitzpatrick 2005: 330). Ironically, the family business of keeping secret regarding the familial issues has robbed its members of individuality as Beth says to Theresa: "I'm scared . . . my head is full of other people's memories. I don't know who I am . . . what I am . . ." (61). Thus, Beth's act of revealing secrecy is equated with the questioning the phenomenon of privacy accumulating communal

memories and traditions which impoverish subjecthood, fragmenting the conventions of feminine sphere of Northern Ireland. In this regard, Beth's act of keeping just one Belleek teacup and one saucer, while selling the rest of the set after Sarah's death, symbolises the reclamation of selfhood, "simultaneously preserv[ing] the culture of her past, yet also fragment[ing] that tradition, so that it is now incomplete" (Pine 2011: 136).

The Belle of the Belfast City (1989): Exceeding Transgenerational Paralysis

Set in East Belfast in the year of the first anniversary of the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985), *The Belle of the Belfast City*, portrays the family life of Dolly, a former Orange music hall star and now a 77 year-old grandmother. As in *Tea in a China Cup*, the play spans three generations of the family: Dolly's daughters Vi and Rose, their cousins Jack and Janet, and finally Belle, Rose's illegitimate child (not only fatherless but also coloured), are featured as main characters. Dolly's beloved husband Joe has been dead for decades now, and 57 year-old unmarried Vi is responsible for running a family business, a corner shop which is not profitable as it is "in a side street that the Army has closed to traffic" (182). Jack is involved with Ian Paisley's DUP party politics, leading the "Ulster Says No" rally. Janet has been married unhappily to a Catholic RUC member, Peter. When the play begins, Dolly and Vi are expecting Rose, now a journalist based in England, to arrive in Belfast with Belle, who has never been to her mother's hometown, in order to celebrate the anniversary of Joe's birthday. As all the family members gather, the play unfolds the family history, which is overlapped with the contemporary issues – political, social and familial.

While Dolly's family life has been conditioned by the problems of the public world and poverty, memories of the family history, mediated by Dolly's photo album and re-enacted on stage by the characters' play-acts, largely function to create Dolly's private world as distinct from the conflicts of the public world. Reid states regarding the play in an interview:

The play comes very much from my background – my grandmother and my great aunt and my mother and her sisters, you know, Protestant, respectable Protestant women to the last. Once the men were out – which was a lot of the time, because the men, when they weren't in work, generally were in the pub. So there was a lot of time, with the women and children together. And they play-acted. (Qtd. in Doyle 1995: 30)

Reid's statement is suggestive of the pervasive gendered politics of location in Northern Ireland. Yet Reid's dramatic world in *The Belle of the Belfast City* does not only bring to light the material conditions of Protestant women historically confined to the subservient role of supporting their loyalist men. It also dramatises Reid's interest in exploring to what extent the individual performance of creativity and imagination, which is often expressed through the characters' storytelling, songs, rhymes, and dancing, might function as a transformative source to counteract the rigid, political, and public performance of loyalism. Thus, as crucial as the playwright's re-engagement with the conventional divide between the domestic and the public is Reid's exploration of the role of performance within the play in mediating the domestic and the public.

When *The Belle of the Belfast City* was premiered in the Lyric Theatre, Belfast, in May 1989, some reviewers expressed their uneasiness about the use of songs, which led to their scathing critique of the play as lacking an artistic integrity. For John Keyes, who interprets the play as a "left-wing propaganda," the songs performed in the play are irrelevant to anything: a mere concomitant of Dolly's former career as a stage star, "without which the play would be 20 minutes shorter, and none the worse for that" (Keyes 1989: 27). Damian Smyth also chastises the playwright's ineffective employment of songs when he accuses her of "a notable lack of an ability to pursue each individually valid idea to a conclusion" and claims that this "lack [is] not concealed by resort to song and dance." Moreover, according to Smyth, the songs and rhymes "oddly" function to distance the play from its various themes (such as national conflicts, feminist concerns, and "the recognition of religious guilt") invoking a "kind of cosy familiarity" about "the" Belfast city that "no-one but news journalists feel anymore with Belfast; and then only when they're stuck in Stockholm or San Marino" (Smyth 1989: 42).

Indeed, the characters' play-acts mediated by songs, rhymes, and dances are pervasive throughout the play: not only do they erupt at points where audiences might expect more accessible narratives or comments about the related events, but they also function to frame the whole play as each Act begins and ends with Dolly's song (although Dolly's granddaughter Belle takes over the role of singer at the end of the play). However, since this initial response of the reviewers to the stage performance, academic interpretations of the play have hardly paid any attention to the formal and thematic use of the songs. Scholars of Irish drama such as Mary Trotter (2000), Imelda Foley (2003), Jozefina Komporaly (2004), and Megan Minogue (2013) explore the ways in which the playwright politicises the domestic in order to challenge the state's exploitation of domesticity. While the critics focus on how Reid writes the hitherto unmarked Protestant women's stories into the history of Ireland, they have not considered the roles of songs and rhymes in relation to the discursive construction of domesticity as a feminine ideal.

Paradoxically, the hostile reviews by Keyes and Smyth to the use of songs in the play offer a vantage point from which to consider a disruptive force of the realm that has been contained within the melancholic dynamics of 'retention-yet-exclusion' of the Northern Irish state. In other words, while the reviewers consider that the deployment of songs and rhymes damages the play's formal and thematic integrity, they also reveal unwittingly how the use of songs unsettles the expectation of audiences for more conventional or accessible narratives of the domestic, disrupting the identification with the entrenched social dichotomy on the one hand and revealing the process or the result of social assimilation on the other. As Simon Firth states, "Songs are not just any old speech-act – by putting words to music, songwriters give them a new sort of resonance and power" (Qtd. in Rolston 1999: 42). A new resonance and power that the play evokes using the songs and rhymes (performance in general) is that Reid calls into question the naturalised gender melancholia in the state's injunction to assimilate and identify with the ideal of communal unity.

Dolly's songs signify, at one level, the richness of her life as well as her humorous personality, powerfully evoking her personal history as wife

and mother. Throughout the play, Dolly playfully sings and performs often seeking for individual freedom in the feminine role, contending that marriage or motherhood for women is not necessarily always stifling. Dolly's two daughters bear witness to her (transgressive) optimism: she elopes with Joe Horner a fortnight after they fall in love; in the happy marital relationship with Joe she gives birth to Rose at the age of forty-one; after Joe's death she is able to keep up with good spirits in her role as mother to the extent that her daughters claim that there is not a single day when she is not happy.

Dolly's playful take on the motherhood mediated by her fluidity and ability to sing/recite her own songs/rhymes marks a stark contrast with Sarah in *Tea* who is a passive receiver (limited mobility due to sickness) of the Twelfth march band's music. Sarah asserts while dying: "the sound of the flute bands...always gets the owl Protestant blood going. I tell you, a daily dose of the True Blue Defenders would do me more good than them hateful transfusions they give me up at the hospital" (*Tea* 8). One interesting dynamics works here. Sarah is a passive receiver of the loyalist music illuminating to what extent she has internalised the loyalist belief with the effect of self-loss; yet the assertion points to Sarah's active occupation of the subordinated status by substituting the ideal of female national subject for her suffering, and the music becomes a medium that conjures up the Protestant blood of pride from the weakened and ill body. Thus, Sarah's conventionally suffering and enduring maternal image is always overlapped by her wilful acceptance and perpetuation of relegating women's experiences to the realm of secrecy, invisibility, and silence, which instigates a trans-generational paralysis of alienation.³²

In a sense, Reid re-writes the mother image in Northern Ireland and transforms the sick, immobilised, and staunch loyalist mother into the sardonic, playful, and liberal mother who often occupies the stage with

³² Consider how her daughter Beth's entry into puberty is upsetting in the mother-daughter relationship when the mother relates Beth's menstruation with the future frustration as if it becomes a condition of denying oneself and being denied. Sarah's self-transformation of the ill body into the ideal loyalist subject by attaching with the loyalist songs has another resonance with Dolly's life and death, considering Dolly's fluidity as well as her ability to sing becomes paralyzed by the male national subject (Jack) as she is resuscitated against her will.

other family members. The opening scene, for example, overflows with songs and movements as the characters participate in a dancing and singing performance in one form or another in the mixed time of past and present: while Dolly conjures a memory of 1958 and joins in the dance with her young children, Belle remaining “*in the present time*” watches the performance “*as if seeing an often-heard story re-created*” (180). This element of dance is also deployed later in Brian Friel’s *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) to denote an emotionally explosive moment of the Mundy sisters who were stuck in the claustrophobic cultural and economic isolation of the 1930s of the Irish Free State. As in the opening scene in *Belle*, a present time adult narrator Michael conjures up the memory of his aunts, and their bodily performance marks a moment of women exceeding the limited role for women within the Free State’s body politic. However, rather than an expression of freedom or release from the prescribed order of everyday life, the women’s bodily performance provides a sense of the women’s liminal or split status caught between the self and other. The narrative technique, the adult Michael’s all-time presence on the side of the stage, reinforces the idea of the performative moment as both explosive and controlled by the male narrator’s view.³³

Unlike the narrator Michael working as “a patriarchal control mechanism” (Sweeney 2008: 121) by occupying the stage throughout the play, Belle’s presence, also functioning to introduce and commentate on the events as well as the characters, does not claim for the omnipresence with the controlling power. Belle is not a subject of recalling past and re-enacting it on stage. She rather partakes in the action of the play as a present-time character, actively engaging with the past that are brought on stage by the former generations: Belle is an active agent who makes the present out by engaging with other characters, thus the past, rather than ghostly, gains liveliness. This absence of an omnipresent narrator (and the partial presence of the narrator engaging with the past together with other characters) makes the play distinguished from other memory plays including Reid’s own play

³³ Bernadette Sweeney states, in relation to the control of the performing body by the male narrator/author, that “Friel’s stage directions specify grotesque movement, near-hysteria and crude caricature” (125) For Sweeney’s full discussion of Friel’s play, see *Performing the Body in Irish Theatre* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

Tea and later Carr's *The Mai* (1994) in which the mature voices of women narrators control the mood and events of the plays. Notably, although generational story-telling or myth-making is central to *The Mai* giving full voices to the female characters of older generations, the stories are illuminated and framed by the presence of the narrator Millie, who remains on stage throughout most of the play, similarly to Friel's *Michael*. In Reid's play, the lack of a controlling narrator not only allows each of the characters to be a storyteller but also provides a less restricted space for singing and dancing performances. The sense that these bodily performances are equated with the act of storytelling in the drama is manifest in that which the performers are also storytellers. For example, immediately after the singing and dancing performance in the opening scene, Vi and Rose take an equal position to Belle as narrator when three of them take turns to introduce the past story of Dolly to audiences.

Considering this close link between the control/release of narratives and performances,³⁴ the characters' ability to sing and perform then becomes equivalent to their claim for the authorship of their own stories and histories. Reid's contemporary playwright Anne Devlin also emphasises the significance of songs and performances in relation to women's struggle for self-expression within the context of the ethno-nationalist conflicts of Northern Ireland. Set in the Catholic area of West Belfast, Devlin's *Ourselves Alone* (1987) begins with Frieda's frustration with the condition in which she is forced to sing Republican songs. Frieda's desire to sing her own song is silenced by her male colleague. While engaging with the play's main plot which illuminates an active Republican woman, Josie's failed paramilitary action, this short scene re-enacts the difficulty for women to find linguistic means to express and perform their experiences of the political conflicts within the dominant ethno-nationalist masculine discourse. Frieda's physical position at the centre of the club (and the

³⁴ In a crucial sense, a staunch loyalist Jack's avoidance of taking part in performances (and his felt humiliation when forced to partake in them) can indicate the contested nature of his narration (including not only his attachment with the loyalist discourse but also his anger-driven rehearsed public speech).

theatre) further highlights the alienated and othered position of women in the narratives (central but excluded).

Bill Rolston notes the inadequacy of regarding at a superficial level the Republican and Loyalist songs as mirroring each other because such abstraction ignores “the structural context of colonialism and inequality” in Northern Ireland where “the domination of unionism and the suppression of nationalism” was historically naturalised. (Rolston 1999: 36). However, Rolston emphasises that, though differently, the songs of each tradition have “contribute[d] to the perpetuation of their respective ideologies” in the way of confirming group identity and “creating and reinforcing a sense of community in the face of apparently overwhelming odds” (36, 42). Thus, Devlin’s opening scene speaks to the reality (though confined to the Republican community) in which the voices of minor group are silenced in the name of the communal or ethno-nationalist ideal.

Rolston observes in his analysis of loyalist songs that many ordinary unionists used songs to articulate their ideology, which made the terms similar between “popular expressions of ideology in loyalist songs and the representation of loyalist ideology by political experts” (45). Given the dominant loyalist ideologies that make “a sharp distinction between male and female spheres,” emphasising the centrality of marriage to family life and naturalising women’s supporting role within the domestic sphere (Sales 1997: 65), the paucity of loyalist songs articulating women’s experiences within society at large points to “the male near-monopoly over the public sphere roles” (Maguire 2006: 99). Frieda’s predicament in *Ourselves Alone* demonstrates the similar conditions on the Republican side. Indeed, one of the republican women whom Loraine Dowler interviewed addresses this point: “There are a couple of songs about women but most of them are about the men. It is absolutely desperate it is, the bold Fenian men. What of the bold Fenian *Women*?” (Dowler 1998: 170).

Megan Minogue notes that Northern Ireland’s “deep-seated religious traditions, Catholic and Protestant alike, have shaped the roles and structures of both the public and private lives of men and women” (2013: 203). Imelda Foley puts this reciprocity between nationalism and loyalism more forcibly: “The former’s dictate of the place of women in the home is

replicated by the latter's espousal of loyalty to the men of Ulster. The challenge to the relegation of women as literal and cultural servants is a challenge to the hegemony of church and state and, more importantly in Northern Ireland, to deeply held senses of history and tradition on both sides of religious divide" (Foley 2003: 24). Foley further maintains that in Northern Ireland "it was not a lack of feminist consciousness but a fear of voicing that hidden consciousness that has ensured the slow progress of gender equality in the twentieth century" (25). What Foley significantly points out here is that voices about women's issues (i.e. different voices) have often been equated with a threat to the social stability, which made women's movements crossing political and sectarian divides sporadic and short-lived, if not "systematically and effectively quashed by opposing political hierarchies" (25).

Given this context, Reid's strategy to make the stage flow with women's songs and dances can be understood as an act not of merely celebrating the domestic as separate from the violent public world but of giving the hitherto muted realm voices and movements that are not contained within narrow dimensions of physical space women inherited. Moreover, as Frieda's case displays, to be able to sing her own song is closely linked to the act of resisting (or affirming) a given identity – which is often associated with gender roles.

The transgressive nature of Dolly's songs becomes more notable when they are juxtaposed with the dialogues of other characters, providing both mockery and commentary on what is happening on stage. In one instance, by reciting loudly "Holy Mary Mother of God/ Pray for me and Tommy Todd/ For he's a Fenian and I'm a Prod/ Holy Mary Mother of God," Dolly simply drives Jack the loyalist politician into outrage. This recitation, however, is Dolly's jeering joke at Jack's old and blunt sectarianism expressed in his bigoted ideas against Peter, Janet's Catholic husband who is also an RUC member, which goes: "A Catholic policeman! It's the like of him who've infiltrated the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Corrupted the force into fighting against us instead of standing alongside us as they've always done" (185).

Similarly, Dolly sings “I am safe in the arms of Jesus” as an oblique but acute response to Jack’s obsessive reliance on religion which he uses to impose his own moral values on others. In the scene where Vi asks Jack to persuade Davy – deaf, a mental age of ten, and Jack’s admirer – not to participate in the rally as it is dangerous for him and it also worries his mother, Jack replies to Vi saying that “God works in mysterious ways . . . God will look after him” (190-1). This religious cliché, however, obscures reality in which Davy and his mother struggled to overcome his disability. Besides, it highlights the single-minded and callous compulsion of his political discourse which urges the sameness of every loyal man and woman under the leading political organisation. Faced with Vi’s insistence, Jack explodes: “Every loyal man, woman and child must take to the streets to show the British government they will never defeat us. Never! Never! Never!” (190). While it is an explicit reminder of Ian Paisley’s famous statement in the 1985 rally,³⁵ Jack’s outburst betrays the nature of his public speech, which he previously claimed to be done in a controlled and conscious manner – “Never speak without knowing exactly what you’re going to say” (186). Jack’s positioning of himself as a careful political speaker – and when he is conscious, his movements are also “*very careful and controlled*” (182) – is constantly undermined by his uncontrolled exclamations carrying his hysterical and excessive emotions of anger.

Moreover, unlike his own portrait of himself, Reid’s treatment of Jack delivered through stage directions feminises and even infantilises him. For example, in the opening scene which begins with the emphasis on women’s sense of generational connection, fluidity, and creativity expressed through the participation in performances, in that memory performance, Jack, even as a child, refuses to “dress up or join in the love and laughter that envelops the girls” (179). Jack’s rejection of supposedly feminine capacities for connection ironically leads to his behaviours that imitate

³⁵ “Where do the terrorists operate from? From the Irish Republic! Where do the terrorists return to for sanctuary? To the Irish Republic! And yet Mrs Thatcher tells us that that Republic must have some say in our Province. We say Never! Never! Never! Never!” (in Lee A. Smithey, *Unionists, Loyalists, and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland*. Oxford University Press, 2011, 141).

negative femininity: triggered by Dolly's jokes, for instance, "*Jack recoils,*" "*Jack angrily walks back to the shop*" (185), "*Jack is almost in tears with anger and humiliation*" (219). This dramaturgical treatment of Jack highlights the ambiguity of a notion of femininity – whether it is acquired through a series of performance of identity. Moreover, Jack's overtly misogynistic and stereotypical view on women delivers an odd resonance: for example, when he says, "Women! That's always been a trouble with this house. Women having secrets, whispering, gossiping" (193), the blame is partially directed on to himself as he both performs and denies femininity. Indeed, it is Jack himself who has a secret scheme to sell the family shop to the dubious English man, Tom and to use it as "a shop outlet for their propaganda" of the National Front (227), causing literally 'a trouble with the house'. This overlapped dramatisation of effeminate Jack and his shadowy business involving violence challenges the idea of a state agent as the modern enlightened man who embodies and upholds the political body of state unity or harmony.

Clearly, Reid exposes through the characterisation of Jack her purpose to dramatise the hypocrisy of political rhetoric and its exclusionary practices. Brian Singleton points out that the loyalist preoccupation with sameness derives from their "fear not only of the 'other' side or political affiliation, but fear of the other within one's own community, a fear that there might be more than one singular narrative" which is also underwritten in their promotion of "one masculinity" (Singleton 2011: 17). Reid's understanding of loyalist practices as the struggle for masculine supremacy is matched with Singleton's observation of loyalism as the struggle for a single narrative that regards the other as threat – the object to exclude from the nation's narrative. As Singleton maintains, in Northern Ireland there were campaigns led by Ian Paisley in the late 1970s and the 1980s "not only against Catholics for their so-called heretical beliefs but also against those he considered a danger to the compulsory and 'native' heterosexuality of the settler society of Unionists" (17). Within this context, Reid's characterisation of Jack as self-consciously upholding rational masculinity and yet often slipping into effeminate behaviour deftly reveals the oddity of the exclusive loyalist narratives. This ironic masculine hegemony, according

to Singleton, does not only originate from loyalist men's "imagined" hegemonic status in the sense that it is based on the notion of Protestant supremacy whilst their social and economic status has nothing to do with the hegemonic power. The ironic nature of masculine hegemony is also the legacy of Northern Ireland's colonial history in which the conflation of different mentalities of loyalist men, the frontier mentality and the siege mentality, has contested the practices of 'pure' masculinity in the performance of loyalism. Significantly, the rally Jack organises against the British government is a heightened expression of this contested hegemony of loyalist men – hegemonic masculinity transformed into the protest masculinity "against the British politicians for abandoning them" (Singleton 2011, 161).

This question of ironic masculinity is summed up in Jack's rehearsed speech for the rally: "We are at war with the British government, . . . We will never submit to the conspiracy of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Fight the good fight. Rejoice in your strength. But beware of complacency. For therein lies weakness. And weakness may be seduced by that other great conspiracy – the corruption and perfidy of Rome" (241). While the contour of Jack's speech is a reminder of Paisley's speech in his 1985 rally, its monotony is driven by his Cyclopean animosity and the phantasmal belief in power. Besides, Jack's fear of effeminate lapse, as in the case of Jack the Scalp in Deevy's *In Search of Valour*, is transformed into the fanatic horror of degradation that female sexuality might bring about: "Guard our women. . . Lest they succumb to the insidious evil that festers and grows in our land. The phallic worship of priests in scarlet and gold. The pagan rites of black nuns. Sisters of satan. Sisters of sin. Defilers of man's. Guard your mother. Guard your daughters. Guard your sisters and wives. And may God guard us lest we weaken and yield to Unholy Desire" (242). While revealing his protest against both the corruption of Catholic Church and the politics of the British government, Jack's speech feminises Catholicism by equating it with women's moral weakness and at the same time, it exposes the extent to which loyalist masculine identity is played out on woman's body and sexuality. Furthermore, by putting the stage direction which relates Jack's speech to a sexual performance – "[...] by the end of the speech he is in the

state of masturbatory ecstasy,” (242) – the playwright removes the mask of rationality from the political speech Jack aspires to, revealing what has been hidden behind the mask: sexual insecurity.

Reid also introduces the link between sexual insecurity and the political life in the scenes where Jack’s desire to control and possess Janet’s body is highlighted. In one scene, Janet is situated centre stage between Jack and Peter, her husband, and both men claim their love for her. In the process, Janet reveals her unconsummated fifteen years’ marital life and the fact that she married Peter because “he was everything [Jack] was not. Quiet. Gentle. Kind” (210). Mysteriously conflating, or even confusing, Jack’s violent control and Peter’s “gentle” negation of her body through their dialogues performed in the manner of liturgy, Janet draws a link between the two men’s desires for her as sister and wife, asserting: “A devil and a saint are the same thing. Afraid of women. Afraid we will tempt you. Afraid we won’t. They say there are no women in Ireland. Only mothers and sisters and wives” (209-10). While Jack and Peter act as personification of certain value systems – Jack as a loyalist politician and Peter as a Catholic missionary who joined RUC for peace and reconciliation – both men attain their “authoritative public bodies” (Landes 1998: 148) by stoically separating them from instinct. By exhibiting their superiority to the somatic relations, they turn their bodies into the location of abstract value systems – ultimately a paradoxical position of what Dorinda Outram calls “a body which [is] also a non-body” (Qtd. in Landes: 149).

Another occasion where Dolly’s song is prominent features the memory of smuggling goods from Dublin through the check-point in the year of 1959. Here, Dolly’s song and dance, performed together with Vi, Rose, and Janet, contest the forceful process of body search. Dolly’s story suggests a violent nature of body search: “For a minute I thought he was considerin’ takin’ us off the train for a body search. They took my cousin Annie off the train one time. Made her take all her clothes off. Every stich. Mortified she was. Particularly when they found the two bottles of whiskey an’ the hundred John Players she’d hid in her knickers” (202). Begoña Aretxaga argues in an article “strip searches as part of a colonial history which produced the Irish body as an ethnised, feminised, inferior body”

(Aretxaga 2001: 6). Strip searches are a gendered form of political domination that is used to inflict “a political and psychological wound” on rebels: following Aretxaga’s expression, it is a “technology” of the domineering power to control rebellious bodies, “a fantasy screen of detached objectivity in the management of bodies that masks a desire for total control, a *jouissance* that wildly exceeds the calculated rationality of punishment” (Aretxaga 2001: 1, 6). Although this scene of the customs check-point is set in the late 1950s, the re-enactment of the memory in the present time of the late 1980s implicates the unfinished colonial history of Northern Ireland, which the play indicates through the appearance of a British customs officer. The scene also invokes the issue of the feminised body of imprisoned IRA men, or more specifically in this context, strip searches carried on women prisoners in the 1980s.

The point here, however, is the pervasiveness of such extreme violence on “ordinary” bodies – Protestant bodies, unarmed but hiding sausages, whisky and cigarettes. The female characters transform this precarious moment into a delightful dance performance that involves the act of revealing smuggled goods. This expression of joy, together with Dolly’s humorous manner of telling the story of strip search, uncannily matches with the vulnerable condition of life in Northern Ireland in which the exposure to violence in everyday life and its normalisation take place in imbrication. Belle has a vantage point as an outsider to see through the process:

I wasn’t frightened by the bomb scare, but I was frightened by their complacency, by their irritated acceptance that it’s a normal part of everyday life, like being searched before entering the shops. The situation has existed for so long now that the people have come to accept the abnormal as normal. Armed soldiers in suburban streets. Armed police in armoured cars. An acceptable level of violence. (213)

At the same time, the performances demonstrate the female characters’ potential to transgress the borders (in both geographical and cultural sense) that function to contain woman’s body in a specific location. This female transgression acquires its meaning as it resists the coercive power of the state discourses conferring the private-realm identities on women. Hannah

Arendt identifies this private-realm with the irresistible, constative, and uncreative condition of embodiment “where no beginning and no end exist and where all natural things swing in changeless, deathless, repetition” (Arendt 1958: 96). Reid’s characterisation of female transgression through creative story-telling, songs, and performances, then, counteracts Arendt’s notion of private-realm identities and asserts that “the private realm is where the new action is’, in so far as the unmasking of structures of female subordination is concerned” (Dietz 1991: 245). However, Reid does so in a way to complicate some feminists’ elevation of women’s space, reproductive nature, and traditional activities.

The play discloses from its beginning that Dolly’s self-claimed independent choice for happy marriage, expressed in her first songs, has been compromised: Dolly had to quit her career as a musical dancer leading to dependency on her husband Joe, and it is not Dolly but Vi who has been responsible for sustaining the family life – Vi had to sacrifice her school education for the support of running the family shop. And indeed, Dolly on stage is mostly preoccupied with nothing but looking at the family album and recalling the past experiences. To this extent, Dolly’s sense of freedom – “I was never a housewife” (195) – is closely intertwined with her very ‘in-activity,’ and her self-respect or maturity is measured only in terms of role given to her within the specific location – as wife and mother. Thus, Dolly’s songs can be acknowledged at some points as affirmation of her feminine identity, but only within the limited scope that the playwright allows for her. In other words, Dolly’s maternal power of unifying the family, or her humanitarian ability to see past the stigma of illegitimacy embodied in Belle’s skin colour, or her emotional strength to embrace Janet’s extramarital relationship, remains absolutely bound to her individual family unit – as Dolly says to Belle: “Well, I can tell you all about the family. But as for Ireland, I’ve lived here all my life and I still can’t make head nor tail of it. Better leave that to them clever professors at your university” (194). Dolly’s self-claimed ignorance of the politics of Ireland is potentially ironic considering its symbolic centrality to the nation state. Moreover, her willing separation of her private world from the political world of the outside reveals the extent to which the spatial politics has cultivated the gendered

idea of home where women are left to ‘chat’ over tea about their ‘personal’ views about their world.

Reid shows that a tradition of East Belfast full of songs, rhymes, stories and recitations, while it redeems women’s capacities for connection through performance, is embedded in the social and political context of Northern Ireland. The social quality of performance, for example, is manifest in a moment when the estranged relationship between the cousins Vi and Jack is reconciled through a singing performance, initiated by their innocent and intimate childhood memory.³⁶ The lyrics of the song, which depict the explicit sectarian hatred celebrating the Protestant flute and music’s resilient survival against the player’s betrayal, are far from the two performers’ gesture of reconciliation. And their performance illuminates that children’s songs are not immune from the political structure of society: hence the innocence of the private realm (as pure and non-political) is not to be easily assumed. The adult life – represented by the established ideas of the singers, for instance, in Jack’s bigotry and Vi’s unquestioning faith in loyalism – has been constructed through such songs.

In many ways, as Tom Maguire argues, *The Belle of the Belfast City* may be considered to present “a long-standing tradition within Troubles dramas” in the sense that the play elevates the domestic realm as having humanist values of caring, peace-loving, and individual freedom against the state’s dogmatic rhetoric and violence (Maguire 2006: 113, 151-2). Based on the division of between the personal/domestic and the political/public, the play links the political to Jack’s fanatic faith in loyalism. By associating Jack’s political activities with gangsterism through Rose’s arguments that “Jack is a gangster,” the playwright tends to de-legitimize the basis of loyalist violence as ultimately damaging and suggest that the hegemony of loyalist men is deeply unstable. Reid astutely relates the poverty of the family to the state’s exploitation of the working-class loyalty: the family-owned little shop is hardly operating because the streets are closed off due

³⁶ This temporary moment of reunion is broken by the laughter of Dolly who has been looking at the photo, taken by young Rose, of young Vi and Jack singing the same song. Jack’s immediate reaction to the awkward moment of broken ‘pleasure’ is to blame “sly” Rose in the old time for interrupting the performance by taking the photo. This episode repeats Jack’s oscillation between the shame of effeminate masculinity and the aggression towards women.

to the on-going political struggles, and Jack is planning to sell the shop for the dubious purpose of the National Front. Furthermore, Rose's equation of Jack's political activity with gangsterism reveals how loyalist masculinity has been configured in the absence of a discourse of classed and gendered power relations, through emotions and violence – “angry masculinity” to follow Singleton's terms (2010: 180) – which eventually usurps the feminine space of home: after Dolly has a stroke, the home space comes to be sold to and controlled by a National Front ‘politician’ who wants to use it as a base for their conservative political activities.

Reid's characterisation of the mother role through Dolly and Vi who emphasise the family solidarity opposed to the public violence – lacking interests in any public issues (Dolly) or lacking the ability to see through what is hidden behind loyalist activities (Vi) – presents another vein of the tradition of Troubles drama, demonstrating what Maguire asserts: “This figuration of the mother role [...] is stripped of any political insight or analysis in order to serve as the vehicle for the assertion of liberal humanist values against the doctrines which are presented as the source of the division within the society” (Maguire 2006: 104). Moreover, the outsider (Belle) is “used to offer alternative perspectives” – the embodied expression of resistance (young, black, and English) to Jack's “loyalism as the product of false consciousness” (Maguire 2006: 151, 154). For Maguire, Reid's play follows this tradition of Troubles dramas which emphasises the consequences of violence – which Maguire regards as the legacy of Sean O'Casey's Dublin trilogy – relying on established stereotypes (stage Orangeman and stage motherhood).³⁷ Maguire argues that such accounts are rendered “the most apolitical” as they decontextualise political issues, attempting to “seek to identify the human cost of [violence] and therefore to assume the broadly humanitarian perspective that no cause is worth causing

³⁷ Discussing O'Casey's Dublin trilogy, Shakir Mustafa argues that “in his iconoclastic representations of past events, ... and in his insistence that the only possible outcome of political activity is indiscriminate violence. By presenting nationalists as pretenders destructive to self and others, O'Casey does not allow them to make their case adequately or persuasively, and he thus denies Irish nationalism a narrative sequence. Nationalist politics becomes a peripheral activity in his plays, since it fails to contribute positively to the lives of his characters. As an incoherent, destructive, and irrelevant narrative, nationalism in the Dublin trilogy lacks justification and legitimacy” (Mustafa 2000, 96).

suffering of this kind” (165). Nevertheless, it can be argued that at the core of the play lies Reid’s attempt to engage with the stereotypes at work in society and in literature of Northern Ireland, challenging the figuration of “gender tropes whereby women appear frail, vulnerable and become the protector ‘only’ of their immediate private spaces of the home” (Dowler 1998: 163).

Reid contends this gendered figuration of woman’s role by depicting the characters’ differing perspectives on life and the resulting conflicts of generations, exploring the site where the status quo is produced and nurtured and seeking for the possibility of overcoming the self-harming culture of violence (notably through the characterisation of Janet). Rather than being “used” to offer an alternative perspective, women are shown to struggle to find their voices, constantly transgressing the boundaries that delimit their movements and revealing that the body of the state’s subjects is not a ‘neutral’ one but “a body already invested with the meanings of sexual difference” (Aretxaga 2000: 7). And the meaning of the sexed and gendered subjects is constituted, as Butler notes, “dramatically and contingently through sustained social performances which take place in the context of the regulatory conventions and norms dominant in society” (Butler 1990: 33). In resisting the regulatory norms, Reid’s play uses this aspect of social performance of the norms – rather than women as such – which identifies women’s location with the domestic.

Rather than a mere reproduction of the conditions of women’s life, the play offers a critique of those conditions, which is achieved, as Maguire argues, by locating the outsider as an alternative. The voices of critique come from Rose and Belle. Although it might as well look like an easy and convenient solution, the position of Rose and Belle is a consciously wrought one to interrupt the established identity politics of Northern Ireland which forced oneness – operating on the insistence on one race, one faith, one flag, one crown, and one narrative. Arendt identifies a conscious pariah position with “a privileged site from which one can secure the distance necessary for independent critique, action, and judgement” (Honig 1998: 119). Thus, Rose criticises and unmasks the loyalist paramilitary connection with English nationalist activities; Belle identifies the absurdity of naturalised

violence and understands Dolly's wish to choose her death as linked to individual choice and freedom. Both of them are capable of embracing and communicating with others – Rose for Janet and Belle for Davy.

However, in Reid's drama this position of outsider is not always seamlessly privileged. It is instead constantly contested as in Vi's dispute over Rose's position: "It's all very fine and easy livin' in London and makin' noble decisions about what's right and what's wrong about how we live here . . . You've been on your travels since you were seventeen. You don't even talk like us any more. Talk's cheap. And it's easy to be brave when you've somewhere safe to run" (199). Moreover, Belle's position of outsider is explicitly categorised and reduced by Jack into illegitimate child born outside Northern Ireland; and her bodily visibility is marked by invisibility in society as represented by Jack's constant refusal of directly engaging with conversations with her. Thus, in Reid's play, the status of outsider theorised by Arendt is closely linked to precarity of melancholic others of society where their voices are subsumed and their visibility is displaced by the workings of dominant ideology. The elegy of Belle over the death of "the" Belfast city at the end of the play can be seen as a critique of the stifling discourses of loyalist identity politics that make the city a living dead with no future possibilities.

O the bricks they will bleed and the rain it will weep
And the damp Lagan fog lull the city to sleep
It's to hell with the future and live on the past
May the Lord in His mercy be kind to Belfast. (250).

Despite the difficulty of envisioning a different future, Reid presents an authorial hope and demand that Northern Irish society embrace differences in order to overcome the entrenched division and hatred. By giving the last song of the play to Belle, at the same time, the playwright affirms the role of the fragmented identity position in the creation of narratives that overcome the single narrative of loyalism: a constant retelling of traumatic stories of the Troubles not to consolidate an identity against another but to expose manifold experiences of pain and abjection in a way that challenges and

refuses the rigid and myopic policies of the Unionist state of Northern Ireland.

Conclusion

Reid expressed in various interviews her refusal of being attached to any kind of 'label'. In a 2002 interview with Imelda Foley, Reid answers Foley's question about "a feminist stance" in some of her plays: "I am very wary of labels in general and it's not particularly to do with feminism. I was brought up with a set of labels" (Foley: 2003: 60). This statement certainly echoes her earlier affirmation of label/politics-free art demonstrated in her statement (1983): "I think labels diminish good art. I don't make political statements, I present words and images that are open to interpretation" (Qtd. in Roll-Hansen 1987: 394). It seems that Reid's statement mirrors the aesthetic tendency of her contemporary Northern Irish playwrights to avoid directly addressing the Troubles. More significantly, Reid's wary avoidance of being labelled reflects Northern Irish social conditions in which traditional and conservative forms of gender prevail and, according to Linda Racioppi and Katherine O'Sullivan See, 'the generally conservative political ideology of unionism leaves little space for feminist reconstructions of unionist identity and politics' (Racioppi and See 2000: 22). Reid's statement also indicates a female writer's anxiety about writing "women's stories" in a society where women's stories regarding women are hardly received beyond restricting and accusing polemics of feminism or sexism. Caroline Williams states in relation to this plight that women dramatists have often faced: "One of the difficulties ... is that we are so used to men's images of men, and men's images of women on the stage, that a play written by a woman is regularly criticised for not complying with these norms" (Qtd. in O'Dwyer 2000: 238). Riana O'Dwyer extends Williams's critical comments into the issue of authenticity: that is, critics and audiences have become so accustomed to these "normative" images that "the representation created by a female playwright [has] not always [been]

experienced as authentic” (O’Dwyer 2000: 238).³⁸ O’Dwyer’s critical observation of the cultural reception of women’s drama indicates the persistent omission and loss of women in the representational field marking the paradoxical position of the lost other as present absence, and vice versa, in the melancholic narratives of nation.

Despite the playwright’s reluctance to be ‘labelled’ as a feminist or political writer, Reid’s plays reveal the political and cultural significance of illuminating the melancholic incorporation of the domestic into the hegemonic ideal within the militarised society. Many scholars of cultural studies on Northern Irish conflicts (Racioppi and O’Sullivan See 2001; McDowell 2008; Graff-McRae 2016) argue that the elision of non-hegemonic gender in the conflict narratives of the Troubles continues to prevail in Northern Ireland. McDowell, for instance, contends that the post-conflict commemoration of paramilitary men reproduces militant masculinity of the past. The ideological rivalry between Loyalism and Republicanism reconstitutes the process of memorialisation as a “war” of cultural memory as they still compete for the territorial and social control of the State. For McDowell, “this control is inherently patriarchal and is inexorably tied both to male solidarity and male competitiveness” and reproduces “the war time gender order/regime” (340). The contemporary act of remembering in Northern Ireland then highlights the present predicament of the State caught by the reiterated past, continuing to deny loss by means of wilful elision of it into the ideal of communal solidarity.

If the history of the Northern conflicts has yet to be confronted in the public act of remembering, Reid’s *Tea in a China Cup* and *The Belle of the Belfast City* that engage with the Troubles acquire a significance in their relevance to the contemporary gender selective act of public memory. By rewriting and retelling the historical moments of Northern Ireland from the marginalised group’s perspective, Reid brings to centre stage the memories and narratives of the domestic that were incorporated into a discursive and

³⁸ Mary Trotter sums up the difficulty Irish women playwrights face: “theatre by and about women remains ghettoised to the point where some women playwrights shun the term “feminist” - or even “feminine” - in descriptions of their work for fear of such marginalization. In Ireland, feminist playwrights find themselves on the margin of a theatre on the margins” (Trotter 2000(a): 164-5).

structural construction of social hierarchy. Both of the plays deploy the female characters' flashbacks to illuminate specific moments of Irish history of wars and conflicts, which have been traditionally a site of masculine narratives in cultural representations. In these plays, the communal ideal is sustained by the collective and exclusive identification with the public, triumphalist memory of certain historical moments. Moreover, Reid reveals, on the one hand, how the domestic discourses, combined with traditional Protestant values, reproduce the exclusive communal identity and memory and function to mould 'properly' gendered subjects of the State. On the other hand, Reid reconstructs the realm of domestic through diverse songs and performances of female members of the family and shows how such vitality has been lost in the public performances of paramilitary commemoration and violence. Through the portrayal of the domestic as both transgressive and collusive, Reid deforms the convention of conflict narratives that centres on the hegemonic paramilitary masculinity and regards the domestic as free from politics. In doing so, she challenges the perpetuation of the militarised community's erosion of gendered other and demands the public recognition of the melancholic erosion of the other in the national narratives. Chapter Four moves to the cultural narratives of family in the Republic of Ireland, which Marina Carr reimagines and dramatises in her Midlands plays, disruptively questioning the legacy of traditional notion of home and revealing the conditions of existence of those haunted by traumatic histories in the era of modern progress named as Celtic Tiger.

Chapter Four: Marina Carr (1964 -) The Uncanny Midlands

Reengaging with the Midlands Plays

Carr's *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996), and *By the Bog of the Cats...* (1998) are often named as Midlands plays together with her later plays *On Raftery's Hill* (2000) and *Ariel* (2002). Set in the literally 'mid-land' of contemporary Ireland,³⁹ the plays present the rural community, characterised by its "isolation and inwardness" as a depiction of Ireland that "the Celtic Tiger would seem to have left far behind" (Murphy 2006: 390). Carr's Midlands plays were produced at large during the era of the Celtic Tiger when the nation was aspiring to economic, political and cultural discourses of growth/advance: a time when people longed in a self-conscious manner to forget and avoid backward looking gazes for promises of the future as has been much interrogated and critiqued by scholars of Irish studies. The plays revisit the realm that the progress has left behind: the legacies of history that continually haunt the characters and arrest them from the pull of the future.

In his assessment of the years of economic success defined as "Ireland's speed revolution," Michael Cronin critiques the relentless speed of the period as urging "the repudiation of the past and [...] loud claims for the future" (Cronin 2002: 61, 65). With the era's unprecedented economic boom, late twentieth-century Ireland clearly marked a time when the nation's self-consciousness worked to move forward to the promises of liberal modernisation. The newly found national confidence through various legislations that spoke for the democratic change of political and cultural landscape altered the cultural imaginary of nation as embracing multicultural differences rather than caught by pre-modern, insular stagnation that had characterised Ireland up until the 1980s since the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922. However, as Peadar Kirby points out this newly invented Ireland was characterised by "a great gap between

³⁹ Most of Carr's Midlands plays are set in 'the present' time except for *The Mai* set in 1979 and 1980. The 'present' is implicated in this memory play (*The Mai*) because the stories are inflected by the memories of the narrator (living in the year of 1993) Millie.

rhetoric and reality” (2002: 34). He maintains that an “all-pervasive rhetoric of multiculturalism cloaks the emergence of an ugly racism, a continuing intolerance of the Travelling community [...] Similarly, a rhetoric of social inclusion masks growing relative poverty and economic inequality” (34). Moreover, the revelations about the historical cruelty and abuse of women and children in church-run Laundries, orphanages, and Industrial Schools retraced repetitive issues of public denial and refusal to acknowledge social realities, accelerating the nation’s desire to forget the old Ireland. This Celtic Tiger phenomenon, then, operated on the conflicting dynamics of confidence for a linear progress and resistance to facing psychological anxiety generated by the persistent appearance of the past and the hidden side of national prosperity characterised by deprivation.

This chapter explores how Carr’s drama responds to these cultural changes of Ireland, focusing particularly on *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, and *By the Bog of the Cats...*, together known as Carr’s Midlands trilogy, which has achieved a canonical status in contemporary Irish drama. The chapter offers a reengagement with the plays drawing on the critical concept of melancholia. Melancholia is particularly constructive for Carr’s trilogy because she dramatises the onto-psychological instability of the characters living, or failing to live, in melancholic modes of dereliction: they are trapped in the repetitive cycle of familial history in which they reiterate the denial of self, culminating in the protagonists’ self-destruction. Melancholia as a concept is concerned with the aggressive denial of loss, which helps towards understanding of Carr’s presentation of intense attachment with loss and absence on the margin of the modern progress as a way of imagining an alternative view of belonging and connection to the world and challenging the cultural logic of (anti)nostalgic positivism in Celtic Tiger Ireland.

Melancholia also offers a critical insight into Carr’s deconstruction of traditional norms of home regarded as grounding our sense of identity as well as genre coherence, that is, ‘realist’ drama set in the domestic. Carr does so by foregrounding the mystical Midlands landscape where loss is preserved in a form of inassimilable alterity and is repeatedly performed through the characters’ engagement or desire for the incorporation of the

very inassimilable. The unhomely, haunting nature of the Midlands landscape and legacy at once anchors and disrupts the characters' sense of home/self; the characters, through their constant attachment with it, reconfigure the landscape into a space for melancholic performance of haunting and being haunted. That is, the onto-psychological instability of the characters invades the outside landscape as much as the Midlands landscape invades the inside space of home and characters. The mutual crossings between the inner and outer landscape ultimately threaten the purported reality and coherence of time, space, and identity. The protagonists' constant crossings of boundaries between the past and the present, the inside and the outside, the living and the dead, the subject and the object are characteristic of melancholia in which spatial-temporal configuration is continually postponed. In melancholia, the spatial border between the subjective/internal-objective/external is ambivalently compounded and confused through the melancholic substitution of the lost object for the ego. The time of melancholia is also border-bending as the event of loss in the past is brought to the present, making the present empty, and the future is cut off. In Carr's drama the Midlands is, to a crucial extent, the spatial representation of melancholic time in which melancholic subjects desire for the future (death) that only promises the eternal return of the same (the confusion between life and death). And yet, the Midlands is also, though paradoxically, is a space where incalculability of the future can be imagined in a way of embracing the protagonists' sense of non-belonging and placelessness.

This melancholic performance of crossing boundaries is exteriorised in the formal disintegration of linear borders of time and plot structure of the plays as in *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan*. The formal structure of the plays prohibits the future of finality and closing by resurrecting the dead for a further engagement with the past. The melancholic structure ultimately transforms the Midlands' realist/ontological home/genre into an uncanny and 'haunted' mode of stage in which the confusion of real and ghost figures dislocate realness of the physicality of home (walls, windows, or doors, which defines home as a bounded and 'safe' space) and corporeality of living body as home of ontology. Through this aesthetic mode of the

uncanny, Carr's drama materialises the dynamics of presence and absence on stage, or what Butler calls "intelligibility" – the capacity to be recognised as subject, or possibility for a lived life, and "foreclosure" – the problem of unrealisable life or the policing of (gendered) lives through normative violence in the process of subject formation. (1999: xxiii, 24). Through the critical and aesthetic act of melancholising, Carr presents a way in which what is performed and visible on stage (participation) can be understood by reference to what is foreclosed from performance (non-participation). In so doing, she invites us to reconsider what possibilities of a community we are envisioning: the meaning of opening up possibilities in the process of social changes for people who repeat 'impossible' life within a larger cycle of time and history.

A number of feminist approaches to Carr's Midlands drama illuminate the cultural baggage women have endured and explore the issue of the protagonists' suicide. For some scholars, their death is defeat. For example, Fiona Becket considers that Portia's self-destruction (like The Mai's death) silences her "resisting voices" (Becket 1999: 91). Brecken Rose Hancock argues that the "nihilistic ending [of the plays] is disappointing and exposes Carr's own culpability in the cycle of repetition and mother-blaming" (2005: 24). For both scholars, Carr's engagement with matrilineal legacy of wound and patriarchal authority is not satisfactorily resolved: rather the female characters are given little possibility to achieve independence or creativity "within the confines of Carr's plays" (Hancock 2005: 24). Moderating the scathing feminist view on Carr's drama, Melissa Sihra suggests offers another reading that focuses on the precarious conditions of the protagonists' life, characterised in terms of "continuing decay" (2009: 173). In that death-in-life condition, the protagonists' "liberating awareness of the inevitability of death" (173) provides them with an experience of freedom. Similarly, Cathy Leeney regards the protagonists' final acts of committing suicide as their "final resistance [to] the impossibility of life" (2004: 158). Margaret Maxwell also considers their suicide to be a "proactive choice" that "provides an escape from a death-in-life" (2007: 416).

Kelly Marsh suggests “a third possibility” of interpreting their death, which “is neither defeat nor triumph but serves to illustrate the frightening continuity between life and death, the inaccessibility of finality” (2011: 129). Marsh’s onto-tragic approach to the plays describes the protagonists’ condition of abjection as deriving from their sense of ‘overliving,’ which is closely linked to the fate of tragic heroes in traditional plays of tragedy. From this perspective, the plays obliquely subvert the conventions of “patriarchal tragedy” (Wallace 2000: 87), conferring on the protagonists a position of tragic heroes, rather than simply marking Carr’s ‘culpability in the cycle of repetition’ to follow Hancock’s terms above.

While these critical engagements interrogate to what extent Carr’s dramatic involvement challenges the conditions of the marginalised and offers a potential possibility for the achievement of agency, they have not provided a fully discursive space in which to examine Carr’s way of bringing to light the characters’ melancholic ‘disorder’ – the incorporation of loss into the world of self – in order to disintegrate traditionally fixed notions of Irish identity, gendered roles within home, and possibilities of the outside world for the marginalised figures as well as of liberation from the legacy of historical wound. How can people who sense themselves as the ‘leftover’ of historical process and suffer from the inability to move on negotiate with antagonisms of the external world as well as the internal dilemma and conflicts raging from within?

I argue throughout the chapter that Carr’s Midlands drama interrogates melancholia of the marginalised group of people and reconfigures the failure of overcoming the mourning process (or of freeing oneself from the constraining cyclicity of established orders) in the aesthetic adventure of dramatic performance as politically and culturally meaningful. In so doing, I examine the ways in which Carr rewrites pathology of individual character’s melancholia in order to illuminate the uncontainable nature of the past, or loss, that exceeds the modern nation’s desire to forget and exclude uncomfortable elements of the modern progress of Celtic Tiger Ireland.

Emilie Pine suggests that (anti)nostalgia is a distinctive cultural phenomenon of contemporary Ireland, in which a distortion of the past

experiences through the work of forgetting and remembering has become a formative element of Ireland's remembrance culture. (2011: 7-8). Melancholia of the remembrance culture is manifest in its desire to fixate and consume the past as the knowable and accessible by muting the historically disturbing elements of the nation and by denying histories of those hidden behind the established white, masculine, Catholic identity of the nation. As the analysis of the plays will demonstrate, Carr exposes the unstable base of the melancholic attachment to the past and loss as a way of compensating for a sense of insecurity and placelessness of the present life as well as for the unknowable futurity.

Reconsidering Carr's Incorporation of Dramatic Traditions

While Carr's earlier plays such as *Low in the Dark* (1989), *This Love Thing* (1990), and *Ullaloo* (1991) present subversive and satirical challenges against traditional gender roles using the experimental dramaturgy, her Midlands plays adopt the more conventional style of mainstream Irish theatre: these plays deploy the strategies of realist tragedy foregrounding the onto-psychological struggles of the characters in the recognisable language and setting in the Irish landscape. The stylistic shift in Carr's drama brought her a national and international success that saw continuous productions of her plays both on the national and international stages across the United States and Europe: unlike her earlier plays that were produced in fringe venues, almost all her Midlands plays reached the Peacock (*The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*) or the main stage of the Abbey (*By the Bog of Cats...*, *Ariel*) with the exception of *On Raftery's Hill* which premiered at the Town Hall Theatre, Galway. Carr's more recent plays such as *Woman and Scarecrow* (The Royal Court Theatre, London 2006), *The Cordelia Dream* (The Royal Shakespeare Company 2008), and *Marble* (The Abbey 2009) share with her Midlands plays a sense of loss and psychological stasis. However, these plays do not foreground the specific locale of the Irish Midlands in specific time, leaning rather towards the surrealist mode (despite a linear development of the plot in *Marble*) in dealing with questions of

relationships, hope and failure, or life and death in the contemporary milieu of the world. Despite a “significant shift in style and form” as Sihra observes, “Carr’s thematic explorations display a strongly organic development from play to play” (2007: 206). For example, Curtain’s story of the unnamed man and woman in *Low in the Dark* continues to appear in her Midlands plays and later plays in “realms of alienation and emotional aporia” (29) reconfigured in the characters of Robert and The Mai in *The Mai*, or Ben and Catherine in *Marble*. I suggest that Carr’s Midlands plays, although anchoring on geographical specificity mostly exposed by the landscape and language with strong accents of the Midlands, are located in this author’s artistic ‘development’ in which she constantly enmeshes the subjective, existential sense of loss or inability to articulate experiences in society, whether in rural or city scape that is unable to adequately accommodate expressions of living.

The success that the Midlands plays brought to Carr was significant, providing her with resounding fame that few women playwrights of the Abbey had achieved since Gregory. Certainly, the critical and commercial success of Carr’s engagement with rural Ireland largely drawing on the mimetic strategy of realist tragedy is remarkable considering Singleton’s observation that “a largely realistic form and rural subjects did not reflect the experience of the young people coming of age in the 1990s” (Singleton 2010: 7). Moreover, as Singleton remarks, in the 1990s the “theatrical innovation” by new amateur companies such as Blue Raincoat, Fishamble and Pan Pan was increasingly growing and aspiring to the experimental forms that “were non-realistic, and often highly physical, and approached texts with a corporeal irreverence” (6). It was Tom Kilroy who observed the impact of social changes on the forms of Irish drama. Writing in 1992, he argued that, as a consequence of Ireland’s urbanisation in the late twentieth century, Friel’s *Translations* and Murphy’s *Bailegangaire* marked the culmination of Irish peasant play as “the most durable of all Irish theatrical genres,” which began “to finally exhaust the form” (Qtd. in Morash and Richards 2013: 117).

While Carr’s success testifies to the resilient continuation of dramatic traditions on the national stages, her integration into the

mainstream theatre and her return to the rural setting in the exploration of Irishness caused some critical anxiety. As seen above, much of feminist criticism on Carr's Midlands plays was anxiously concerned with Carr's dramatisation of female agency, pointing to how Carr's acceptance of the dramatic traditions might be problematic from the perspective of certain brands of feminism. As Clare Wallace notes, "[f]rom the perspective of positive, politically aggressive feminism, Carr's work might be said to have developed in a negative sense veering from a playful satirical feminism to grim patriarchal tragedy" (2000: 87). In a different vein, Victor Merriman compares Carr's drama to her contemporary Martin McDonagh's plays, criticising both of them for serving the taste of a neocolonial elite through "staging Ireland as a benighted dystopia," and offering "a kind of voyeuristic aperture on the antics of white trash" and revealing rural Ireland and culture as best left behind (Merriman 2006: 273-4). Merriman's criticism emerges at large from the disparity between Irish theatre's location in the macrostructure of global production and consumption and what it stages for international bourgeois middle-class audiences.

Though potent, Merriman's attempt to view both Carr and McDonagh within the same framework has been challenged by various theatre scholars. For example, Lionel Pilkington considers: "far from confirming and celebrating the bourgeois conventions of the audience," Carr's plays suggest that "it is exactly these conventions that need to be challenged insofar as they tend to conceal, simplify and distort the more complex realities of desire and repression" (Pilkington 2010: 76). Thus, for Pilkington, Carr's plays differ from McDonagh's drama that presents rural Ireland as best "to be abandoned, and quickly," offering "a sequence of actions and characters that appear bizarre, exotic, violent, comically entertaining and – crucially – without any ethical framework of their own" (Pilkington 2010: 70-1).⁴⁰ Although Pilkington did not directly take on

⁴⁰ Patrick Lonergan suggests, however, that the difficulty of interpreting McDonagh's plays derives to some extent from critics' attempts to frame his works within national discourses which lead to the failure to see "postmodern pastiche" in his drama (Lonergan 2010: 124). For Lonergan, McDonagh's plays should thus be seen beyond the categories of authenticity and inauthenticity because representing authentic Ireland is not his aim: his plays are rather "self-evidently inauthentic" (111) using the familiar landscapes of the local only as a

Merriman's criticism on Carr's drama, his recognition of Carr's plays as challenging the working of modernisation process confronts Merriman's view that Carr exploits the stage Irishness for middle-class global audiences.

Audience receptions of Carr's plays reveal that her work illuminates the global modernisation as a process that involves not only the work of forgetting but also the attachment to the nostalgic past. For example, after the 2001 Pittsburgh premiere of Marina Carr's *Portia Coughlan*, an audience member complained about the play as "positively disgusting." The critique continued: "The Irish may drink and swear and fight but surely not as they were portrayed in the play (if that's what you call it). My kind of Irish are not interested in such trash" (Sihra 2005: 180). This comment brings together the central issues surrounding the notion of stage Irishman and raises some questions about how "the politics of identity and authenticity are predicated upon the dynamic of exclusion" (Sihra 2005: 181). The audience's response also epitomises the selective work of forgetting and remembering in global theatres: Irishness could be remembered and staged as 'other' (stage Irishman) but it should be 'authentic', which in this case indicates a nostalgic version of Irishness, thus transforming the nation's cultural identity into the realm of romantic other. What the patron desires to exclude and forget is the represented 'morbidity' of Ireland which Carr expresses through the protagonist's terrifying rejection of her role as mother/wife and her destructive (incestuous) attachment to the dead twin brother. Given the disturbing revelation of the abuse of the church and state power in the 1990s, however, the audience's attachment to 'his kind of Irish' raises a question whether the social and institutional desire of excluding and silencing 'the undesirable' has not been deepening the social malady.

The audience's reaction thus shows how Carr's drama disrupts the collective identification with the idealised Irishness and unmasks the

marker to help international audiences' understanding of the plots of his plays. In this regard, the locations where his plays are set should be considered on a different plane from, for instance, Carr's Midlands which is a site where Carr challenges both Irish national and nationalist discourses that have transformed the female body into a symbol of the nation and gendering globalisation in which gender is presented in limited ways (165-175).

process of exclusion in the formation of shared identity through the experiences of theatre performances. As Sihra notes,

Each one of Carr's plays explicitly reveals the rupture or increasing void created by the diminished authorities of church, family and state in Ireland. While Carr's theatre may privilege the remote, the rural, the local and the mythic, her vision is fundamentally recalcitrant to ahistorical bucolic and romantic representations of Irishness, most specifically in terms of landscape/place, language, the family, patriarchy and the Irish women and/or mother figure. (2005: 181)

Carr's incorporation of traditional dramaturgy, from this perspective, is a strategic mode, rather than a mere exploitation of established genre, in which to engage with the negative double of the modern nation that it firmly believes is buried in the remote past – the ghosts haunting the modern community and nation just like those in/on Carr's plays/stages manifesting their presence in various forms.

I suggest that this strategic mode is to *melancholise* the existing genre. As Jonathan Flatly defines, the word melancholising:

suggests that melancholy might not just be a mood state into which one falls, or which descends on one like bad weather. Instead, melancholising is something one does: longing for lost loves, brooding over absent objects and changed environments, reflecting on unmet desires, and lingering on events from the past. It is a practice that might, in fact, produce its own kind of knowledge. (Flatley 2008: 2)

That is, the lens of *melancholising* proposes that Carr's reengagement with traditional dramaturgy is an active and passionate participation in, rather than a total refusal of, mainstream theatre in order to challenge a hegemonic vision of identity by unsettling audiences' subjective/collective attachment to various cultural stereotypes relying on the borders of femininity and masculinity, bodies and non-bodies, or the living and the dead. The unsettling of various borders, characteristic of symptoms of melancholia, turns Carr's apparent realist drama to the performative aesthetics of melancholic uncanny. That is, the melancholic confusion of borders of time, space, and identity enables the performance of disclosure of, or engagement with, alterity of the modern nation: alterity that the audience above defined through the word "trash," which ironically indicates the existence of abjected body, of inassimilable elements of society that cannot be

incorporated into the cultural and political play of identifications. As we will see in the section below, Carr's Midlands is a cultural, geographical, and metaphorical embodiment not only of the melancholic negotiations between conflicting forces and desires of possessing (incorporating) and being possessed (incorporated), but also of the melancholic unsettling of any fixed notions of identity, as Carr relates the space to ambivalence and instability manifest in a character's description of the Midlands bog, "always shiftin' and changin' and coddin' the eye," in *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998: 267).

The Midlands in Context

Locating the female subjects' alienation in the dysfunctional family of rural communities geographically located in the 'mid-land' of modern Ireland, Carr's plays engage with the issues of peripherality and centrality in the contemporary context of Ireland. Dealing with the nation's established symbolic realm of home-land, Carr delves into the psyche of national power that has invested in colonialism's violations, thus repeating the patterns of domination. Geraldine Moane's psycho-social approach to the production of marginalised group identities in the postcolonial nation-state points to this reiteration of historical patterns in the Irish context:

Colonialism is a well-developed system of domination, with clear mechanisms of control which maintain the status quo. The post-colonial state itself is thus a system of domination in which positions of power vacated by colonisers are occupied by the native elites. It is thus predictable that a post-colonial state would perpetuated pattern of inequality and marginalisation, and it is likely that a post-colonial state would also be vulnerable to domination by outside forces [...] the pressures to re-enact dominator patterns of history come both from our own historical legacy and from contemporary global forces which combine to push us toward a path in which we recreate the patterns of domination reminiscent of colonial domination. (Moane 2002: 112)

Translating Fanon's view on a postcolonial state's precarious maintenance of colonial *status quo* into the Irish context, Moane's assessment of various cultural and social symptoms of historical legacy illuminates the ways in which postcolonial melancholia consists in the reiteration of a dominant and

punitive form of power, which both constrains and enters into the subjects. While also recognising different forms of resistance to the continuing patterns of domination, Moane argues for a forum for developing “new visions which can open the imagination to new forms of social relations which are not based on domination and subordination” (122). For Moane, this new process can emerge with the acknowledgement with the psychological patterns concomitant to the social developments.

Similarly, Brian Singleton notes how the economic success in the late twentieth-century Ireland correlates with social failure:

[F]or the majority of the population the Celtic Tiger economy was a complete myth. Forced out into sprawling suburban housing schemes with few or no amenities and not possessing the skills for this new so-called knowledge economy, a growing population of disconnected and disaffected youth was spawned and fuelled by a violent drink and drugs culture. Growing up in the 1990s for this section of the population the national imaginary did not exist and the myth-making of the economists for them was not reality” (Singleton 2010: 15)

The nation’s identity fractured by both the unresolved legacy and the repeating patterns of deprivation resulted in the self-conflicting vision for the future: the embrace of the other but resistance to a radical transformation. The manifestation of such anxious conflicts is evident in the results of the 2004 referendum on the constitutional right to citizenship by birth in which the majority of voters (almost 80%) agreed to the amendment of the Constitution. The fear of unpredictable transformation in the re-negotiation of the national identity generated by the influx of immigrants appears here as resistance to the foreign existence in the notion of national identity. Claire Bracken points to this so powerfully:

Nationality is imagined in this constitutional amendment in traditional terms; alterity is abjected outside national borders with a view to maintaining homogeneity and sameness. Futurity, as unknowable possibility, is literally rejected here” (Bracken 2016: 6)

What these critics of Irish studies share in common is a resistance to the drive of defining the national prosperity in terms of dominant discourses of growth and to the global urge to move forward.

In this chapter, I argue that Carr's drama challenges the collective drive for success and prosperity, speaking to a necessary process to engage with those outside discourses and histories in order to open up possibilities of rewriting the Irish identity that moves beyond the practices of territorial boundary making. More specifically, I argue that Carr's dramatic world features what Lib Taylor calls the "unhomely stage" (Taylor 2006: 206). On Carr's unhomely stage, the rural community – conventionally, an embodiment of the nation's self-image imagined as an orderly and coherent whole – is profoundly destabilised by unruly violence, transgression, desire, loss and pain. Its purpose, however, instead of offering a way of escape from it, is to respond in different ways to a diminished and fragmented sense of self as well as the sense of connectedness and belonging to the world. Indeed, Carr's drama does not provide any easy sense of escape, liberation, or redemption. The possibility for change and transformation is locked up in the cyclical space and time; the individual capacity for rationality continues to be haunted by the nocturnal memories and ghosts.

At this point the midlands as setting for hybrid identities becomes crucial. The Midlands depict the unhomely home that embraces placelessness of the protagonists and represent the centrality of the marginalised to a possibility of imagining an alternative Irishness. Carr describes the centrality of the Midlands to her plays through her personal experiences. Drawing on the Midlands' wild elements, which she characterises as "the open spaces, the quicksand, the biting wind, the bog rosemary," Carr goes on to say:

I find myself constantly there at night: lights off, head on the pillow and once again I'm in the Midlands, I'm wrestling, talking, laughing, reeling at the nocturnal traffic that place throws up. Now I think it's no accident it's called the Midlands. For me at least it has become a metaphor for the crossroads between the worlds (Qtd. in Gladwin 2011: 394)

In Carr's empirical accounts, the landscape expands into the imaginary space as 'a metaphor for the crossroads between the worlds' in which the empirical is bridged with the psychological, the present with the past memory, the known with the unknown, the living with the dead. Counter-echoing de Valera's utopian vision of the nation as "a land whose country

side would be bright with cosy homesteads [...] joyous with the sounds of [...] the laughter of comely maidens” (Éamon de Valera’s 1943 St. Patrick’s day speech; qtd. in Sihra 2009: 257), the laughter of day is transformed in Carr’s imagined space into the nocturnal experience of insomnia in which all the familiar sounds and figures of the daytime disappear into the nocturnal stream, something that the place hides from visibility in the sun but ‘throws up’ in the dark.

Clare Wallace relates this darkness of the Midlands to the “traumatic unstable space of subjectivity” and suggests that the “primary importance of [the Midlands in Carr’s drama] is derived from its metaphorical dimensions, as a no-man’s land, a claustrophobic zone of entrapment, a state of mind, and ultimately as a dystopia” (2001: 436, 438). Pointing out the limitation of a feminist reading of the Midlands plays that focuses on the protagonists’ “capacity for liberatory imagination,” Wallace suggests that Carr’s drama is “not an attempt to represent (contemporary Irish) women’s experience in any literal or realistic manner” (2001: 435). She maintains that the major concerns of Carr’s Midlands plays lie in the characters’ struggles with their “chronic inability to imagine freedom and their subsequent descent into [...] abjection of the self” (435-6), which is an embodied experience of being caught up in a process of restless forward movement of history.

While drawing upon Wallace’s conception of Carr’s Midlands as the onto-psychological topography of abjection, the chapter also considers that the aesthetic construction of the Midlands illuminates a cultural space of liminality in which temporal and spatial boundaries are negotiated and blurred at both individual and collective levels. If the landscape of individual psyche of the characters melancholically defies any notion of time as a linear succession by keeping alive the past in the present, this psychic topography of melancholic subjects – the spatialisation of time that accommodates different times in the present self – is physically configured on stage in the wild landscape of the Midlands that preserves objects, memories, and desires of various times. The landscape reflects not just the characters’ status of mind or their inability to move on but also a locus of their cultural and social position that disrupts the national desire for a ghost-free present and future. As Sihra notes,

Carr's characteristic representation of the Midlands of Ireland renegotiates the 'stability' of dominant cultural tropes of a romantic, *green* Irish landscape. This *mid*-lands, or between-lands, displays an ambivalent poetics of Irish topography in its negative relation to the popular, romantically constructed landscapes of East and West. The indistinctiveness of the flat, black Midlands bog [...] radically counteracts depictions of the 'fixed' Irish pastoral scene, incorporating a simultaneous politics of geographical centrality and cultural marginality. (2003: 95)

It is noteworthy that, considering the Midlands as a cultural space, the rural landscape of Ireland has an iconic implication in the construction of Irishness: an iconic space on which the nation depended for its identity-making in association with the purity of Irish femininity against the colonial, modern, and urban power. Revisiting this issue of Irish landscape in relation to the formation of Irish femininity, Carr's Midlands plays attempt to imbue the landscape with forces of fluidity and openness that does not disavow changeable, unknowable, and even threatening elements of the past that exist in the present. However, this fluidity and openness of Carr's landscape does not lead to the notion of liberation of female subjects. Rather, it is a battleground in which the dynamics of the past and the present, preservation and liberation, entrapment and escape, presence and absence are played out. On the one hand, the protagonists' identification with and escape to the landscape is an act of imagining and redefining their way of belonging outside the traditional terms legislated by the nation. On the other hand, the Midlands, as a space where memories of concealed history are preserved, locks up the characters in the continued suspension of resolution, which makes impossible a complete escape of the characters from the burden of history. The protagonists' attachment with the landscape, thus, illuminates the way in which their escape from one space into another becomes a return to the past, to the forgotten or silenced memories of the past. In short, Carr constructs the Midlands as both metaphorical and cultural space in which the past persists as formative of the present: that is, Carr presents the past as having its own living force, ambivalent and polyvalent manifested in the landscape, rather than highlighting causality where the present is created by the original moment of loss in the past.

***The Mai* (1994): Building a House and Dwelling in Stories**

In Carr's 1994 play *The Mai*, I explore the ways in which the playwright complicates and problematises the melancholic bind of spatiality with identity. I focus on how Carr presents the eponymous protagonist The Mai's creation of home space in relation to a need to tell, or perform, stories as a way of seeking a sense of belonging in the world. The act of both place-making and storytelling is a way of claiming the rootedness of self in the world, or the reconciliation of self with society: as Laura Bieger asserts, the "yearning for narrative [...] springs from an existential need to belong" and a need to sustain our being at home through the capacity to articulate disconcerting experiences. (Bieger 2015: 33). The "needle and thread" that The Mai looks for at the moment of crisis becomes a metaphoric tool for building a house in order to recover from her traumatic loss caused by the separation from her husband Robert. As The Mai's daughter and narrator of the play Millie says: "The Mai set about looking for that magic thread that would stitch us together again and she found it at Owl Lake" (111). Throughout the play, Carr presents the metaphoric tool of needle and thread in a close association with the characters' act of 'stitching together' through the narrative-making driven by their hope it to be "an especially potent remedy" (Bieger 2015: 33) for their loss.

However, Carr's exploration of "belonging's narrative drive as a life-sustaining 'need to tell'" (Bieger 2015: 33) complicates an assumption of the role of narratives as remedy: it rather sheds light on the melancholic cyclicity of myth-making, or repetitive histories of wound, that absorbs women of generations into a further wound culminating in The Mai's suicide. By dramatising how the sense of belonging (place-making) is interlocked with myth-making through history, Carr challenges a static notion of identity and offers a melancholic site of being, embodied both in The Mai's aesthetic construction of house and the characters' life histories revisited by Millie appearing in the form of the play text. From this site of melancholic construction of home and story, I suggest, Carr invites us to question "how identities continue to be produced, embodied and performed, effectively, passionately and with social and political consequence" (Bell

1999: 2).

Being the first play of Carr's Midlands trilogy and commissioned by the Abbey theatre, *The Mai* appeared on the Peacock stage winning the Irish Times Award for Best New Play. As we saw earlier in the chapter, the play marked Carr's major shift from surrealism and experimentalism to the integration of a more conventional, mimetic dramaturgy of mainstream theatre, deploying a frame of memory play where narratives are filtered through the central narrator Millie and a recognisable setting of the domestic interior: a strategy used, for example, by Christina Reid in *Tea in a China Cup* (1983) or by Brian Friel in *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990). Carr's naturalist single set of the protagonist's house may look problematic considering that the traditional realistic setting of Irish theatre has been criticised for its perpetuation of the gendered division of space: hence we saw in the previous chapter how Reid attempted to politicise the domestic and blur the strict boundaries between the private and the public through the use of soundscape in the Protestant Northern Irish context. The domestic setting has been popularised in mainstream theatre since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Manifest in the 1902 staging of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, for example, the division of space has denoted the onstage interior as a cradle of personal, communal and national identity while the outdoor space being a politically charged space fraught with possibilities despite its unstable, or even unknown and undefined, quality. Although the image of the domestic interior often signified restrictive confines from which both men and women seek to escape, the interior onstage has invoked the recurring image of female figures at home, equating woman with "an element of space" (Cerquoni 2003: 173): women continue to wait within the four walls of house for man, an adventurous, free agent of time and space perpetuating the ancient mythology of Odysseus and Penelope. Besides the matter of gendered division of space, Csilla Bertha comments on how such a dramatic form has been exhausted: "[the cottage kitchen setting] has been much overused in Irish drama since the beginning of the twentieth century that today, a playwright shows either laziness or great courage to set a play in a naturalistic house" (Bertha 2004: 64).

Carr's turn to the realist setting, thus, raises a few questions: what does it mean to stage home place in the modern world in which women, especially in the 1990s Ireland, were beginning to actively participate in the public life and the nation was moving fast forward to the discourse of mobility and future development? Why does Carr deploy the traditionally feminine motif of Penelope's thread and needle in order to explore the female character's troubled sense of self and belonging? Does Carr's play ultimately perpetuate the mythical role of women within home? Or, does it create new possibilities of female selfhood through the performative work of repetition, that is, appropriation of traditional, paternal genre aspiring to the unity of narratives and repressing female subjects' disconcerting experiences? These questions are worthwhile to ask in order to reconsider some feminist criticism on Carr's integration into mainstream theatre as a "struggling to incorporate the ghosts of patriarchal literary authority into her writing while also striving to understand her place in the traditionally literary canon" (Hancock 2005: 20).

Contrary to the strict feminist reading of Carr's play as 'failure' of "rejecting the larger patriarchal tradition," (Hancock 2005:20), my approach to Carr's *The Mai* will attempt to explore the possibility of looking at her integration of the traditional dramaturgy as a strategic mode to make it an uncanny site, a mode of 'queering' the existing form, a mode of "working on, with, and against" the essentialised identity of genre, which is, to borrow José Muñoz's term, a tactic mode of "disidentification" (1999: 12). According to Muñoz, "disidentification does not dispel those ideological contradictory elements; rather, like a melancholic subject holding on to a lost object, a disidentifying subject works to hold on to this object and invest it with new life" (12). In Carr's drama, most compelling is the excess of otherness coming forth in forms of dreams, fantasies, and myth moving beyond the spatial boundaries of home as well as various storytellers' controlling power of their own narratives. Such excess of dream accounts transforms the play text, Millie's configuration of the family history, into an uncanny and subversive site.

Millie's narrative, conjuring traumatic events of the family through her memory, incorporates loss and ruptures of family histories into the

sublimatory rite of mourning, or telling stories, as a means of overcoming the death of her mother. As remedy for a sense of dislocation, thirty-year old Millie's performance of storytelling recreates and reunites with the past, her childhood in the year of 1979, encompassing histories of four generations, centring on the matriarchal line of the family – from one-hundred-year old Grandma Fraochlán, through Ellen (dead and absent onstage), The Mai, to Millie.

The play begins with the return of her father Robert after his five years' absence. The fact that the mature Millie "*remains onstage throughout the play*" reinforces the idea that dramatic actions and articulations of all characters are primarily filtered and inflected by Millie's vision and voice. For example, Robert's return to the house on Owl Lake is immediately led to Millie's memory of the day when he left The Mai: with "[n]o explanations, no goodbyes, he just got into his car with his cello and drove away" (110), for which The Mai set out to seek the needle and thread. Millie's narrative soon afterwards moves to the present describing her failed relationship with Robert linked to the memory of buying a shroud for The Mai's waking walking through the drapery. Because of the way Millie constructs and narrates her memory oscillating between the past and the present, all the metaphoric tools of construction of life (need and thread, narratives, and home) become enmeshed with The Mai's death and the entailing results – the collapse of order and connection.

Millie's narrative recreates the past in order to diagnose and locate her present sense of dislocation in the midst of her family histories, especially the death of her mother. Millie's memory narrative, as Rhona Trench remarks, "is directly related to everything that is left behind by the maternal abject" (2007: 102), which is interwoven with the paternal infidelity, or failure to provide a sustainable order for family histories. Millie describes her present relationship with Robert:

[...] when we meet now, which isn't often and always by chance, we shout and roar till we're exhausted or in tears or both, and then crawl away to lick our wounds already gathering venom for the next bout. We usually start with the high language. He'll fling the Fourth Commandment at me, *HONOUR THY FATHER!* And I'll hiss back, a father has to be honourable before he can be honoured, or some facetious rubbish like that. (128)

If the fight is regarded to be a struggle to hold on a power to narrate traumatic events and perform histories, Millie's final achievement is the production of family histories on her own accounts, marginalising Robert from her personal history. Indeed, while Robert is a central figure that shapes the plot structure of the play, his significance throughout Millie's construction of the past is diminished to a figure unable to be faithful to The Mai and family life.

While so, Millie's narrative also dislocates her disconcerting experiences by repressing the loss of the maternal and her sense of alienation. For example, Millie's unspoken desire for narrative unity, or refusal to face the messiness of experiences, turns the dead body of the maternal into an ultimately romantic figure of melodrama – the incorporation of loss into the narrative ideal. Millie cannot provide a full account of the scene of the maternal death. Instead, she lets the body appear very briefly at the end of the first act embraced by Robert's arms and watches it from a distance while narrating the mythical legend of Owl Lake. Only the ghostly light on the window challenges Millie's distanced narration, illuminating the precariousness of the correlation between the tragic fates of the women. The traumatic loss of the maternal also allows Millie's appropriation of memory through a power to narrate family histories. For example, the oddly inserted story of The Mai's experience in London of caring for "the curls of Arab royalty" (152) betrays Millie's disappointment with The Mai's abandonment of her children, strongly resonant with Robert's inability to remember her name after his five year absence. Millie's desire for the possession of memory and jealousy appears in a form that she represses the life (let alone the names) of her siblings from her narrative.

Nevertheless, Millie's narrative discloses disrupting forces that exceed the frame of her stories, and thus letting (hi)stories of the family invade her own power of narrative control. Millie's narrative represses ruptures but at the same time allows otherness to emerge as constitutive elements of her own stories and lived experiences of the family members, which positions Millie's narrative as 'disidentifying' with a reality claim of

memorialisation of the past. It is just like The Mai's house on Owl Lake that she builds in order to make sense of her self but is invaded by elements of uncertainty. Thus, Fintan O'Toole notes in his comment on the premiere production of the play that, although *The Mai* has a look of conventional Irish theatre:

the appearances are deceptive. The trappings of the well-made play – a set suggestive of a real house, fixed props, unified action – are no more than a rough grounding for the piece. In fact, the play has little interest in plot or in describing event. It works by evoking an atmosphere rather than by enacting a story. (O'Toole 2003: 130).

O'Toole maintains, if Carr invokes a porous and unstable world, the atmosphere of which is “doom-laden but not gloomy, compounded of myth and memory, of fierce longing and bitter elegy,” the created anarchy of her dramatic world “is purposeful, creative collisions rather than messy disorder,” showing the playwright's understanding “that realism and surrealism are no longer opposites for Irish theatre, that our reality is so strange that only strange images can encompass it.” (10)

O'Toole's appraisal of the play shows that Carr's dramaturgy exceeds the limits of a totalising vision of a realist setting that attempts to present the onstage place as unchanging and fixed. The atmospheric density that constantly confronts the familiar grounding of the naturalist setting is resonant with the uncanny arising “when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced” (Royle 2003: 15). When related to the issue of belonging (place and identity), the uncanny entails feelings of uncertainty regarding who I am and what is being experienced. In Julia Kristeva's terms, it has to do with the moment we come to realise that “foreignness [has crept] into the tranquillity of reason itself [...] that we are foreigners to ourselves” (Kristeva 1991: 7): the emerging moment of abject self. This sense of uncertainty is delivered, in Carr's play, through The Mai's remarks on her house:

This house – these days I think it's the kind of house you'd see in a corner of a dream – dark, formless, strangely inviting. It's the kind of house you build to keep out neuroses, to stay off nightmares. But they come in anyway with the frost and air bubbles in the radiators. It's the kind of space you build when you have nowhere to go. (158)

In The Mai's portrayal of the house, the boundaries between inside and outside, reality and dream, rational and irrational are all at once blurred. Something natural, regarding the role of house as providing an intimate shelter of private comfort and order, has been transformed into nightly experiences of strangeness. The Mai finds herself caught, without 'hav[ing] nowhere to go', in the grip of the invasion of foreign spirits whose atmospheric density is tangible like 'frost or the sound of air bubbles in the radiators'.

Alterity not only creeps into from the outside but also wells up inside of The Mai disrupting the idea of identity as personal property, my 'own' being, my 'own' sense of myself. As Nicholas Royle notes,

the uncanny is destined to elude mastery, it is what cannot be pinned down or controlled. The uncanny is never simply a question of statement, description or definition, but always engages a performative dimension, a maddening supplement, something unpredictable and *additionally strange* happening in and to what is being stated, described or defined" (Royle 2003: 16)

Significantly, it is with The Mai's realisation of her inability to grasp her relationship with Robert in absolute and romantic terms that she feels herself as stranger within her own home (or herself). The unsettling and strange mood The Mai feels in the house becomes a marker that disrupts her identity defined in relation to Robert, in which the meaning of house as a symbolic construction of her identity as wife and mother also becomes unstable.

The elusive nature of the couple's relationship is furthered by their talks about dreams. Questioned about what brought him back home, Robert responds to The Mai:

I dreamt that you were dead and my cello case was your coffin and a carriage drawn by tow black swans takes you away from me over a dark expanse of water and I ran after this strange hearse shouting, 'Mai, Mai', and it seemed as if you could hear my voice on the moon, and I'm running, running, running over water, trees, mountains, though I've long lost sight of the carriage and of you -. (125)

Robert's dream mirrors the legend of Owl Lake, a mythical love story between Bláth and Coillte. According to the legend, Bláth leaves Coillte under a spell for the dark witch during the winter. Not being able to wait until spring, the time Bláth is supposed to be back, Coillte travels to the dark world. In despair, because Blath cannot recognise her, Coillte cries a lake of tears. When Blath finally returns, Coillte has dissolved into the water. In Robert's dream, it is now Robert that pursues The Mai who is vanishing from his sight into darkness of nature. Contesting The Mai's response to his dream that "[he has] come back to bury [her], Robert says to her, "Not everything has to be final and tragic, Mai, [...] And dreaming about death always means something else. Dreams aren't that vulgar, they're coy, elusive things" (125). However, The Mai's response to his dream comes to manifest the transformation of The Mai's house into her graveyard in which she is buried alive: it is not only a premonition of her death but also an evocation of her death-like journey in life to the lost other.

The Mai's dream that she delivers to Robert has also a theme of pursuit, rather precarious as the dream involves murder and laughter. There are two stories included in The Mai's dream: in one of them, an old woman murders Robert, and The Mai finds it hilarious watching the murder. In the other story of the same dream account, seeing The Mai waving at him, Robert passes by her and says, "Not yet, not yet, not for thousands and thousands of years" (126). The Mai continues to describe her dream, "And I turn to look after you and you're gone and the river is gone and away in the distance I see a black cavern and I know it leads to nowhere and I start walking that way because I know I'll find you there" (126).

The Mai's accounts of her dream revolve around the desire to know the unknown: although she is aware, in the dream, that nothing is certain, she knows that it is the way where she has chosen to go. Considering that the description of a dream is also a story created or revised on the basis of dream contents, The Mai's accounts of her dream-journey demonstrate her strong will to understand her own journey in life, which will continuously slip away from her grip just like the dream figure of Robert who defers an encounter for now and ever.

Trench interprets that their dreams “mark a distinction between the imaginative and the actual realms of the narrative” breaking the “rigid categories of femininity and masculinity within the institution of marriage” (2007: 111). In other words, Robert’s dream of The Mai’s death, while bearing on his sense of guilt over The Mai’s actual death retrospectively constructed by Millie, realises his freedom from all the roles of husband and father. The Mai’s dream also “demonstrates subversiveness in terms of the role of mother and wife ... striv[ing] for a more valid form of relationship with her husband, even though she knows it is inevitably destructive” (114-5). The dreams of Robert and The Mai, in short, express their search for the “points of connection between competing needs and desires” (112), which is unrealisable in reality.

In a different vein, Carr’s rewriting of the legend through the couple’s dreams of pursuit illuminates the dynamics of seeing in a way of disintegrating the link between the gaze and the knowledge/power. While the ability to see is bound up with a possibility of bringing otherness into the realm of light/knowledge, the couple’s dreams manifest their fascination with something over which their gaze has no power – the vanishing other that is not the object of perception. In The Mai’s dream in particular, ‘a black cavern’ into which Robert disappears is immediately associated with no-place. But that ‘nowhere’, the strange and frightening contour of darkness, continues to attract the gaze revealing the nature of their journey as attachment with something that they can neither fully grasp nor relinquish. Millie portrays their precarious journey as follows:

A tremor runs through me when I recall the legend of Owl Lake. I knew that story as a child. So did The Mai and Robert. But we were unaffected by it and in our blindness moved along with it like sleepwalkers along a precipice. . . (148)

Millie’s narration articulates the play of knowing and unknowing through the image of sleepwalkers – their blindness. Cathryn Vasseleu notes that blindness has been regarded in philosophy as “a quality of knowing [...] difference in understanding rather than an absence of sight (Vasseleu 1998:

87)⁴¹. By associating this blindness (as a form of knowing) with their life defined as a journey of sleepwalkers, Millie's narration reveals their manner of living as caught by something over which their knowing abilities have no power. The living condition of sleepwalkers is characterised by its liminality in which the borders between knowing and unknowing, light and darkness, self and other are blurred, confirming the existence of "the indeterminate nothing which dissolves sight into a useless state" (Vasseleu 1998: 87), or something that exceeds the law of light and perception. The image of sleepwalking along a precipice is a reminder of their precarious condition of existence, the melancholic trap of paralysis in which their interminable journey of dying with no promise of future (even finality or death) continues.

Notable in The Mai's dream is the figure of the old woman who murders Robert, which causes The Mai's laughter. Explosive laughter of women at a terrible scene (such as a murder in the dream) evokes the mood of macabre functioning as a defensive mechanism that not only guards one from the fear of death but also transforms laughing women into a spectacle of transgression. According to Kathleen Rowe, such laughs, "incomprehensible and frightening" to the public, often "colour [laughing women] with the demonic or the grotesque" (Rowe 1995: 2). This association of laughing women with the demonic and the grotesque is depicted again in Grandma Fraochlán's dream:

I've been havin' woeful drames lately. I keep dramin' I'm in hell and I'am the only one there apart from Satan himself - And through a glass ceiling' I can see everyone I ever cared about, up beyond in heaven, and d'ya know the worst part of the dream is Satan and meself gets on like a house on fire. We're laughin' and skitterin' like two schoolgirls. Isnt' that a fright? (118-9)

⁴¹ While explaining the insomniac quality of the *il y a* in Levinas's philosophy, Vasseleu writes about the way in which blindness has been considered in the tradition of philosophy: "Blindness, as an 'unseeing in the eye', has been treated abstractly in philosophy as a quality of knowing, whether as innocence, denial, madness, sacred and apocalyptic insight or ignorance. Alternatively, it has been treated as a differential form of knowing, achieved by supplanting of vision by other senses" (Vasseleu 1998: 87).

While the murder of Robert in The Mai's dream can be interpreted as a displaced fulfilment of her wish, the absolute union with her husband,⁴² the laughter links her to the unruly nature of Grandma Fraochlán who reminds us of the old laughing hag in Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (1984 [1968]: 25). Grandma Fraochlán is now one hundred years old, living dependent on the romantic memory of her dead husband, nine-fingered fisherman. The tall oar of her husband that she constantly carries represents a fetish object for her loss, which is at times replaced with her transgressive openness to the sensual enjoyment of life. She shares her secret pleasure of smoking opium with her granddaughter Beck; she also rebuffs conservatism of her daughters, Julie and Agnes, whose actions and speeches are motivated by strict Catholic morality. When Julie blames her for smoking and drinking, and for not "obey[ing] two simple rules," Grandma Fraochlán responds: "The Lord put grapes and tobacco plants on the earth so his people could get plastered at every available opportunity" (138). And further along their arguments, on being chided for "talking about sex at [her] age," she claims: "what else is there to talk about at any age? You're born, ya have sex, and then ya die" (143).

The laughter in Grandma Fraochlán's dream, then, is the expression of ecstatic transgression and violation of rules. Melissa Sihra associates Grandma Fraochlán's excessive tendency of transgression with the "gleeful, disruptive ambivalence" of the Sheela-na-gig iconography of pre-Christian Ireland, which embodies excessive female grotesqueness and integrates "sexuality and death", as well as "creation and destruction" (Sihra 2009: 179).⁴³ Sihra identifies the characteristics of Grandma Fraochlán (along with other old women in Carr's drama) with that of the female iconography depicted by Lisa Bitel as "ugly, frightening, amusing, fertile, erotic [...] threatening, rude and exciting all at once" (Bitel 1996: 233; Qtd. in Sihra 2009: 180). For Sihra, Grandma Fraochlán's relentless expressions of sexuality and pleasure function to "potently combine the obscene and the

⁴² Considering Levinas's understanding that "Murder exercises power over what escapes power" (*Totality and Infinity* 198), the murder in the dream also expresses the impossibility of grasping the desired other within my house of being.

⁴³ Vivian Mercier describes the characteristics of the iconography in *The Irish Comic Tradition* (1962): "... and ugly make-like or skull-like face, with a huge scowling mouth; skeletal ribs; huge genitalia" (53).

erotic with death [...] challenge and complicate the discrete categories of birth and death” (181).

The central point of identifying Grandma Fraochlán with the Sheelana-gig iconography lies in the sense of continuity that they embody at the threshold between life and death. Sihra uses the term, “the organic symbiosis of birth and death” (178) in order to explain the nature of this continuity. In other words, she argues that Carr’s drama concerns with “excavat[ing] what it means to live, through a liberating awareness of inevitability of death and the cyclical nature of being” (173). For her, thus, the presentation of the protagonist’s death in the middle of the plays belongs to the formal expression of such cyclicity.

However, Carr’s drama seems to complicate the journey towards death conceived as liberating by the conscious being. Moreover, in the drama the question of creation and destruction, or life and death, appears to be rather ambivalent. To my reading, ‘the cyclical nature of being’, which implies the meaning of ritual wherein birth marks death and death in turn brings a certain type of rebirth through lamentation and discovery, is not easily promised in Carr’s play. The seasonal cyclicity of being and the world also marks the characters’ enchainment to the endemic cycle of being defined by the repetition of abandonment, which entails illegitimacy, abjection, and mythmaking.

The repetition indeed characterises The Mai’s familial history as expressed in the testimonial remark of Grandma Fraochlán: “we can’t help repeatin’, . . . we repeat and we repeat” (123). This living condition as repeating is evoked by Millie’s narration which shows how The Mai has transformed her home into a site of repetitive act of waiting:

The Mai sat in front of this big window here, her chin moonward, a frown on her forehead, as if she were pulsing message to some remote star which would ricochet and lance Robert wherever he was, her eyes closely tightly, her lips forming two words noiselessly. Come home – come home. (111)

Millie’s accounts of The Mai at the window provide a romantic and mythical dimension to her waiting, transforming her into the archetypal figure of Penelope, or Róisín Dubh. Moreover, The Mai’s mythical status is

further emphasised by her name: she is called as ‘The Mai’ by other characters in most cases throughout the play, which also implies that her living is conditioned and contained by the mythological legacy.⁴⁴ The mournful image of The Mai at the window is itself a repetition. Julie, Grandma Fraochlán’s seventy-five-year old daughter, tells a story how her mother habitually spent days and years waiting for her dead husband, “rantin’ and ravin’ at us or starin’ out the window at the sea” (145). The overlapping image of The Mai at the window with Grandma Fraochlán provides the women’s personal experiences with a particular sense of history, transforming the personal and familial history into a national history of women and questioning the limited image of women in cultural representations.

The Mai’s position at the window brings the dynamics of gaze to a focal point again. While The Mai constantly looks out the lake through the window, she is also framed by and looked through the window from outside. While this dramatic device enables the invitation of audiences to see how The Mai performs her longing or how she is performed by narrative performance, it also configures the protagonist’s existential form. The window that once divides and blurs the border between the inside and outside denotes Mai’s liminality vacillating between dream and reality, myth and history. Gerry Smyth notes that the “highly ambivalent” nature of the window goes beyond the function of “the architectural arbiter between inside and outside,” as it is rather “the physical manifestation of a fundamental ‘hesitation of being’” (Smyth 2001:155-6). He maintains:

The window is particularly revealing in this sense, for in certain circumstances (darkness) it can function as a mirror, reflecting the gazer back to himself [...]

⁴⁴ Mary Trotter offers a different interpretation regarding The Mai’s name. The name rather refers to the protagonist’s strength and authority as the head of the family, as the name readapts “the Irish tradition of adding ‘the’ before the last name of the (male) head of a clan” (2000: 168). Rhona Trench supports Trotter’s idea by relating it to The Mai’s house, built in the 1970s when the “typical custom of male-owned property [was] prevalent in Ireland” (2010: 115-6). For Trench, thus, The Mai’s house represents the subversion of the male-centred tradition, which is reinforced by her name. The house is certainly related to The Mai’s search for strength, hope, and independence (she is already economically independent as a school master) faced with Robert’s abandonment of the family. But in my reading, The Mai’s house also bears a cultural connotation of the feminine role within ‘the house’ historically passed on to women, and the name The Mai indicates a mythologised site of femininity, or the cipher, that has to be subverted and resisted.

If the window allows the subject to gaze out, it also enables the subject to be gazed upon [...] and with its demarcational, reflective and transparent properties, the window offers a suitable space for a ghostly presence caught between past and present, between openness and closure. (Smyth 2001: 156)

In the dynamics of gaze through the window, she looks out the lake; she looks upon herself. While the window essentially implies the possibility of crossing the threshold, it also enables the withdrawal into the self, and in this case the window functions to make the house and the self most exclusive and secluded. Just like the definite article in front of The Mai's name, the window, in this sense, functions to frame The Mai's existence, her retreat into silence. Rather than opening the window, which itself is an act of telling stories of her life and inviting audiences to her performance of storytelling, The Mai hesitates at the threshold unable to open a window for such invitation.

The Mai's dead body is also framed by the window: "*Ghostly light on the window. Robert stands there with The Mai's body in his arms, utterly still. Millie watches them a minute. Ghostly effect*" (147-8). As mentioned earlier, Millie's narration about the legend of Owl Lake also surrounds the death filtering her death and identifying it with Coillte's emotional death. At the same time, this scene may be a formal indicator in which The Mai is transformed into part of a larger cyclicity of the nature. From the perspective, her death is related to a creative activity: the understanding that her death (physical death) brings a form of rebirth, the creative reclamation of female agency, or "metamorphosis," to borrow Shonagh Hill's term, "where she [like Coillte] dissolves into Owl Lake, which functions as a space of creativity for her where no other is available" (2009: 48). However, the presentation of the dead body double-framed within Robert's arms and the window can be seen as to re-enact The Mai's other world as also caught at the threshold of being, the very ghostly being who is unable to articulate her stories, (not in the 'normal way in any case, to which I will return later) caught between Act One and Act Two, the present and the past, the eternal cycle of returning to the threshold.

Carr also problematises this issue of repetition by associating storytelling with mythmaking. The ambivalence of storytelling is revealed

in its capacity to build fantasy in which we accommodate ourselves and yet, unsettle this sense of belonging. In order to explore the ambivalence of Grandma Fraochlán (as the figure of creation through the grotesque and the storytelling), I return to the scene of arguments between her and her daughters Julie and Agnes. Grandma Fraochlán's daughters in their sixties and seventies respectively are the re-embodiment of mother figures (though unmarried) characterised in Deevy's 1930s drama: the figures such as Margaret Drybone in *Katie Roche* and Mrs Marks in *The King of Spain's Daughter* who constantly spy on the young female protagonists and act as masculine mother identifying themselves with patriarchal authorities. On the arrival of Julie and Agnes at the house, Millie says: "So they arrived in one lovely autumn day armed with novenas, scapulars and leaflets on the horrors of premarital sex which they distributed amongst us children along with crisp twenty-pound notes. Births, marriages and deaths were their forte" (135). Carr portrays their arrival at The Mai's house in a comical tone: audiences can easily laugh at their act of spying on the house through the window discussing the rumour of pre-marital pregnancy of The Mai's younger sister Beck. It is not, however, without sympathy. As the play unfolds, it becomes apparent that Julie and Agnes have not overcome the pain that was inflicted on them by their familial legacy of abandonment, which Grandma Fraochlán actively has masked through the creation of stories.

If Carr conjures up the mother figures from the 1930s, the reconstruction of them through the characterisation of Julie and Agnes is to question the matrilineal legacy of storytelling. While the storytelling tradition of women is often celebrated by female writers such as Christina Reid as realm of subversion, fluidity, and imagination of the female tradition that goes beyond the oppressive political and societal norms, Carr exposes the ambivalent quality of the female tradition of storytelling through Julie's pronouncement of the destructive power of Grandma Fraochlán's stories. Julie says that Grandma Fraochlán was "always fillin' our heads with stories and more stories – [...] she doesn't realise the influence she has over all of us. I'm seventy-five years of age, Mai, and I'm still not over my childhood. It's not fair they should teach us desperation so

young or if they do they should never mention hope” (146). Julie exposes here the nature of Grandma Fraochlán’s story as imbuing the children’s mind with illusionary hope, which is essentially linked to the feelings of desperation; and Julie’s statement here also points to the possibility that her extreme conservatism is derived from their reaction to Grandma Fraochlán’s stories (thus, Julie says she is not over her childhood).

We can glimpse at the nature of hope that Grandma Fraochlán’s stories planted to the children in what The Mai dreamed of as a child, a dream that “a dark-haired prince would come across the waves on the wings of an albatross and he’d take me away . . . “ (162). The Mai also knows that her longing for a fantastical life is a result of the stories she grew up with. She continues to say:

Grandma Fraochlán] filled us with hope [...] And her stories made us long for something extraordinary to happen in our lives. I wanted my life to be huge and heroic and pure as in the days of yore. I wanted to march through the world up and up, my prince at my side, and together we’d leave our mark on it. (163)

The Mai’s longing for heroic life is connected in her mind to “beautiful things in [her] life,” all of which she let go of in the course of life and marriage: she “did exceedingly well academically, and [she] was good on the cello” (163). The Mai’s disappointment at her life, far from heroic but ordinary and even banal which is portrayed by a ten-pound note, a birthday present given to her by Robert, and the *Cosmopolitan* magazine Robert brought to her from his weekend with his mistress (which she never reads), resembles the one of her mother Ellen. Just as The Mai gave up playing the cello, Ellen had to quit studying medicine as she got married, and Julie finds the root of Ellen’s unhappiness and inability to cope with life in Grandma Fraochlán’s influence and illusionary hope:

[Ellen] was brilliant, that girl was going places but there was in Grandma Fraochlán that must stop it, [. . .] She made that child marry. And at the same time she filled the girl’s head with all sorts of impossible hope, always talkin’ about the time she was in college, and how brilliant she was, and maybe in a few years she’d go back and study. And it only filled Ellen with more longing [. . .] the worst of it all, Ellen adored her [. . .] and believed everything she said, and that’s what killed her, not childbirth, no, her spirit was broken. (145-6)

Not just a fairy tale, then, Grandma Fraochlán's stories have functioned to make women's lives linked to illusion and trapped within the self-made "wound [of] mythmaking" (Hancock 2005: 19).

Grandma Fraochlán's fantastical storytelling, as the play reveals later on, is profoundly related to the familial legacy of abandonment and despair. She was born out of wedlock, and her mother The Duchess (the way how she was called by her own child) was anxious to cover up the stigma of the illegitimate child by weaving stories about the child's father as the Sultan of Spain. Grandma Fraochlán's name itself is a manifestation of the illegitimate blood: Fraochlán is the name of an island off the west coast where she was born, which identifies her with the landscape signifying her otherness, the outsider of the settled community just like Hester in *By the Bog of Cats*.... Just as Hester wanders about the bog looking for stories and memories of her mother who abandoned her, Grandma Fraochlán waits for her father at the cliffs of the island, which repeats in her relationship with the nine-fingered fisherman: she is reported to have been howling at the cliffs, wishing to kill herself and unable to overcome the grief of her loss. However, if Hester's otherness as Traveller (her illegitimate blood, her isolation, her identification with the bog) brings the insular stability of the community to the point of crisis offering a sense that her destructive act has the symbolic meaning of the destruction of the communal cyclicity of exclusion and abuse, Grandma Fraochlán's otherness, when transmitted to the next generations through the act of storytelling, functions to reiterate the patterns of guilt, shame and grief.

In a sense, her storytelling, though paradoxical, is a retreat into silence to the extent that it covers up and denies traumatic experiences: silence and denial, which Geraldine Moane identifies as "psychological legacies" of a traumatic history continuing in the Irish context in the form of institutional abuse "up to the late twentieth-century and into the present time" (Moane 2002: 116). Grandma Fraochlán's treatment of Ellen, then, stems from her fear of exposure and vulnerability as revealed in her confession to Beck, "I was afraid what everyone'd say, afraid they'd blame me and say it was The Duchess' blood that made her[Ellen] wild and immoral" (170). Her fear of Ellen living through the same pain and scandal

makes her force Ellen into a loveless marriage, and the stories created to compensate for Ellen's disappointment disable her 'spirit', ultimately leading to her self-destruction coming from her inability to endure the tension between fantasy and lived experiences.

Storytelling, in the patriarchal traditions of Irish drama and the larger context of Irish culture, can be the very act of challenging normative practices operating within the cultural and societal discourses. It is also Bieger's view that narrative is the artistic realm in which to articulate the meaning of ourselves and to obtain the potent remedy for the troubled sense of self. However, this most optimistic view of storytelling is 'troubled' by Grandma Fraochlán's storytelling practices which, rather than aspiring to a form of self-realisation, lead the women of the next generations to the shadowy realm of myth and the enchainment to the legacy of fantasy-making as a means to escape from gritty reality. Moreover, the characters of the play pronounce that stories they grew up with are rather a source of regenerating their wound and pain than a source of remedy.

This problem of cyclic regeneration of shadowy legacy does not end with The Mai's suicide as her daughter Millie also passes on the legacy of storytelling to her own child. Just as The Duchess did generations before, Millie weaves a story of "El Salvadorian drummer" to compensate the stigma of her fatherless five-year-old son (165). This insular history of passing on the myth-making, which Hancock relates to the "matrilineal residue" that makes women's lives remain undisclosed (19), has become a mythic discourse in women's lives that constrains the possibilities of narrative expression.

From this perspective, Millie's narrative has contradictory double forces: the exposure of the distorting power of myth-making, the constraints of which she finds difficult to break from; but the world of fantasy and dreams, its otherworldliness embedded in and yet exceeding Millie's narrative, becomes a site of opening up possibilities of coming to terms with the repressions of the legacy. Millie exposes her own imprisonment within such cyclical patterns of legacy through the accounts of her dream:

I dream of water all the time. I'm floundering off the shore, or bursting towards the surface for air, or wrestling with a black swan trying to drag me under. I have not yet emerged triumphant from those lakes of the night. Sometimes I think I wear Owl Lake like a caul around my chest to protect me from all that is good and hopeful and worth pursuing. And on a confident day when I am considering a first shaky step towards something within my grasp, the caul constricts and I am back and Owl Lake. (184)

On a level, Millie's account of the sense of imprisonment within the frozen stances of legacy, now expressed as her continuous return to Owl Lake, can be regarded as a projection of the playwright's position. Both of Millie and Carr are enchained to the force of various myth-making practices and yet, without returning to the very site of enchainment and without telling and performing loss and false legacy, the breaking away from it may not be possible. With regard to the issue of belonging through narrative arts, Hancock writes that, in the context of Irish literary tradition, the enchainment explored in Carr's play might be an expression of Irish female writers' general experiences as an "outsider in [their] own national literature [...] faced with a mythic culture that misrepresents them, as well as with the silence of their foremothers (a silence that leads legacy to become infected rather than healing)" (23). Hancock maintains that "Carr is perhaps expressing her own artistic inheritance through the damaged psyches of her characters while she herself attempts to recreate or re-envision female creativity by empowering herself through her playwriting" (23). Hancock's reading of Carr's drama, then, seems to place Carr as a playwright who exploits, rather than recognising, the peril of women's position both in cultural discourses and literary traditions in Ireland in order to empower herself. Echoing Victor Merriman's contention that Carr's plays (though his focus is on *By the Bog of Cats*...) serve the taste of the global and neocolonial elite by "stag[ing] Ireland as a benighted dystopia" (Merriman 1999: 312), Hancock's feminist reading of *The Mai* expresses her dissatisfaction derived from the play's "nihilistic ending [that is] disappointing and expos[ing] Carr's own culpability in the cycle of repetition and mother-blaming" (24). Hancock's criticism reflects on a feminist expectation that a female writer should "break away from the grip of the patriarchal past" (24) and move "beyond myth into a new, more

positive creative space” (25), which is to say that a female writer’s burden is in her right and obligation to configure a (utopian) vision about how things should be, an expression in itself of ‘unlivable’ condition of the present. Given the paucity of women playwrights accommodated at the stage of the national theatre, this feminist expectation imposed on Carr’s drama is not surprising. However, the quality of ‘a new, and more positive creative space’ Hancock demands is rather obscure: would it mean that the dramatic world should be the one in which characters overhaul patriarchal influences and create revolutionary bonds amongst female characters, based on the playwright’s positive acknowledgement of her foremothers?

Even though Carr did not mention any Irish women playwrights in her lecture entitled “Dealing with the Dead” at the Peacock theatre in 1997, the world of fantasy, as in *The Mai*, written by a woman playwright, was once acknowledged by the national theatre: Teresa Deevy’s one act plays such as *A Disciple* (1931) and *The King of Spain’s Daughter* (1935), as well as her full act play *Katie Roche* (1936). These plays by Carr’s foremother feature young women protagonists who are caught within the mythic visions that national discourses reiterated through the regulation of female body. In the realm of social myth where women cannot accommodate themselves, Deevy creates female characters who attempt to break away from the constraints of law and social regulations by means of daydreaming or fantastical identification with the other. Although their attempts to find inner security or freedom are not easily realised, the fantastical stories function to indicate the conditions of the marginalised in society: that is, how the marginalised people create the world of fantasy in order to deal with the sense of alienation and dislocation.

Here lies the value of Millie’s narrative as a site of opening up possibilities of coming to terms with the realm hitherto denied – the social constraints and legacy that stifles women’s search for home (self). Though admitting that the ghosts of the male dead such as Samuel Beckett, Eugene O’Neill, and William Shakespeare haunt Carr’s drama, it does not seem very fair to regard her work as “wounded by myth” (Hancock 2005: 24). Alice Rayner, a performance theorist, who is also haunted by male ghost theorists such as Herbert Blau (1982), Joseph Roach (1996), Marvin Carlson

(1989), and Richard Schneider (2001), writes that “[g]hosts hover where secrets are held in time; the secrets of what has been unspoken, unacknowledged; the secrets of the past; the secrets of the dead.” (Rayner 2006: x). Though her focus here was on the particular substance of performance as ephemeral, Rayner’s acknowledgement of the importance that ghostly figures effect on stage or in culture seems to explain what Carr’s drama achieves: through the resurrection of alterity, rather than the restoration of order and harmony, which is brought to light by storytelling and home-seeking, both the characters and the playwright open up the uncanny gap of the regenerative power of myth, and perhaps only in such a gap, in the threshold doors and windows, we can deal with our prejudices without claiming our home (self) and narrative as normative.

Portia Coughlan: Portia’s Malady

My focus here is on the character of Portia, the eponymous protagonist of Carr’s 1996 play *Portia Coughlan*, whose existence is simultaneously characterised by her will to death and by the fact that she is unable to die. The play features Portia’s life and death as happened on two consecutive days – her thirtieth birth-day and the following death-day. Haunted by the ghost of her twin brother Gabriel who drowned himself in the Belmont River at the age of fifteen but with whom Portia still feels an unbreakable bond, Portia is incapable of leading a ‘normal’ life as mother of three sons and as wife to Raphael. She has been consumed by the thoughts of her brother and the longing for their reunion through death. Portia’s relation to the world without Gabriel is defined as an eternal imprisonment as shown in her claim that she is “stuck here for all eternity” (200). She defines her existence in relation to the sense of ‘thrownness’, which facilitates her nihilistic desire never to be born: she is exiled and severed from the world of complete selfhood by being born. Thus, she undergoes a narcissistic regression desiring for the pleasure of oneness that she imagines through a connection with her brother in the mother’s womb. Having been born, for Portia, is a life sentence in which she has become a timeless being:

she has been arrested into a frozen state outside the passage of time, negating her capacity for change or growth.

This analysis of *Portia Coughlan* explores how Carr relates the protagonist's sense of ontological crisis to the legacy of familial and communal history. It draws a particular attention to Portia's emotional and psychological landscape of impasse, defined by the moods of rage and languor that derives from her insistence on the attachment with the lost other. I trace, first, Portia's manner of living characterised by her vicious language, transgression, and indifference to others as a disguise of her mood of existence, that is, languor. Simon Critchley explains the concept of languor in the experiences of "both the body's limpness, its languid quality, and time as distension, as stretching out, procrastination" (Critchley 2004: 32). Portia is hypnotised and imprisoned by the desire for the dead brother that is also a source of her sense of guilt and loathing. Carr's contextualisation of Portia's onto-psychological crisis in relation to the familial and communal legacy and gender norms of the society transforms the individual into the cultural realm. Thus, I examine how Portia's melancholic attachment, the fictional possession of the lost other as a means to reward her sense of absence, exposes the normality of dominant cultural norms as constraining and denying the marginalised identity of society. Then, I examine the implication of her staged dead body, the traumatic materiality of death, which offers no release to both the community and audience.

Portia wishes to die, and she finds it impossible to live through an interminable string of "pointless days" (203). This is Portia's malady, which derives from her dilemma that she is riveted to life with the unbearable weight of Gabriel's absence. When the play opens, Portia appears in her living room on stage, "*dishevelled*" and "lost-looking" with "*a drink in her hand*"; she is listening to the haunting song of dead Gabriel who simultaneously appears "at the bank of the Belmont River" (193). They are described as "*mirror[ing] one another's posture and movements in an odd way; unconsciously*" (193), reinforcing the idea of their twinship as sharing each other's identity. Portia says to her husband Raphael: "It's me birthday today ... Thirty – half me life's over" (194). Rather than being a celebration

of birth, beginning, or living, Portia's mood here delivers her sense of life as "continuing decay" (Sihra 2009: 170). Portia's birthday is doubly overshadowed by death because it is an inevitable reminder of her twin brother's death.

He would've been thirty today as well – sometimes I think only half of me is left, the worst half ... Came out of the womb holdin' hands – when God was handin' out souls he must've got mine and Gabriel's mixed up, aither that or he gave us just the one between us and it went into the Belmont River with him. (210-1)

Portia's self-conception is defined by her unwavering determination to identify herself with Gabriel. The loss of Gabriel marks Portia's fractured subjectivity; as much as the world has become empty to her, her own existence is defined as unworthiness of 'the worst half'. Christina Wald describes that Portia's attachment to symbiotic relationship with her twin brother "establishes an androgynous 'anatomy of melancholia'" (2007: 189). Wald argues that "by ascribing this androgynous anatomy to the embryonic state before separation and sexual difference," Carr's play confuses "the demarcation of separate bodies and troubles the binarism of discrete sexes and genders" (189). Wald notes, for example, how spectral presence on stage as well as other characters' memories of Gabriel illuminate him non-masculine while Portia troubles femininity through her melancholic inability to pursue feminine ideals of society.

This unruly anatomy of melancholia is radical on one level since Portia rebels against various gender expectations of society by deliberately failing to fulfil them. Yet, it also indicates the impossibility of fulfilling her narcissistic desire to achieve a prior connection with the dead brother, which is a cause of Portia's malady and abjection. As Portia is immersed in the phantasmatic thought of unity as inherent in the relationship between her and Gabriel, the mode of her existence in the world is an indeterminate content-free being, already ghostly and absent, presented in her description of her house as "creakin' like a coffin" (207). Portia's mood fulfils the quality of Freud's melancholic: "[i]n mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself (1957[1917]: 246). The Freudian melancholic transforms the contradictory attitude

towards the lost other, desire and hatred, into self-hatred emerging from the critical instance of the super-ego in the process of incorporation of loss. Portia's sense of self as a remainder, that is, the 'worst-half' remaining in the world, is a source of the denial of her existence. Incapable of separating her self from the other, Portia fantasises that by choosing death she can escape the horror of separation and achieve a unity with the lost other/self.

Indeed, Portia articulates her wish to escape in numerous places. For example, when she receives "*a three-foot white delft horse*" for birthday from her aunt Maggie May and uncle Senchil, Portia says, "I may jump up on him and ride off on him one of these nights" (198). But in actual reality, she languishes torn between her longing to escape and the impossibility of that possibility. This is revealed in the fact that she has never left her home place, as Portia says to her friend Stacia that she "[would not] survive a night away from the Belmont Valley" (207). Paradoxically, when her wish to escape (die) becomes her hope and anticipation, Portia is further drawn to her inability to leave, the hopelessness of not being able to die. Thus, Trench defines Portia's condition as a "narcissistic crisis" in which she is twinned to the threat of death on the one hand and to the threat of living on the other, to "separation and belonging" (2010: 119). The mode of Portia's existence further complicates this double-edged threat of life and death because she has been already experiencing death (life defined as death), which turns her death-drive ambiguous.

It is crucial that her life in the world is overlapped by her life in the other world. She wishes to die to achieve a reunion with her dead brother. But her life is already experienced with the coexistence with him in her mind. Portia's attachment with the landscape then highlights her otherness. She says to her father Sly who demands that she forget Gabriel: "There is no corner of any of your forty fields that don't remind me of Gabriel. His name is in the mouths of the starlin's that swoops over Belmont hill, the cows bellow for him from the barn on frosty winter nights. The very river tells me that once he was here and now he's gone" (213-4). In her account, Gabriel is immanent in every part of the Valley in which Portia stays undistinguished with him. Gabriel is dead but not dead yet; Portia is not dead but dead already. By identifying with the landscape, Portia assumes

the Valley, the home for the dead and memories of the dead, as an alternative existential 'home' distinguished from the "livin' hell" (222).

Preserving the elements of unknowability, death, and memories, the landscape expands into a space that embraces the fluid, evasive, uncontainable, unruly, marginalised existence that disrupts existential stability: the sense of self and real is confounded with otherness, which allows the mode of living as continued suspension between borders. This quality of landscape is then linked to Portia's sense of horror of continuation with no promise of finality or fixity. In this interminable series of experience of existence as dying – not death as finality – Portia languishes with fear that death might not exactly produce an escape from the burden of life, but rather a prolonged life. The fear of death as non-freedom is illuminated in Portia's ambiguous articulation of death wish: "When I lie down at the end of another impossible day, I pray for the time --" (214). Margaret Maxwell draws attention to the elision of Portia's statement and explains the implication of it: "This truncation engages both with Portia's desire for, and fear of, death. The elision foregrounds both the unbearable weight of life [...] and the unspeakable quality of her wishes for death" (Maxwell 2007: 419).

Portia's consciousness of her death wish derives from her fear that death might be the repetition of the same, prolonged life. As Portia is drawn more to death, greater is her sense of uncertainty of death as freedom from life. Thus she confesses to Maggie May, "Before I was always sure, was the one thing as kept me goin' – Now I don't know any more, and yet I know that somewhere he lives and that's the place I want to be" (240). As Kelly Marsh notes, Portia knows that "death can provide no respite" (2011: 129), nor a release from life as she declares that she will keep coming back to the Belmont Valley even after her death: "I'll be comin' here long after I'm gone. I'll lie here when I'm a ghost and smoke ghost cigarettes and watch ye earthlin's goin' about yeer pointless days" (203).

Portia's fear of repeating the same, of continuing to live in the condition of loss and horror even after death is, thus, closely linked to her wish never to have been born. The existential nihilism – the mode of existence in dereliction with no promise of liberating sense of death –

appears in extreme forms of indifference/languor and violent rage on the one hand, and in ambiguous feelings of love and loathing for Gabriel on the other. Her indifference twinned with rage is manifest in her mockery of the world (community and individuals): the world without Gabriel is a joke for her evidenced in her claim, “how can everyone be alive and not him?” (241). As all of her existential gravity and seriousness is focused on Gabriel, Portia melancholically turns all others into comedy, which entails the verbal and physical attack on others. However, the fierce attack on others is an expression of her self-hatred and rejection of belonging to the prosaic world. Portia even turns the haunting of Gabriel into a kind of comedy: “Can’t ya leave me alone . . . Is heaven not so lovely after all? Are its streets not paved in alabaster and gold? Do the angels not sit drinkin’ coffee and prunin’ their wings along the eternal boulevards of paradise?” (235).

The most startling moment of her rage/indifference is when she expresses her fear of harming her children. Doing nothing for them, being indifferent to them is the only way of saving them from her rage. She says to Raphael:

When I look at my sons, Raphael, I see knives and accidents and terrible mutilations. Their toys is weapons for me to hurt them with, givin’ them a bath is a place where I could drown them. And I have to run from them and lock myself away for fear I cause these terrible things to happen. Quintin is safest when I’m nowhere near him, so teach him to stop whinin’ for fear I dash his head against a wall or fling him through a window. (233)

In a sense, it is an articulation of her ontological fear – her tragic view of life as curse. Portia’s aggressive account bears on her tragic sense that “she has already damaged these children by bringing them into the world” (Marsh 2011: 130). As Marsh asserts, “[Portia] is weighing how to hurt them least [...] by allowing them to live free of her influence or by taking them out of the world altogether” (130): a dilemma of Portia as mother similar to that of Hester who takes her daughter’s life in order to protect her from repeating the curse of life.

The source of Portia’s rage/languor (her drive for destruction) and her ontological crisis (hatred of herself and life) becomes more manifest

when Portia's tragic sense is linked to the family history of incest. Towards the end of the play, Portia reveals to Raphael the nature of the bond:

me and Gabriel made love all the time down be the Belmont River among the swale, from the age of five [...] But I think we were doin' it before we were born. Times I close my eyes and I feel a rush of water around me and above we hear the thumpin' of me mother's heart, and we're a-twined, his foot on my head, mine on his foetal arm, and we don't know which of is the other and we don't want to, [...] all the world is Portia and Gabriel packed for ever in a tight hot womb [...]. (254)

Portia's description of the primary, semiotic, bond that transcends the relationship in the symbolic realm is transformed into something pathological: the incestuous desire has been passed down to her in blood by her parents. They are also a brother and a sister "born within a month of one another" from different mothers (244).

A motif of blood is recurrent through the play in order to highlight the hatred of otherness and the anomalous repetition of the same – history indefinitely repeating itself, which is also manifest in Portia's imitation of Gabriel's death by choosing to die in the exact spot of the Belmont river where Gabriel drowned himself. Portia's grandmother Blaize confronts Marianne, Portia's mother: "We don't know where ye came from, the histories of yer blood. [...] There's a devil in that Joyce blood, was in Gabriel, and it's in Portia too. God protect us from that black-eyed gypsy grieve with their black blood and their black souls!" (215). Blaize's rejection of otherness, however, reveals further the anomaly of family emerging from the cyclical history through the maintenance of the same manifest not only in Blaize's collusion in the incestuous relationship between her own son and Marianne; Blaize is also a product of incest as Marianne reveals: "One of the inbred, ingrown, scurvied McGoverns. They say your father was your brother!" (215).

The fact that Portia and Gabriel are products of incest is linked to the sense that they were born in error, the undesirable beings of society, placing them in the realm outside humanity. Maggie May asserts, "Young Gabriel Scully was insane from too much inbreedin'" (245). The twins bewilder their parents as well. Their father Sly describes Gabriel as "no human child but some outcast from hell" (230), and for Marianne, Portia looks like

“some evil goblin perched up there glowerin’ at me” (248). Portia and Gabriel are regarded as embodiment of disorder and threat to normative bodies and values of society.

Carr’s engagement with incest, thus, gains its cultural and political significance beyond the articulation of ontological crisis. Rather than approaching the incest taboo with the lens of moral tale, Carr’s focus seems to be in the exploration of process in which the marginalised are rendered ‘non-human’ others and stigmatised against by dominant communal norms. Although the repeated occurrence of traumatic family history becomes pathologised, the inwardness (“one of the inbred, ingrown”), characteristic of the family history, is rather an indictment of communal collusion in the exclusion and pathologisation of otherness. This is apparent in the communal understanding of the legend of the Belmont river, which a local man Fintan delivers: “Miss Sullivan used to tell us in school [...] wasn’t it about some auld river God be the name of Bel and a mad hoor of a witch as was doin’ all sorts of evil round here but they fuckin’ put her in her place, by Jaysus they did” (219). But Portia’s story corrects Fintan’s understanding as she says that the legend is about the communal hatred of difference resulting in a cruel sacrifice of a girl. For Portia, this history of hatred and brutal exclusion embedded in the legend sustains the quality of community as “dungen of the fallen world” (219). Fintan’s description of the legend points to the way in which “the psychodynamics of culture and community remain fundamentally the same” (Bracken 2016: 44) by attaching to the stereotypes. As Bracken points out, Portia acknowledges how the community maintains itself through repetition by addressing “a phallic economy in which the law of the father regains” (44). Portia says to Maggie May: “Raphael. Only thing Raphael knows be how to make money and then how to save it. Same as Daddy” (39). Prefiguring the Celtic Tiger boom in the later years, the play frames “a cultural moment in which economic value and the mechanisms of consumer trade are at the forefront” (Bracken 2016: 44). Portia’s indifference, or even disgust, in the materialist world as seen in her ‘dismay’ at a diamond bracelet, Portia’s thirtieth birthday present from Raphael, distances her from such a framing.

Portia's languor/rage, emerging from her attachment with Gabriel, is also a site in which Carr articulates her feminist voice. Facing Raphael's blame for her neglect of children and house care, Portia says: "I never wanted sons nor daughters and I never pretended otherwise to ya; told ya from the start. But ya thought ya could woo me into motherhood. Well, it hasn't worked out, has it? You've your three sons now, so ya better mind them because I can't love them, Raphael. I'm just not able" (221). Portia's open rejection of motherhood disrupts traditional perceptions of womanhood that, as Sihra remarks, has been "officially located within the home since De Valera's 1937 Constitution where the words 'woman' and 'mother' are, to this day, used interchangeably" (Sihra 2007: 211).

By the time the play was premiered, with the economic boom Ireland had undergone a rapid change in sexuality and gender related legislations: for example, the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993 and the repeal of the ban on divorce in 1996. While Carr's play speaks to the Irish feminist determination to challenge the position of women in both reality and discourse, her dramatisation of Portia in the contemporary context reveals that the perceptions of femininity are still deeply ingrained in the domestic care and motherhood. Carr points out the illusion that regards the maternal as natural trope of love and care:

I don't think the world should assume that we are all natural mothers. And it does [...] The relationship between parent and child is so difficult and so complex. There's every emotion there. We mostly only acknowledge the good ones. If we were allowed to talk about the other ones, maybe it would alleviate them in some way. (Qtd. in Sihra 2007: 211)

At the same time, Carr's characterisation of Portia as caught by emotional/ontological stasis also reflects the conditions of home-keeping women "doubly penalised" by the lack of mobility and positive self-image in the era of speedy modernization (Cronin 2002: 62). If stasis is considered in the modern world to be "stigma" in Cronin's terms (62), Carr's engagement with Portia's condition stigmatised by stasis in blood and emotion illuminates well the conditions of the marginalised women with no status outside home.

The portrayal of mother figures in the play illuminates Carr's conscious subversion of the existing perceptions of motherhood. For example, Marianne is a mirror figure of Portia as mother who can do nothing for her own children.⁴⁵ Maggie May, a surrogate mother for Portia, is far from the depiction of idealised mother figure. She has a reputation as "an old prostitute"; she appears wearing a "black mini skirt, black tights, white high heels, sexy blouse, loads of costume jewellery, [and a] fag in her mouth" (195). With a resonance of excess in drag performances, Maggie May's appearance is "at the same time a critique and an overcoming of the situation she represents as 'female' and prostitute" (Trench 2010: 121). Entering on stage with her husband Senhil, portrayed as "half the size of her, skinny, fussy, lovely" and proved to take a role of nurturing woman (195), the couple "brings gender subversion to parodic lengths" (Trench 2010:121).

Portia's inability to keep up with traditional womanhood is instantly linked to her otherness. Her mother Marianne says, "You'd swear you were never taught how to Hoover a room or dust a mantle; bloody disgrace, that's what ya are" (209). Portia's existence (what she is) is measured by her ability to manage house chores, and her emotional instability (her excessive attachment to Gabriel) is associated with the level of abnormality caused by the neglect of her duties as revealed in Marianne's assertion: "If ya passed your day like any normal woman there'd be none of this!" (211). Portia's rejection of home in that sense is a rejection of the domestic melancholia (the incorporation of the established social norms into the hierarchical gendered roles within a family), the rejection of the diminished world as an integral space for womanhood.

However, Portia's resistance is not defined as a radical subversion of dominant norms. The quality of Portia's subversion, characterised not as progressive resolution but as immersion into the continuation of liminal identity, culminates in the moment of her death. This powerful moment, which abruptly disrupts the linear progress of the plot by its insertion in the

⁴⁵ Portia to her mother: "Don't you bluster in here and put a death with on my sons just because you couldn't save your own. My sons'll be fine for if I do nothin' else I leave them alone and no mark is better than a black one" (210).

middle of the play, brings to centre stage the romanticised trope of the feminine death by water often linked to the motif of cleansing, purity, and rebirth. Carr appropriates this mythical trope of feminine death in order to unsettle “the iconography of the tragic dead female body as a silenced victim” (Hill 2009: 50). Act Two begins with a pulley lifting the dead body of Portia from the river surrounded by the other characters:

By the Belmont River. Evening. A search-light swoops around the river. . . a pulley raises Portia out of the river. She is raised into the air and suspended there, dripping water, moss, algae, frogspawn, waterlilies, from the river. [...] Portia wears only a slip. No one moves, transfixed by the elevated image of the dead Portia. Senchil takes off his jacket, tries to cover her; she's too high, jacket falls, suspends on her foot, hangs there. Hold a couple of beats. Then lower pulley. (223)

The image of Portia’s dead body, the startling mess of it detailed in water remains covering her body, defies the romantic description of female corpse: in contrast with the atmosphere of The Mai’s dead body held by her husband in ghostly lights, the presentation of Portia’s dead body in the public view delivers a sense of her total rejection of the community values. Portia’s defiant body, elevated high and out of reach, even has the authority of silencing the other characters on stage with its inescapable presence. Traditionally, the materialisation of a corpse involves a process of objectification: the body is stripped of human subjectivity and complexity and conceptualised into fixity and reification. This process is to give a recognisable form to the unknowable (death) – an antidote to the fear of otherness that is outside the horizon of rational subject. Elizabeth Bronfen explains the conceptualisation of death through the female body in relation to gaze: by making something present to sight, the subject achieves security and empowerment. If this is the case, something absent from the sight “perturbs and questions power. [...] In the case of the feminine corpse and the portrait of a deceased woman, the non-visible is given figure, visible presence” (Bronfen 1992: 123).

The representation of Portia’s dead body subverts the traditional dynamics of gaze in relation to power. Portia’s dead body, instead of giving in to the representational patterns of the female body, disturbs the gaze by insisting on the continuation of her subjectivity – the rejection of

containment through the wilful display of the body and the refusal of being covered and hidden from sight. The dead body as corporeal presence rather freezes the gaze and transfixes the movement of the spectators on stage, evoking a sense of discomfort. If the materialisation of the dead body is traditionally associated with the stabilisation of the order, engendering “a stable relation between subjects and objects” (Bronfen 1992: 6), the presentation of Portia’s dead body disturbs this boundary that separates the dead from the living. Moreover, the presence of Gabriel unseen by the characters further complicates the representation of the female dead body as a means of fixing the unknowable otherness to the realm of knowledge. It is Gabriel’s ghost who claims the possession of Portia’s dead body in his triumphant voice, which is the realisation of his vengeful words that he will keep coming back until he has Portia. Its uncanny resonance with Portia’s claim for the return after death resists the closure through a representation of death (whether mythical or ritual) that transforms traumatic experiences of loss into a proper mourning of separation, placing the dead outside the realm of the living.

This display of Portia’s dead body points to the encounter of theatrical and discursive performativity. On the one hand, the embodied presentation (theatrical performance) of the dead body transgresses and resists the values of community and society. On the other hand, the performance of Portia’s death deconstructs the rational and stable subject position whereby the subject draws boundary between self and other. The encounter generates a site of “liminality,” a mode “of embodied activity whose spatial, temporal, and symbolic ‘betweenness’ allows for dominant social norms to be suspended, questioned, played with, transformed” (McKenzie 1998: 218). The performative moment of exposure of Portia’s dead body to the public view reveals the community’s illusion of stability – fantasy that they can marginalise otherness by separating and containing it. The combined presentation of Portia’s dead body with Gabriel’s ghost also expands the scope of community into a broader landscape of existence, as the ghost-body (Portia’s attachment with otherness) breaks narrow boundaries between living and dead. However, Carr does not provide a simple resolution: the subversion of domestic melancholia is predicated on

Portia's self-alienation produced by the attachment with otherness rather than the norms. Moreover, while her identification with the landscape achieved through the sublime moment of immersion into water accentuates the potential possibility of escape from and subversion of constraining forces of norms, it is far from her triumphant achievement of defeating the limitation of life. Emphasis on Gabriel's presence both in the scene of Portia's death and the final scene of the play illuminates Portia's death not as a complete liberation but as the continuation of the power dynamics of associative domination. Carr's final voice goes to Gabriel as the "*sound of Gabriel's voice, triumphant*" (255), which overwhelms and subsumes Portia's voices. The constant reappearance of the dead in the authors' drama is a sign of no escape from the lost other, the dead, and the past. In *Portia Coughlan*, the ghost returns to fulfil Portia's fantasy of lost union with the dead. And yet, the ghost, who possesses Portia's past, present, and even the future, reveals repeated stories of fight for dominance complicating the protagonist's final act of merging with the fantasy.

By the Bog of Cats...: Encountering the Other

While explaining the phenomenological appearance of the Stranger, Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch note in a collaborative book chapter that "the Stranger occupies the threshold between the Other and the Foreigner" (Kearney and Semonovitch 2011: 5). It is a realm in which boundaries of identity and geography are at once divided and obscured, displaying dynamics of concealing and revealing, knowable and unknowable, visible and invisible, inner and outer, or presence and absence. Situated in such a dynamic of unsettling ambivalence, the Stranger "is doubled" as it has "two sides of the same visage" as the Foreigner and the Other (5). The Foreigner is a named and legible stranger who is no longer surprising or frightening as it has been "classified" or assimilated into the realm of the Same: it is now placed within one's own horizon. Whereas, the Stranger as the Other continually evades one's recognition and knowledge – "the unnamable in its alterity" continues absencing any attempt to see its

face (6). From this phenomenological perspective, then, the locus of the Stranger marks both loss (through reduction) and otherness (through excess): the double of representational presence and evasive absence, the liminal conjunction between the living and the dead, and the familiar unfamiliarity. At the same time, the experience of encountering the Stranger reveals a precarious position of self located between epistemological violence and vulnerability: the act of underpinning the Other in the mode of self (within the horizon of the self's totality) is thwarted by the evasive and uncontainable alterity of the Other effecting a loss of ontological selfhood.

Carr's *By the Bog of Cats...* dramatises this experience of encountering the Other at the edge of knowledge by featuring the conflict between a Traveller woman Hester Swane and the settler community, which underscores the cultural and psychological forces hovering over the marginalised boggy landscape of the Midlands of Ireland.

In this discussion of *By the Bog of Cats...*, I focus on loss issued by the dynamics of the self/other relationship, exploring it in relation to land ownership and memories played out in the dramatic work as critical to individual and communal production of melancholic selfhood. Carr's dramatisation of land ownership and memories as central to the construction of identity brings to the fore the idea of belonging, an affective term that defines the mode of dwelling in the world through the lens of desire and identification moving beyond ontological sense of being (Bell 1999: 1). The community's obsessive ownership of land entailing their intolerance of otherness triggers the brutal rejection of Hester, which in turn reveals their own cultural locus, alienated from the national process of urban and global modernisation in the Celtic Tiger era. Distinguished from the community's claim for territorial ownership, Hester's mode of belonging involves the embrace of her non-belonging transcending the restricted sense of home and preserving the melancholic ambivalence of the other as double. Hester's continual oscillation between the bog and her settled home marks her particular status of belonging and selfhood that challenges communal act of boundary-making.

Hester's selfhood as homelessness, representing both loss and otherness, is reinforced by her blood identity as "tinker" (*By the Bog of*

Cats... 1999: 289)⁴⁶ and fragmentary memories of her mother which she believes are saturated in the swampy Bog of Cats. Hester's unyielding identification with the landscape then comes from her desire to explore her selfhood by excavating memories preserved in it; the identification also transforms her blood identity from a reduced idea of her as tinker into the realm of myth, invoking a sense that Hester is a character larger than ordinary human beings. She is part of the landscape as manifest in the legendary episode of her birth, nurtured in the lair of a wild swan named Black Wing.

This analysis of *By the Bog of Cats...* argues that loss issued by the repression of otherness can never be absolute, as the repressed alterity (but never to be containable) continually returns transforming selfhood into an uncanny being. This ineffable bind with otherness is characteristic of melancholia of both Hester and the community. Hester is attached to otherness of her past memories, characterised by loss and absence because of the abandonment by her mother. Although Hester cannot fully grasp the meaning of it, she vehemently desires to keep the lost other alive in herself in the form of memories. Whereas, rather than a sense that they lost something, the community is bound with anxiety that they will lose a 'authentic' sense of self with too much contamination from otherness. Therefore, the community's colonisation of land and the other is to exorcise the melancholic bind with otherness, projecting all negative features onto Hester and classifying her in the register of familiarity to strip her (and the landscape) of uncomfortable and fearful elements. The community's accusation of Hester as possessing "a black art thing" (324) is also an attempt to diminish and grasp otherness in their realm of knowledge. However, both the landscape and Hester evade the community's self-claimed ownership as their indeterminateness transcends any attempt to grasp their meaning and use.

A historical dimension of the community's attachment with land disavowing otherness comes from postcolonial Ireland's construction of particular bind to place in an attempt to overcome the dislocated sense of

⁴⁶ Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

identity. Setting a psychological process of displacement caused by colonisation of land and otherness in the contemporary context of Ireland, Carr's play challenges the nation's nostalgic construction of place as preserving purity of national identity as well as the mechanism of anti-nostalgia that attempts to evict otherness of the past through the myth-making of progressive growth. Moreover, the play reveals that symptoms of individual and social degeneration or regression are endemic to modernity of postcolonial Ireland. These symptoms are produced, according to Geraldine Moane, by the postcolonial nation's submission to patterns of domination. Moane argues that postcolonial Ireland is characterised in terms of ambivalence that emerges from its internal investment in colonialism's violation repeating the patterns of domination (race, gender and class inequality) and vulnerability to domination by external forces (global capital) (Moane 2002: 111-2).

I argue that this submission to repetition of domination patterns consists of postcolonial melancholia. Carr's play thus dramatises the vehement and destructive return of what has been lost in the dynamics of domination and exclusion. Carr states in an interview regarding her dramatisation of Hester Swane's rage:

The rage of Hester Swane is terrifying [...] The rage doesn't come out of nowhere. The rage comes out of being said no to just one time too many, where you should have been said yes to, if the world was fair. And you're into conversation about parity here, and equality. If society is always saying no to you, that rejection has to go somewhere. It turns dark, and it erupts then [...] There's lots of men raging around the place, too, but male rage has a different quality. It's less self-destructive. Women's rage turns inward most of the time. How wonderful to be able to burn down the whole world. Even if it is only a stage. Revenge. (Maleney, *Irish Times*, August 22, 2015)

In Carr's view the social and cultural loss is profoundly gendered. Hester's cultural identity as both woman and Traveller, then, delivers a sense of double dispossession issued by the postcolonial nation's efforts to dominate and control the territory in the metaphor of female body and sexuality. Hester's homelessness (or her locus as part of nature and environment) exposes the postcolonial nation's discriminatory discourse that posits the gendered other as object that tests the national morality. In this sense, Carr's

rewriting of land ownership in relation to memories of the nation's forgotten other is to illuminate the forces of the other that continually undermine the fixed understanding of the present self. The eruption of ghostly other with terrifying emotional forces obscures the illusionary promise of the short-term future and disintegrates the discourse of modernisation, its understanding of time that the past can be overcome by the growth.

The struggle over the land ownership in the play revolves around the communal event of Carthage's wedding to Caroline, daughter of the landowner Xavier Cassidy. As the play unfolds, Carthage has just joined Xavier's plan to evict Hester from her home in the bog. Despite Hester's claim for the impossibility of separating from the bog because it is the only world to which she belongs, the hostility against Hester alienates her under the rubric of the foreign other who deserves to be denied and excluded. The intolerance to Hester is most blatantly delivered by Carthage's mother Mrs Kilbride: "I've had the measure of you this long time, the lazy shiftless blood in ya, that savage tinker eye ya turn on people to frighten them – " (312). Thus, the eviction of Hester from the life of family and community illuminates the social disavowal of foreign other at personal and institutional levels, originating from the fixed understanding of others in terms of blood identity.⁴⁷

Set against the community's possessive attachment with the territory entailing amnesia of its own peripherality and closure to acceptance of the marginalised other, Hester's landless position embraces evasiveness through her unruly crossings of time and space. In many ways her homelessness has semblance with Catwoman's sense of ownership of the bog.

CATWOMAN: I know everythin' that happens on this bog. I'm the Keeper of the Bog of Cats in case ya forgotten. I own this bog.

HESTER: Ya own nothin' Catwoman, except your little house of turf and your hundred-odd mouse traps and anythin' ya rob..." (271)

In contrast with the territorial ownership, the way of 'owning' the bog for both Catwoman and Hester seems to be a practice of dispossessing it. Not

⁴⁷ Hester and Carthage were never actually married although they have been living together for fourteen years and have a daughter between them, which represents Hester's refusal of traditional convention of Irish community and provides the community with a convenient reason to evict her.

the possession of land but the movement in and with landscape (or ghosts hovering the bog) defines their way of ownership, a reminder of Rosi Braidotti's notion of nomadic identity. According to Braidotti, nomadic identity should not be regarded as 'homelessness' in the usual term:

it [the nomad] is rather a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity [...] The nomadic subject [...] is not altogether devoid of unity; his/her mode is one of definite, seasonal patterns of movement through rather fixed routes. It is a cohesion engendered by repetitions, cyclical moves, rhythmical displacement. (Braidotti 1994: 22)

Hester and Catwoman's particular ownership of the bog moves beyond the fixed idea of belonging and home. Their connectedness to the bog and its cyclicity also emphasises their belonging in the liminal space that is defined by the continual return of ghosts like Ghost Fancier or Joseph's ghost: they are suspended between the living and the dead as well as between the past and the present. As they constantly cross the boundaries, the community's constraining identity patterns fail to disempower them. Rather, any laws imposed on them by the community are not of importance, which is revealed in Hester's act of 'discarding' the contract about eviction and compensation. Hester says, "Bits of paper, writin', means nothin', can as aisy be unsigned" (283). As Sihra observes, Hester "persistently interrogates the rhetoric of authority" (Sihra 2009: 262), subversively mimicking and deriding the utilitarian exploitation of the other.

However, Hester's liminal status suspended between the living and the dead also indicates that her precarious sense of self emerges from her attachment with the mother's absence. Although the stage is crowded with the characters and dense with emotional forces, the real protagonist of the play is absent on stage: Hester's mother Big Josie. It is Big Josie who continually haunts Hester's life, defines her sense of loss, and triggers a series of violent actions such as the murder of Joseph. As it turns out, Hester killed him out of jealousy – he possessed Mother who had been always evasive in Hester's fragmentary memories. Sihra takes this point drawing on the theatre program for the 1998 production of the play, which features "a photograph of a child held in the arms of a blanked-out mother figure. Denoted by a white void, this non-presence, Big Josie Swane, is the

protagonist of the play” (2009: 258). To a crucial extent, Hester resembles Portia in the sense that both of them experience excessive rage deriving from their longing for a union with absent figures of mother and twin brother respectively. They are both hypnotised by haunting figures that they at once love and loathe; they become alien to themselves because their existence is experienced as present-absent and inauthentic. Hester is plagued, she says, by “a longin’ in me for her[mother] that won’t quell the whole time” (275). For Hester, to remember her mother is essential in granting some sense to her own identity, and Hester is caught by the fear of forgetting as she says to Joseph’s ghost: “Every day I forget more and more till I’m startin’ to think I made her up out of the air” (320). Hester’s fear of forgetting is linked to her awareness that memory is never complete and that she is attached to the created memory of her mother. Just like Portia violently reacts against any narratives that threaten her sense of attachment with her dead brother, Hester also clings to the illusionary memories that she stitched together in order to overcome her fear and despair emerging from the evasive nature of memory.

It is Monica who asks Hester to face the truth of her waiting: “[...] this waitin’ is only a fancy of yours. Now I don’t make out to know anythin’ about the workin’s of this world but I know this much, it don’t yield aisy to mortal wishes” (324). Monica’s remark is a warning to Hester that what is happening in this world is not to be grasped by the desire for the definite knowledge of the self. It is only a mortal wish that Hester clings to, the wish that she can end the cycle of waiting by possessing the mother through a subjectively constructed memory of her. Hester’s tragic act of taking her seven-year-old daughter’s life in the final scene of the play also comes from her wish to end the cycle of waiting, the legacy of separation and loss, which Little Josie will possibly repeat. Being aware of imminent separation, Little Josie says to Hester: “Mam, I’d be watchin’ for ya all the time ‘long the Bog of Cats. I’d be hopin’ and waitin’ and prayin’ for ya to return” (338). The painful awareness of repeating the legacy of loss and absence in her daughter’s generation is a cause of the tragic murder of her own daughter. As Hester is also aware that even death cannot undo the cyclicity of history and that death is never complete but another delay of finality,

which she has learned from Joseph's ghost, she wails and says to Ghost Fancier on his arrival to take Hester's life: "You're late, ya came too late" (340).

Many critics regard Hester's death as affirming: for example, Bernadette Bourke considers that Carr "reworks the folk belief in the earth as grave and womb, that 'swallows up and gives birth at the same time', embracing and defeating death simultaneously" (Bourke 2003: 132). Bourke maintains that Hester's death is the "return to [the] natural element, to the womb from whence she came," to the bog (132). From this perspective, her death is positioned in the cosmic cycle of continuity of death and rebirth. The return to the natural elements, not as finality but as continuity of life, is confirmed by Hester's final words to Carthage:

Ya won't forget me now, Carthage, and when all of this is over or half remembered and you think you've almost forgotten me again, take a walk along the Bog of Cats and wait for a purlin' wind through your hair or a soft breath be your ear or a rustle behind ya. That'll be me and Josie ghostin' ya. (*She walks towards the Ghost Fancier*). Take me away, take me away from here. (340)

Hester's return to the bog involves her eternal ghosting around the bog, affirming death as "part of a cosmogonic cycle of birth, death, and rebirth into the landscape" (Gladwin 2011: 392). Indeed, Carr's compassion for her protagonist is remarkable: unlike in *Portia Coughlan* in which the grim display of Portia's dead body illuminates the continuing dynamics between rejection and possession of the female body, in this play Carr allows Hester to perform her death through "*a death dancing*" (341) with Ghost Fancier, transforming her self-destruction into a sort of sublimational performance art through which her pain is embraced.

Carr's authorial sense of the repetition of colonialism's violation in the contemporary context of Ireland is manifest in her depiction of the community's desire for maintenance of stability through the eviction of Hester. To an interviewer's question regarding a similarity between Portia and Hester as "represent[ing] two halves of the one sphere," Carr responds: "Yes that is true. Portia is beset by the internal, whereas Hester is defeated by the external, although she also has some responsibility [...] I choose to

make her a traveller because travellers are our national outsiders aren't they?" ("Marina of the Midlands," *Irish Times*, May 4, 2000). Unlike Portia, Hester as a Traveller woman is the definitive outsider of the nation, accused of "the illicit nomadism" in Cronin's words (2002: 59) and continually alienated by settled communities. Carr's embodied ghost (Hester) viciously resists assimilation by the settled community, which she expresses through the destructive act of burning the farmhouse near the end of the play. As Trench remarks, the act results from "a cultural rage [...] against the increased pressures to assimilate to dominant ways of community life" (2010, 143). At the same time, Hester fulfils "a destruction myth in the cosmogonic cycle", destruction by fire signifying total annihilation (Gladwin 2011: 392): Hester's rage thus moving beyond the cultural implication brings up the mythical force that destroys the community's hope for regeneration and repetition of the control over the other.

Carr's returned ghosts also allow the boggy land to appear as space already and always inhabited by otherness with many visages of the unknowable, and the community's intimate proximity to land suggests that their home-land has been already overwhelmed by ghostly apparitions. While Mrs Kilbride's remark essentialises Hester's 'tinker' blood as untrustworthy and threatening, she unwittingly confirms the protagonist's claim that "everthin' [she's] connected to is here" in the bog (273). Throughout the play, the bog is portrayed as unknowable, "always shiftin' and changin' and coddin' the eye" (267) and potentially dangerous retaining memories that the community is unable to define or denies to acknowledge. In his eco-critical reading of the play, Derek Gladwin defines otherness of the bog as grotesqueness and maintains that "[t]he grotesqueness of the bog issues, in large part, from its status as the unknown; the bog is a supernatural space that simultaneously epitomises the ineffable qualities of nature and the worrisome aspects of what is most unknowable in ourselves and the world around us" (2011: 390). Thus, to emphasise Hester's connection with the bog is to accentuate Hester's otherness as fluid like the bog causing worries and fear, the indeterminate sense of something happening in the absence of all knowing human beings, which is warned

when the Catwoman, another grotesque spiritual figure, declares, “Hester Swane, you’ll bring this place down by evenin’” (273).

This quality of exotic darkness that both Hester and the bog share in common illuminates further their melancholic alterity that transcends the community’s stereotyped category. Hester’s otherness indeed is set up from the opening scene, an eerie and yet poetically visual scene, in which Hester drags a dead black swan leaving traces behind them in the snowy and icy boggy land. Revealed is that the black swan is both Hester’s surrogate mother and herself: the swan’s lair was a cradle for Hester when her mother Big Josie abandoned her in it with a curse that “Swane means swan ... That child ... will live as long as this black swan, not a day more, not a day less” (275). Thus, the opening scene, while foretelling that it is also her death day, sets up Hester’s connection to the bog marking her belonging as both here and elsewhere, which the community’s reduction of her identity cannot undo.

The mood that defines the community, then, is anxiety – the mood of not being at home as something old and long-familiar (the bog and the tinker) continually returns as unfamiliar. At the brink of anxiety, that is, the destruction that Hester might bring to the community, the inhabitants find their escape from the anxiety in an utter hostility towards her. Kearney and Semonovitch note that “[t]he anxiety that provokes this sense of not-being-at-home is a mood that comes neither from the inside, nor the outside” (4). It is a mood that “arises in between – between self and other, guest and host, door and exterior” (4). What is experienced at this threshold is the collapse of the rigid boundary between self and other. As Freud explains, the self becomes stranger to itself in the encounter of someone and something concealed and repressed for a long time within itself. The community’s rejection of Hester, to this extent, is the rejection of experiencing the horror of indeterminacy in which the certainty of self becomes disrupted. The result is to project all negative and monstrous features onto Hester, drawing a dividing line between the tinker other and us in the settled community.

However, the encountering of the other, as Kearney and Semonovitch note, “often triggers a double response” not only of fear but also of fascination (4). This double response is well expressed in Monica’s

description of Big Josie: “She was a harsh auld yoke, [who] came and went like the moon . . . There was lots spent evenin’s tyin’ to figure Josie Swane, somethin’ cold and dead about her except when she sang and then I declare ya’d fall in love with her” (323). Monica’s portrayal of Big Josie’s physicality “with her big head of black hair and eyes glamin’ like a cat and long arms and a powerful neck all knotted that she’d stretch like a swan in a yawn” (323) highlights Big Josie’s ‘exotic’ life close to the natural phenomenon who comes and goes like the moon. And although it is said that the villagers admired Big Josie’s creativity as “a song stitcher” (323), such creativity, perceived in relation to fearfulness in Big Josie’s nature, is not very separable for the villagers from Hester’s possession in ‘a black art thing’, causing them utter discomfort. Monica reveals: “I was never comfortable with her . . . she’d make up songs for each occasion [of funerals, weddings, christenings, birthdays and the harvest]. And it wasn’t so much they wanted her there, more they were afraid not to have her” (323).

Hester’s identification with landscape also brings up the issue of domination and subordination as both of them are reduced to the realm of geographical and cultural other to be managed and controlled. They are both perceived as objectified resources for exploitation as illuminated by the male characters’ economic and possessive tie to the land and their patriarchal perception of women as a means to improve their economic and social status. Carthage has settled in the community as an established farmer with Hester’s help and now wants to increase his property holdings, social standing and financial gain through his marriage to Caroline. It is Hester who understands the marriage as transaction which involves exploitations measuring human beings in terms of commodity value: “You’re sellin’ me and Josie [Hester’s daughter] down the river for a few lumpy auld acres and notions of respectability . . . Ya’ll only ever be Xavier Cassidy’s work horse” (289). For Xavier, Caroline’s marriage is to fulfil his utilitarian purpose to secure a land-keeper for his farm as he says, “With [Carthage] Cassidy’s farm’ll be safe, the name’ll be gone, but never the farm” (328). Both Carthage and Xavier are skilled at the economic logic of accumulating material wealth only to reveal the insular repetition of patriarchal

domination over land and women as well as the resulting corruption of the human relations. Hester sharply articulates the nature of exploitation in the matter of marriage and settlement: “You cut your teeth on me, Carthage Kilbride, gnawed and sucked till all that’s left is an auld bone ya think to fling on the dunghill” (288). The issue of settlement through marriage is further problematised when Hester reveals that Carthage’s holding over property was possible only with the money the couple stole after the murder of Joseph, Hester’s brother. This revelation of excessive past memories involving murder and blood subversively illuminates the cruelty of sacrifice required for the sense of settlement and ownership.

Marriage as patriarchal maintenance of domination is also manifest in Mrs. Kilbride’s claim for the exclusive ownership of family and community identity. As a domineering and manipulative figure, Mrs Kilbride attempts to overpower people around her and most successfully does so with seven-year-old Josie. Claiming the exclusive ownership of the family name, she says to Josie: “You are a Swane ... You’re Hester Swane’s little bastard. You are not a Kilbride, and never will be” (279). Hester’s family name associated with the swan represents her illegitimacy and ominous ‘black magic’. What Mrs Kilbride rejects is Hester’s blood, and the issue of assimilation is delivered in the link of violent separation. She maintains, “Me and your Daddy has plans. We’ll batter ya into the semblance of legitimacy yet...” (281). This work of making Josie a legitimate child involves the complete banishment of Hester and her permanent separation from Josie. However, Mrs Kilbride’s manipulative power is significantly undermined by her senile grotesqueness. In numerous scenes Mrs Kilbride is a source of comic relief that involves a deformation of her introjection of social conventions. The instances of deformation of self-claimed stability and cohesion are in her bragging about her savings while playing a card game with little Josie, her act of constantly taking photos of her new shoes, her entering to the wedding scene in a white dress and her unwitty Freudian slip insinuating an incestuous desire for her son. Carr’s depiction of Mrs Kilbride as aggressive, dark, and grotesque comedy seeps into the shadow of tragic experiences of the characters effecting the deconstruction of maternal as symbol of national stability.

It is noteworthy that grotesque excess characterises Carr's play which is expressed through Hester's rage, Xavier's and Carthage's obsession with land, and Mrs Kilbride's hatred. As J. Michael Walton argues, the dramatic world of Euripides evoking the sense of savage and comic at times, finds its contemporary expression in Carr's boggy midlands where the wild emotions and deeds are unleashed in their strangeness, mixed with the tragic, savage, poetic, and comic (Walton 2002: 22). Significantly, by doing so, Carr's work transforms the peripheral into the central, given that both travellers and bogs have been marginalised in the urban development of Irishness in the era of Celtic Tiger. Carr's representation of the settled community in which people live dependent on environment deeply tied to land and farming is far from the image of late modernity defined by speed and mobility. The alienation of rural life in the global era finds an explanation in Cronin's argument that the peripheral is defined by chrono-politics rather than geo-politics. Cronin states:

In the shift from geo-politics to chrono-politics, there is room for a nation that is racy but not of the soil. The peasant must be desacralised, derided as a parasite and a reactionary, a grim relic from the Ireland that ate its farrow. The West is now a rural nightmare from which the young urban modernist seeks to awake. (Cronin 2002: 60)

Carr's dramatic world is then the expression of the peripheral, associated with its quaintness and swampiness preserving all strange fragments of the Irish past and imagination. Posited in the liminal space of cultivated civilisation and untamed nature, the community itself represents the melancholic loss of the nation's modern advance. However, Carr's treatment of the community is not to trigger the anti-nostalgia of modernity. Rather, it is to bring to light the complex patterns of domination that is reiterated even within the marginalised groups of people. To a crucial extent, Carr's depiction of the community's amnesia and blindness about their own marginalisation is a subversive re-inscription of the perpetuation of dominance at the cost of the other in postcolonial Ireland. While the other in the context of colonialism is associated with negativity of the feminine, Carr's re-consideration of the centrality of the other in the individual and communal identity subverts both colonialism's negative other and

postcolonialism's reconstruction of the other in association with the control of land (territory) and the feminine body.

Conclusion

Throughout the chapter I have argued that melancholia is a constructive frame to broaden our understanding of Carr's Midlands plays. Carr's plays present the characters' intense attachment with loss and inability to reconcile with society while being trapped in the repetitive cycle of familial and communal history. These dramatic works also foreground the rural community of Ireland as deeply destabilised by unruly violence, transgression, painful loss, and desire. There have been numerous criticisms on Carr's dramatisation of individual and communal instabilities as an appropriation of the stereotyped representation of Irishness. However, this chapter has illuminated through the critical lens of melancholia that Carr's plays rather transform the existing mode of dramatic representations into the aesthetics of uncanny. In so doing, Carr's plays disclose individual and communal sense of onto-psychological instabilities as endemic to the modern progress of the Celtic Tiger Ireland.

Like most of the plays discussed in the previous chapters, Carr's plays also contest the oppressive home discourses in postcolonial Ireland that are well captured in Kathryn Conrad's term, "family cell," invoking a sense of home as institutional space of ideological regulation – a space for exclusion and concealment of any possible instability that can cause a threat to one's integral sense of unity. As Conrad states, "if the cell is stable, so too are the social institutions built upon it, and one can present to the world one's capacity to rule. Instabilities must therefore be constructed and treated as foreign – not only to the family, not only to one's political position, but also to the nation as a whole" (2004: 10). Gregory explores instabilities conceptualised as threatening to hegemonic rules through her interrogation of perceived 'disorders' of communal home of Ireland. In *Spreading the News*, Gregory illuminates such instabilities in relation to the potential of Irish people's imaginative power. In so doing, she reinscribes the melancholic encryption of Irishness in colonial discourses on the national

stage in order to envision a new national community. It is noteworthy that the women playwrights of the next generations present the darker vision of the domestic and community, which demonstrates how the issue of regulations and controls Gregory explored in the colonial paradigm has been increasingly moved into the space of the domestic in the process of postcolonial construction of the nation state.

Carr's plays, exploring the mutual invasion between the inner and outer space in the cyclical repetition of familial history, deconstruct the traditional norms of home as grounding our sense of self. Multiple border crossings, characteristic of Carr's plays and melancholia, elucidate and disrupt complicated dynamics of desire for possession, categorisation, and control of the inassimilable alterity for the claim of coherence of self. In this way, these plays contend the self-sufficient notion of belonging and communal/national life in Ireland, inviting us to a space of hybridity where the dead return to haunt the present and the living repeat struggles of the dead.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that twentieth-century Irish drama by women transforms various symptoms and dynamics of melancholic experiences into the aesthetic field of melancholic performance as a way of challenging the processes of assimilation/exclusion through which the nation state is formed. I have deployed the concept of melancholia, reinterpreted in postcolonial and gender/feminist theories as a critical frame for the thesis. In so doing, I have proposed that the productivity of the concept stems from its capacity to disclose the structure/mechanism of national/cultural histories and discourses: how a dominant historical narrative incorporates or forgets another history. As theorists such as Butler suggest, melancholic engagement with loss is a particular way of relating to the world that disintegrates binary thoughts about the subject, social reality, and cultural productions. That is, melancholia can complicate the static notion of identity at individual and collective levels exposing dynamic processes through which the subject, as well as the social, is constituted and subverted. In this thesis, I have highlighted that such critical frame of melancholia opens up possibilities of reading the dramatic texts of Gregory, Deevy, Reid, and Carr as staging a battleground of negotiations between symptoms and performed symptoms, presence and absence, and belonging and non-belonging in the hegemonic formation of society.

The chronological structure of the thesis has traced these dramatists' concerns with conditions and possibilities of the subjects on the margin of Irish society. In doing so, it has sought to reveal how the postcolonial nation state's desire for homogeneity facilitated elaborate burials of (feminine) otherness perceived as a threat to hegemonic national identity. In the Republic of Ireland, the emphasis on the masculine national sovereignty saw the oppressive confinement of social elements deviating from norms throughout the large part of the century; in the latter part of the century the discrete nostalgia for the fixed notion of national identity was enmeshed with anxiety about the instability originating from the embrace of global economy and multi-cultural identity of the state. In Northern Ireland, the postcolonial construction of hegemonic Protestant state similarly

appropriated gender identities in the process of defending the cause of Unionism through (para)military operations. While the ethno-identitarianism endemic to both Unionism and Republicanism promoted discourses of antagonism, the Northern Irish state produced the myth of Protestant hegemony that ultimately elided the class and gender divides within the society. While revealing the state ideologies in both South and North of Ireland that were deeply bound with the familial surveillance and control of (foreign) outsiders, the chronological structure of the thesis has offered a reading of canonical historiographies of nation (and national theatre) from a perspective of melancholic performativity, a process of repeated and sedimented acts of tracing loss only to consolidate homogeneity. This order has also sought to uncover the sense of disconnection produced in such processes as well as the historical and cultural baggage these women playwrights work on, with, and against.

The first chapter examined how Gregory applied her perception of loss as an enabling source of artistic imagination to the creation of her dramatic world. My approach to Gregory's writings, both autobiographical and dramatic writings, challenged the melancholic construction of Gregory in the canonical history of Irish drama that focused on her supportive and feminine role in the Irish Revival resulting in the diminishment of her agency as writer. In this chapter, I suggested that the melancholic loss of 'I' in some of her autobiographical works reveals Gregory's conscious construction of narratives where loss becomes a way of negotiating with the outside world refracting the censure of patriarchal social mores of her class and gender. My analysis of *Spreading the News* and *Grania* has shown that Gregory's drama is an artistic manifestation of such negotiations in which the playwright integrates the personal/communal loss into a display of empowerment and presence. For example, *Spreading the News* integrates loss performed by the historically stereotyped representation of Irishness into an artistic field of comedy while embracing the sense of 'tragic dignity' she observed amongst Irish people. In Gregory's distinctive creation of Irish comedic mode, her deliberate invocation of stage Irishmen of incongruity, misfortune, and mismatching speech, displays onstage the power to subvert colonial rules with dark humour and satire. *Grania* demonstrates more

directly Gregory's concern with female agency and disintegrates the passive woman-nation ideal by staging a theatrical enquiry of how women can be empowered by altering the scene of loss into that of self-assertion and reintegration in society. Throughout the chapter I suggested that Gregory's drama performs eccentric alterity of the colonial other, as well as gendered alterity simultaneously retained and excluded from the homosocial bonding between men, in order to interrogate both colonial and national fetishistic insistence on the mythology of stereotyped identities.

Drawing on Butler's notion that the 'real' is a discursive construction in reference to fantasy designated to the realm of absence and unreal, Chapter Two examined Deevy's Abbey plays *In Search of Valour*, *The King of Spain's Daughter*, and *Katie Roche*. This chapter has shown that Deevy complicates the conventional notion of fantasy as wish-fulfilment or escape from reality. Her drama rather unsettles the rigid boundary between real and fantasy by locating the protagonists' cultivation of fantasy and desire to narrate it in the midst of melancholic power of the nation state that assumes the realm of truth and reality. The lens of melancholia deployed in this chapter illuminates the protagonists' fantasy as a melancholic symptom produced by the incorporation of social ideal as well as antagonism: that is, melancholic fantasy derives from a desire to possess and be what is not appropriable in order to compensate for the stigma of illegitimacy. The case study of Deevy's drama has also demonstrated that the protagonists' performed fantasy, marking differences and disconnections from society, challenges the patriarchal nation state's melancholic inwardness, its imaginary turn away from 'reality' by repressing realms beyond understanding. The lens of melancholic performance enables us to reconsider a performative power of Deevy's dramaturgy, that is, her use of silence or abrupt mood changes, as accommodating psychological symptoms through formal tensions. In this chapter I suggested that Deevy's exploration of fantasy, sufferings, and inarticulate expressions in conjunction with loss in society embraces the protagonists' failure to imagine future possibilities outside the system, which invites us to consider her drama beyond the binary paradigm of liberation/autonomous agency and subjugation/loss of agency.

Chapter Three moved to the Northern Irish context, reading Reid's *Tea in a China Cup* and *The Belle of the Belfast City*, in order to broaden the understanding of experiences of marginality in the specific context of Northern Ireland's historical and political struggles. Reid's plays demystify the Protestant values of loyalty and respectability and unveil the status of loyalist women hidden behind the façade of such state ideologies. This chapter challenged certain criticisms of her drama: that she exploits humanist depictions of the maternal and outsider as a way of distancing from the political struggles. In so doing, I sought to offer that Reid's drama melancholises humanist portrayal of those realms through her aesthetic deployment of loyalist music that constitutes experiences and memories of the maternal figures. While the soundscape constantly haunts Reid's drama, my analysis of the plays has shown that the music often mediates the past and the present for the characters, through which they interrogate their roles and subjecthood within and against the Protestant women's tradition they have cherished.

Reid's politicisation of the domestic involves an emphasis on the connectedness of matrilineal lines of the family in which women come to achieve mutual understandings of emotions, pain, and impasse. However, Carr's description of the domestic in her Midlands plays does not necessarily promise a sense of understanding, growth, or release from the confinement. Rather, Carr's *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, and *By the Bog of Cats*... expose the failure of domestic through the portrayal of women who are caught in the cycle of repetition of traumatic abandonment, while emphasising the subjective instability and dislocation. The home space becomes profoundly defamiliarised because histories and memories of the family entailing the negative other of loss, forgetting, and absence constantly invade the space. The landscape of the Midlands, reflecting the protagonists' internal landscape haunted by loss, is another 'living' character of the plays, which preserves and accommodates forgotten, or often disturbing, histories. Chapter Four sought to demonstrate that the mutual crossings between the inner landscape of the characters and outside landscape of the Midlands confront a naturalised history of Ireland's rural community as a cradle of national identity. The chapter also showed that the

melancholic performance of crossing boundaries transforms linear borders of time and plot (not just home space) into a realm of the uncanny. The formal structure of the plot that bars the future of finality and closing by resurrecting the dead enables the reading of history through the lens of melancholic performance, circular time of repetition that invites a critical engagement with the past to envision future possibilities. Such disintegration of time through the plot structure functions to critique the Celtic Tiger Ireland's celebration of a speedy, progressive, and linear move towards the future while refusing to deal with legacies of national history.

By reading the playwrights' drama through a framework of melancholia that encompasses alterity and performance, I have illuminated possibilities of the aesthetics of melancholia. I suggest that melancholia opens up a performative site of engagement in complexity wherein dynamics of loss and gain, or presence/participation and absence/non-participation can be interrogated without losing insight into the conditions of disconnection or failure. Melancholia has been developed in its complexity as a concept bringing to the fore conditions/possibilities of indeterminacy and ambivalence in relation to the melancholic's intense self-reflexibility and self-criticism. Ambivalence, produced by the subject's psychic and affective crossings that encompass conditions of opposing forces, makes the women's drama distant from any utopian treatment of historical pain and failure of marginalised people. I argue that the dramatists' illumination of characters who are *trapped* by melancholic affiliation with losses, often self-destructive, point to their own highly conscious awareness, self-reflexivity, of the risk of aestheticising marginality in terms of melancholic symptoms. Nevertheless, the dramatists' explorations of the conjunction of national melancholia and subjective melancholia, both of which repeat their performative histories, enable us to approach (transgenerational) disconnections from society and history (including the ruptures of connectivity between the dramatists themselves in the canonical history of Irish drama). Their drama also confronts exclusive identifications that reject recognising certain experiences of loss in melancholia for the ideal of communal whole, and

thus offering a constant doubt about, or a possibility for alternative vision of, what national community is.

Melancholic ambivalence also allows us to avoid reading the plays and the dramatists' attitude towards the characters' marginality in simplistic terms of rejection of, or liberation from, oppression that often equate the representation of failure with failure of representation. Melissa Sihra notes that "many critics have expressed discomfort and often derision that there are no 'positive' resolution in Carr's [Midlands] plays" (2007: 214). However, "in a society where historical processes of female oppression have only begun to be seriously acknowledged in the social, political and academic for the last decade or so," she maintains, "painful narratives need to be addressed before transformations can occur" (207). My approach to the plays through melancholia, I suggest, shares with Sihra's idea of a need to write and perform the narratives of loss and engagement. Melancholia of society and history may not be overcome just by turning against the symptoms, or normative rites of grief such as public memorialisation of famine and wars, but by melancholising the symptoms – performing loss – in order to interrogate (in)adequacy of remembering, forgetting, narrating certain histories. To that extent, the reading of these dramatists through melancholia rewrites melancholia as having a critical capacity for detecting social conditions of exclusion and for offering possibilities for an aesthetic mode of negativity as a way of participating in the 'building' of the communal/national home.

One definitive scene of contemporary Ireland in both South and North is collective performances of memorialisation of the past events such as the 1798 rebellion, the Great Famine, the Easter Rising, and the Troubles. The centrality of remembrance to Ireland's political and cultural landscape has been epitomised in what Emilie Pine terms "Irish remembrance culture" (2011: 3). The active memorialisation, which is the iterative performance of transforming the past into presence, uses individual and collective memories to explain the past and functions as a strategy of 'working through' the painful memories of loss, ultimately providing a reliable source of national/group identity. The commemoration culture often celebrates the overcoming and mastering of the past, and as a result, various sites of loss

are institutionalised and canonised in a way that is more accessible and understandable serving to enhance the stable position of national/group identity. As Pine argues, “the most recent thirty-year phase of Irish remembrance culture looks back to a degraded past, stimulating the present by provoking the desire to escape that past” (2011: 7).

The canonisation of losses becomes problematic when it buries certain types of loss through the very visible enactment of historical losses: while the nation is willed into existence through memorialisation of certain losses, another history is absorbed and concealed behind the façade of the memorialising performance – history of women, children, labourers, and ethnic others who variously suffered or participated in the social formation. Intricately enmeshed with the notion of emancipation, however, canonical discourses of successful resolution of ‘chosen’ traumatic past events can regenerate the strict division between successful mourning (inscription) and pathological melancholia (erasure) while remaining blind to persisting tensions in social structure and relations.

The interpretative and aesthetic mode of melancholia, as José Muñoz asserts, “does not see [melancholia] as pathology or as a self-absorbed mood that inhibits activism”; instead, it is “a mechanism that helps us (re)construct identity and take our dead with us to the various battle we must wage in their names – and in our names” (1999: 74). Muñoz’s accounts make possible to ponder the role of commemoration in the contemporary context of the racial and ethnic diversification of post-1990s Ireland: how memories of the dead and traumatic histories of Ireland are intricately entangled with the envisioning of the nation’s presence and future in the frame of intercultural integration of indigenous and non-indigenous minority groups such as the Traveller, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. While the traumatic history of Ireland is evoked in the memorialisation (whether officially or aesthetically) largely through the mechanism of ‘working through’, such mechanism prompts an assimilation of histories of ethnic ‘others’ for the self-healing and the self-definition of ‘new Irish’. That is, the experiences of immigrants are shaped and represented through the lens of Irish history, which functions to prove Irish capabilities of sympathising with and accept the pain of others (through the

projection of their own traumatic histories). Melancholia, as expressed in Muñoz's accounts, enables to interrogate this spectral projection of Irish memories/histories into immigrants' experiences in a way that refuses the neglect of conflicts and contradictions entailing various battles in the course of envisioning contemporary Ireland and beyond.

Another key context to which melancholia can contribute is the focus on migrant women's bodies and femininity that has become a site of anxiety in discourses of post-1990s Ireland. As has been examined in this thesis, Irish women's bodies (both in the South and the North) have been monitored and controlled throughout the twentieth century as a marker of the nation's biopolitics. The inward influx of migration since the Celtic Tiger era has deepened the anxiety about the others of Irishness: the visibility of foreign bodies marking the new post-Celtic Tiger multicultural Ireland and yet "tagged with the euphemism 'non-national'" and their children "as 'Irish-born children' (as opposed to the children of non-migrants, who are not thus termed)" (Lentin 2004: 302). The foreign female bodies have been exposed in a more intricate dynamics of visibility (as in the implicit stereotyping of migrant women as foreign sex worker) and invisibility (foreign domestic worker) in media and political discourses. As Charlotte McIvor argues in her recently published monograph *Migration and Performance in Contemporary Ireland* (2016), this "aggressive spectacularisation of migrant women highlights not just the reiteration of gendered and misogynistic norms in the construction of the contemporary Irish nation. Rather, the treatment of migrant women makes urgently visible the entanglement of race, ethnicity and class in defining the material limits of social interculturalism as policy and process" (2016: 154). In a chapter devoted to the performative labour of migrant women in conjunction with their economic and reproductive labour, McIvor investigates how migrant women are not just policed in the reproductive and economic domains but also compelled to perform "the reiterative materiality of their bodies" to justify their productive contribution within Irish society (156-7).

McIvor also observes that representations of migrant women, despite their visibility in public sectors in the post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, have been relatively absent in contemporary Irish theatres and wider cultural

productions, which mirrors the lack of “[engagements with the] lived experience of their symbolic function in debates over migration and the future of Irish national identity post-1990s” (2016: 154). As argued throughout the thesis, Irish drama and theatre/performance is a key cultural space where dominant narratives can be challenged and the battles of conflicting forces are engaged. Melancholia as aesthetic and interpretive mode employed here can provide a way in which to examine those conflicts with a refusal of binary oppositions that tend to incorporate one narrative into another. This thesis has been focused on the artistic challenge to the discursive construction of Irishness represented in twentieth-century Irish plays by women. Nevertheless, the thesis offers melancholia as an aesthetic and critical frame for the future engagement with contemporary Irish drama, theatre, and performance, enunciating and challenging various sites of crisis repressed by hegemonic (remembrance) culture in conjunction with material and psychological conditions of those residing outside the domain of recognition and the state protection of contemporary Ireland. The focus of the thesis on the dynamics of loss, absence, and presence at material and affective levels represented in twentieth-century Irish drama by women sheds light not just on theatre and performance’s continuing engagement with the marginalised in society. It also opens up space for the potential of future scholarship in Irish drama and theatre in which to investigate the criss-crossed relationship of the illegitimate Irish female bodies (the bodies that do not feed into the norms of Irishness through excesses or failures) to the bodies of migrant women (that are demanded to be integrated into society but are denied in the realm of Irishness). However, without a conscious and melancholic deconstruction of self-positioning, such studies may not be able to avoid the persisting categorisation, a self-naming practice that seeks to exclude (or assimilate) differences across various border lines, operating at various levels of national/group identity-makings. As Ewa Ziarek poignantly addresses, “[t]he dead repeat the bloodshed of the living, the living in turn repeat, without knowing, the struggles of the dead. The struggle of the multitudes, the multitude of struggles, the past haunting the present, the present leaving a deadly residue for the past of the future” (2012: 67). The future that is envisioned now (the history that is not yet

here) may arrive only in the melancholic struggle of the present, the repeated 'bloodshed' in struggles of encountering with the dead returning to haunt the present (the future of the past) in multiple shapes.

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