

CLÁUDIA PARRA

**IMAGINARY IRISHNESS: THE FEMININE IN DRAMATISATIONS OF THE
EASTER RISING IN SEAN O’CASEY’S *THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS* AND
TOM MURPHY’S *THE PATRIOT GAME***

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Another mother's breakin'
Heart is taking over
When the violence causes silence
We must be mistaken
It's the same old theme since 1916
(‘Zombie’ - Dolores O’Riordan)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	p. 9
1. Theorising Irish Nationalism.....	p. 18
1.1 Nation, Nationality, Nationalism.....	p. 19
1.2 An Authentic Self-Image: The Irish Question.....	p. 29
1.3 A Particular Question: Woman's Image and Nationalism in Ireland..	p. 42
1.4 The Easter Rising 1916: The Irish Revolutionary Imagination.....	p. 57
1.5 The Irish National Theatre: The Rising on Stage.....	p. 74
2. Sean O'Casey's <i>The Plough and the Stars</i>: Nationalism in Dublin Slums	p. 86
2.1 Sean O'Casey: Humanity above Nationalism	p. 87
2.2 <i>The Plough and the Stars</i> : 1916 and its Forgotten Women	p. 97
3. Tom Murphy's <i>The Patriot Game</i>: Retelling the Rising.....	p. 121
3.1 Tom Murphy: A Disillusioned Theatrical Imagination	p. 122
3.2 <i>The Patriot Game</i> : Reviving and Revising 1916.....	p. 133
4. Women in the House: Two Stage Representations of the Irish Woman.....	p. 150
4.1 Women in Control	p. 154
4.2 Maternal Image.....	p. 163
5. Final Considerations	p. 169
6. Bibliographical References	p. 176

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. A Little Boy and British Soldiers	p. 28
Figure 2. Ginger Boy.....	p. 41
Figure 3. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Mrs. Pearse.....	p. 55
Figure 4. Louie Bennett.....	p. 55
Figure 5. Countess Constance Markievicz.....	p. 56
Figure 6. Margaret Pearse with her children.	p. 56
Figure 7. The Seven Signatories	p. 72
Figure 8. O'Connell Street after the Easter Rising,	p. 73
Figure 9. Old Abbey Theatre.....	p. 85
Figure 10. New Abbey Theatre.....	p. 85
Figure 11. Sean O'Casey	p. 96
Figure 12. Nora and Jack Clitheroe.....	p. 120
Figure 13. Nora Madness.....	p. 120
Figure 14. Tom Murphy.....	p. 132
Figure 15. The Narrator.....	p. 149
Figure 16. The Cast of <i>The Patriot Game</i>.....	p. 149
Figure 17. The Easter Proclamation	p. 175

ABSTRACT

Ireland's particular national culture has shaped an imaginary conception of identity which has also affected the image of women. Irish drama has contributed significantly to the debate on and revisionism of Irish identity and, in the twentieth century, the Easter Rising in 1916 was chosen by some Irish playwrights as a background to promote reflection on this question. Sean O'Casey and Tom Murphy presented versions of the Easter Rising on the Abbey stage which approached the identity of Irish women in a nationalistic context. A comparison of these two dramatic texts reveals that, although the playwrights used different strategies, they both reassessed the female image promoted by Irish nationalism.

Keywords: Sean O'Casey; Tom Murphy; Easter Rising; Irish Drama; Female Identity.

RESUMO

Uma vez que a cultura nacional irlandesa tem formado uma concepção imaginária de identidade, isso afeta também a imagem da mulher. O drama irlandês tem contribuído muito para o debate e revisionismo sobre a identidade irlandesa e, no século XX, a Revolta da Páscoa em 1916 foi escolhida como contexto por alguns dramaturgos irlandeses pra promover uma reflexão sobre essa questão. Sean O'Casey e Tom Murphy apresentaram versões da Revolta da Páscoa nos palcos do Abbey que abordaram a identidade da mulher irlandesa em um contexto nacionalista. Uma comparação desses dois textos dramáticos revela que, embora os dramaturgos tenham usado estratégias diferentes, ambos reavaliaram a imagem feminina promovida pelo nacionalismo irlandês.

Palavras-chave: Sean O'Casey. Tom Murphy. Revolta da Páscoa. Teatro Irlandês. Identidade Feminina.

INTRODUCTION

Ireland's small geographical dimension is certainly out of proportion when it comes to its immeasurable literary and cultural history. In Ireland "[...] myth and history are intermixed. It is a landscape inscribed with thousands of years of culture." (MURRAY, 2000a, p. 1). As a result of such cultural richness, the formation of an authentic Irish identity has been a problematical question for Irish people since an early age of its history, getting more intense in the nineteenth century, when the country was incorporated as an integral part of the imperial power and central political formation, but remained a colony of the British state. This dual, yet uncomfortable experience provided Ireland with the experience of an arduous and paradoxical relationship with England. Under British rule for about eight centuries, Irish people could easily be swallowed up by English culture and that was what the English wanted. They tried to eliminate the Irish language, to subdue the people, but the Irish, stubborn and obdurate, even under the most tragic circumstances, held on and Britain did not succeed.

In face of this framework, in the twentieth century it seemed the Irish were ready for revolution. The twentieth century was one of the most important and decisive periods in Irish history. Battles, wars, revolutions, cultural and literary movements made the country experience things it had never experienced before. Nationalism flashed its power and due to that the revolutionary spirit swept across the country. Ireland was desperate to define itself and its conceptions of nationality and patriotism on the world stage, not as a colony of the British Empire, but as an authentic nation with its own singularities. The idea of an ancient and native people was central to Irish identity, so patriotic groups sprang up to revive interest in all things which provided an Irish sense, including Gaelic language, music and theatre. They were all about constructing the idea of Irishness.

Apart from that, the First World War was another relevant factor for the changes in Ireland. At least, three important military events occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century thanks to the First World War and a Revival Movement which began in the end of the nineteenth century. In the 1890s, the Irish Revival movement intensely promoted Irish culture and language. It exposed effectively the close interaction between literature and political engagement in Ireland and influenced the revolution of 1916 and the independence of 1922. A literary movement happened at the same time,

described as the modern Irish Literary Movement, which lasted from the end of the nineteenth century with the fall of Parnell to about 1922 with Irish independence. “In the early 1890s it seemed to W. B. Yeats that the time was right for a new cultural movement in Irish society [...] he immersed himself in Irish legend and folklore, and set about enthusing others.” (WELCH, 2000, p. 197). There was a desire to return to the ancient truth, to the Gaelic tradition. After a period of relative inactivity, research into Gaelic language and literature began to revive. “The revival helped to create an image of pastoral, mythic, unmodernised Ireland that influenced subsequent writers and artists.” (WELCH, 2000, p. 198). The Gaelic League was founded in 1893 with the purpose of keeping the Irish language spoken in Ireland and to promote a truly Irish literature; it even sponsored the publication of Irish writing. At the same time, according to Patrick Pearse, later involved with the insurrection of 1916, the Gaelic League was a school for revolution. The IRB (Irish Republican Brotherhood), a military secret society, used the central branch of the Gaelic League in Dublin as a sort of front for their meetings.

The Irish Revival set the tone for what would be produced in the Irish literary world of the twentieth century, including Irish drama. By the early twentieth century, putting Ireland on stage was one of the central parts of the national project, because once it was possible to change the way people saw themselves then there was the possibility of changing the way people thought about the national question, making them more excited about national liberation. Some years later, World War I was seen as an opportunity for the culturally revived Ireland. In 1916, Irish rebels mounted a violent uprising in Dublin that would result in war. The Easter Rising, considered the birth of Ireland’s independence movement, occurred between Easter Monday, 24 April, and Saturday 29 April. It was supported by approximately 1,800 members of the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army. It was quickly crushed by British forces, but not before the destruction of the city, hundreds of civilian deaths, and the certainty of a violent period between England and Ireland. The Easter Rising of 1916 was a decisive moment for Irish history and the process of independence. The importance and popularity of this event can even be perceived on Irish stage, through many dramatic performances which, in some form or another, depict moments of the rebellion in Dublin.

Three years later the Irish people would watch one more violent period, the Anglo-Irish War, or War of Independence, between 1919 and 1921. It was a fight

whereby the parliament of the Republic of Ireland asserted its sovereignty in arms and won dominion status from the British Government under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. In 1922, with the foundation of the Irish State, Ireland officially became an independent country and between 1922 and 1923, the country's internal conflicts resulted in the Civil War, a period of hostilities between the Army of the Irish and the Republican wing of the IRA. The break of relations with England, the consequent end of Ireland's existence as a colony and the idea of being free were not sufficient for the Irish people, they did not only want to be free, but they also wanted to be recognised as a different people with their own culture and traditions. Thus, the emergence of nationalism was very appropriate and contributed to the Irish necessity for Irishness. Irish national culture fed into necessity and reinforced the idea of an irremediable difference between England and Ireland.

The period that followed Ireland's independence was called by O'Toole, the childhood of the Irish state. The years between 1922 and 1958 were based on the central nationalist ideology that, before the coming of the Saxon invaders, Ireland had enjoyed a Golden Age, an age of innocence and bliss. Now free, the country could restore this Golden Age and bring the return of the Gaelic civilisation. (1994, p. 94). Seeking consistency with the emerging modernity but with the national identity question still alive, the spirit of the sixties was one of transforming Ireland in a go-ahead Irish version of dynamic American success. "When Kennedy visited Ireland in 1963, he came as the living symbol of the new national self-confidence", so "throughout the sixties and into the seventies, rural Ireland in particular adapted its own self-image to American models." (O'TOOLE, 1994, p. 144). The changes that occurred throughout the twentieth century still challenged Ireland at the end of the century. Ferriter states that the ambiguities in Ireland are far from being resolved and that Irish nationalism failed to establish its so acclaimed unity. In the Ireland of the 1990s there was "on the one hand a burgeoning underclass racked by drugs, gangsterism and poverty and on the other, spectacular wealth, vulgarity and indifference." (2004, p. 27). Ireland's problematic dualities seem to be far from being settled. If at the beginning of the twentieth century the problem was the British Empire, by the end of the twentieth century it seemed that Ireland itself was causing its division and that the confident nationalist predictions of almost a hundred years previously were merely a window dressing.

In face of this never-ending quest for an Irish authentic imagery interlinked to a fervently ardent national culture, nationalism and its impact on Irish identity has been a

constant theme in Irish literature. Actually, it was difficult for many Irish writers not to be influenced by the existence of this intriguing presence of nationalism in some moments of the history of Ireland, and Irish drama was not excluded from this influence. In the very early twentieth century there were no great novels in the Irish canon, so, if literature was part of the debate about how nationalism influenced Ireland's and Irish subject's self-image, this was mainly due to drama and poetry. In the case of Ireland, theatre emerges as one of most significant and prolific literary forms of the country. It has played a remarkable role in the relationship between literature and history. Such a connection between theatre and history even reached the extent of influencing some Irish leaders in their decision-making; the Easter Rising of 1916 is a notorious example. Great Irish playwrights have addressed the national question in their works and have produced plays which in turn have also had an influence on how Irish society assumed their identity. The promotion of a national identity was even part of the literary movements and Irish theatre took its part in that; the effects of drama on Irish political propaganda, and vice-versa, cannot be denied indeed. The Revivalist movement, for instance, was reflected in the work of the Abbey Theatre. The Abbey's dramatists, in general, typically tried to depict typical Irish life often associated with the past and its national provincial traditions whose main purpose was to shape the idea of Irishness and instigate a form of emotion intrinsically associated to the principle of being Irish. Nationalism drove into Irish identity because Irish society seemed to be dominated by a literature and culture which preached the national culture. Therefore, Irish identity was molded according to the national culture highly promoted through the island, and the twentieth century was the climax of this propaganda.

Albeit to a lesser extent, Irish drama has also provided space for relevant revisionism about the significance of Irish national culture for the Irish individual, including the female subject. In view of this, the Easter Rising in 1916 has been the background chosen by some Irish playwrights in order to promote such a debate. In his book, *Staging the Easter Rising: 1916 as Theatre* (2005), James Moran makes a very well-structured presentation of Irish playwrights who revisited the revolutionary uprising. Seen as a period of intense commitment to nationalism, the author demonstrates the different moments in which the rebellion has been revived on the stage since its actual occurrence and how each playwright has interpreted and used this important piece of Irish history. What is clear from Moran's work is that very few playwrights managed to escape from the incoherent nationalistic version which ended

up compromising negatively the woman's image. Working on Moran's assumption that a great part of Irish playwrights have depicted women in 1916 according to a nationalistic point of view, this study proposes a comparative analysis of two of the plays in which playwrights have challenged Irish drama on this regard. Although living at different moments of Ireland's history and holding distinct points of view towards Irish nationalism, two writers who courageously raised the usually avoided debate between nationalism and gender were Sean O'Casey, with *The Plough and the Stars* (1926); and Tom Murphy, with *The Patriot Game* (1991).

O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* is one of the best dramatic depictions of the Irish rebellion. In addition to being recognised by critics as a brilliant text, the play is one of the best-known plays about 1916 for the fact that the whole moment and environment of the play's debut also contributed to its promotion, pointing out O'Casey's revival of 1916 as a great and important theatrical symbol to Irish society. In addition to the play's commitment to woman's image in a nationalistic context, it is also observed some aspects of the play which according to the Martin Esslin's considerations on drama theory in *An Anatomy of Drama* (1978). In a straightforward manner Esslin explores some theatrical features which make it possible to identify connecting points between his theory and O'Casey's play.

The Easter Rising was also the background chosen by one of the greatest living playwrights in Ireland, Tom Murphy, in *The Patriot Game* (1965). Recognised for his experimentalist style and his different approach to time, there is no doubt that Murphy is one of the most prominent figures in contemporary Irish theatre. The universality and timelessness of his works are due to the themes the author has often dealt with throughout his career: identity, family and religion. Although politics is not one of the central themes of his plays, *The Patriot Game* approaches the recurrent Irish nationalist question. Staged in Dublin only in 1991, the play presents a female narrator as a key character, which reveals Murphy's attempt to expose the existence of a critical perception about the events of the Rising. Considering the form through which the narrator retells the events, it is possible to reaffirm that the Irish idea of nationalism had a questionable function in the past and has an important impact on the Irish lives nowadays.

Bearing that in mind, the present research consists of a comparative study between these two plays which approaches the national culture taking into consideration the question of female identity. The first chapter is essentially theoretical and historical,

providing general information about the theory used and its application within Ireland's context as well as supportive historical data. Among other acclaimed theoretical works tackling the national culture issue, the ideas of Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (2006) are considered fundamental. Anderson's text lays strong emphasis on the interdependence between nationalism and imagination which constructs definitions for nation, national culture and nationality. When it comes to the imaginary aspect of nationalism and national culture, Anderson's arguments are very useful in an understanding of Ireland's image formation process as well as the idea of Irishness. After embodying the concept of imaginative nationalism in the analysis of the two plays, Stuart Hall's (2000) considerations about cultural identities are fundamentally important, in the sense that the author returns to Anderson's arguments on nationalism and forges a link between national culture and the identity of the subject. Analysing the performance of the subject in a given national culture, Hall argues that individuals imagined themselves as being similar, similar in attitudes, ideas, and practices of life due to a constructed imaginative definition from the already fixed conceptions of nation and nationalism, understanding that these imaginary conceptions of nation and nationality are vital elements in the formation of the subject's identity. In fact, more than looking at the formation of the national identity, Hall puts forward some considerations about fragmented identities which dislocate themselves from process of construction of national culture and are then no longer seen as individuals stable in the social world.

Bringing the subject matter closer to the specific case of the female subject, also in Chapter One, the analyses of Margaret Ward (1991) and Gerardine Meaney (2010) provide an important approach to understanding the feminine image in Irish national culture. They advance some considerations about Irish feminism and patriarchal ideology in the Irish nationalistic context in order to reveal the condition of Irish women. The connection presented between nationalism and the female image is relevant in the way that, while feminist ideology is obstructed by the, almost universal, patriarchal culture which promotes the conception of submissiveness for women, it is noticeable that the nationalist ideology, although an untiring promoter of equality and unity, also contributes, in practice, to accentuate the difference and the weakening of the feminine image. However, the intersection between these two cultural movements in the same period, feminism and nationalism, unleashed unexpected and non-conventional behavioural change. In the same way that there are examples of real women who

emphasised the female experience in the context studied, Irish plays contain representations of these dislocated women in Irish society. That question, however, goes beyond the framework of the revolution, or in other words, an active participation in the nationalist movement. What is noticeable about the reality of these Irish women is that they did not limit their participation to the revolutionary struggles, but they also actively acted in areas generally controlled by men, a fact that empowered their image and role.

These examples make it possible to analyse the incorporation and/or subversion of the traditional behaviour prescribed for women. These real-life women, even living in a patriarchal society, broke from the traditional feminine role model by assuming controversial characteristics and were no longer minor individuals; some of them even outshone their male counterparts. However, Irish drama created and promoted a heroic male figure who represented the essence of the nation, through characters who embodied the national culture and represented those who would change the destiny of the country. Contrasting with these works which mostly praised the male image by representing female characters according to the patriarchal standard, there were female portrayals which empowered feminist ideals and, consequently, destabilised the untouchable patriarchal ideology. Thus, based on historical observations and also on O'Casey's and Murphy's dramatic representations it is possible to recognise female characters who subverted the Irish standard for woman's traditional role, but who, in most cases, had their real condition covered or even hidden in the domestic realm. Although they typically operated within the domestic sphere and appeared to perform traditional gender roles, this imagery exemplifies the blurring of boundaries in nationalist warfare.

Chapter One also considers Irish history, especially political and revolutionary events as well as events in the theatre world during the twentieth century which form the background for an investigation of the female image. Historical facts and information, not only in this chapter, but also throughout the research were taken from the following works: *The Concise Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* (2000), by Robert Welch; *Ireland: A History* (1982), by Robert Kee; *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (2004), by Diarmaid Ferriter; *1916: The Easter Rising* (2005), by Tim Pat Coogan; *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (1996), by Declan Kiberd; *The Easter Rising: A Guide to Dublin in 1916* (2000), by Conor Kostic and Lorcan Collins; *The Politics of Irish Drama* (1999), by Nicholas Grene; and *Women in Ireland, 1800-1918: A Documentary History* (1995), by Maria Luddy.

Chapter Two examines O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* as the most recognised play with the 1916 insurrection as its background. Firstly, a brief overview of O'Casey's life and career is presented, particularly his commitment to Irish politics which involved him in the actual rising. In this part, it is shown how his own experience and remembrances of 1916 and his socialist beliefs also made him bitter about the revolutionary occurrences, which ten years later would lead him to denigrate the revolution's idealised imagery promoted by the Irish State. The main focus, however, is on the close examination of the female characters of *The Plough and the Stars*, aiming to reveal the contrast between O'Casey's form of representing the Irish woman and the elaborate romantic version created by the national culture.

Chapter Three focuses on the analysis of the less well-known *The Patriot Game*, by Tom Murphy. This chapter looks into the great significance of Murphy's play in the contemporary revisionism of 1916 and also attempts to verify possible causes for the play's low profile. The aspects of Murphy's life and work emphasised are the playwright's authentic imagination and his conception of imaginary emotions and illusions conceived as part of human nature, which enabled him to compose a disillusioned depiction of the glorified Easter Rising. Murphy's approach to the female subject is interestingly centralised in the play which is entirely narrated by a feminine figure. Moreover, Murphy remembers one of the most famous symbols of Irish motherhood of 1916, Margaret Pearse, managing to contradict the sacrificial maternal imagery and showing that not all Irish mothers were necessarily willing to give their sons to die for the mother land.

Finally, Chapter Four compares *The Plough and the Stars* and *The Patriot Game*. Since both O'Casey and Murphy approached the feminine question in their works, the chapter seeks to consider how each playwright addressed the female image in the nationalistic Irish context of 1916. Although it is evident that both of them sought to challenge the obscured traditional version, it is also evident that they convey different perceptions of the Easter Rising and its significance for Ireland. Thus, the idea of this chapter is to identify two different strategies which deconstructed the fixed female imagery promoted by Irish nationalistic rhetoric.

While carrying out the study of O'Casey's and Murphy's plays, although a number of academic works dealing separately with one or other of the two plays and their approach with cultural studies, only two publications comparing *The Plough and the Stars* and *The Patriot Game* were found. One of them is Alexandra Poulain's

“Playing out the Rising: Sean O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars* and Tom Murphy’s *The Patriot Game*” (2006). In her article, Poulain examines the two plays about the Easter Rising from a comparative theatrical perspective in order to explore the question of the process of history-making, and according to its perspective, Poulain assumes that, while O’Casey’s scepticism looks negatively at the mythical nationalism of the period, Murphy’s play would be an answer to *The Plough and the Stars* in the sense that it reasserts the importance of the revolution in Irish collective memory.

In the countermarch of this research’s premise, there is a second work, Shaun Richards’ “The Work of a ‘Young Nationalist’?: Tom Murphy’s *The Patriot Game* and the Commemoration of Easter 1916” (2015). It makes a comparison between the 1991 production of *The Patriot Game* and Garry Hynes’s production of *The Plough and the Stars* which was on the Abbey’s main stage while Murphy’s play was being performed on the Peacock’s. Richards’ article suggests that Murphy’s play, unlike a great number of works dealing with the national question, adopts a different attitude to the Easter Rising. While there has been a negative disposition towards the significance of the insurrection among the contemporary writers, the article argues that Murphy was not too averse to nationalism and, thus, recalled the Easter Rising with a favourable look.

In a sense, this comparative study is different from Poulain’s and Richards’ on account of its emphasis on the feminine figure and the effects of nationalism on women. According to this perspective, the study suggests that both plays carry a negative criticism in terms of how the two playwrights depicted female characters in their plays. The analysis’s main purpose is far from being a form of denigrating the conceptualisation of the Easter Rising in Ireland’s history. There is no question of this study interfering in the importance of 1916 insurrection, but in revising and reasserting how women have been remembered through the ensuing years.

1. THEORISING IRISH NATIONALISM

The Irish nation's insistence on developing its own culture by itself is not so much the demand of a young nation that wants to make good in the European concert as the demand of a very old nation to renew under forms the glories of a past civilisation.

James Joyce, *Critical Writings*, 1966, p. 157

In order to reflect about cultural identity, particularly national identity and its impact on the individual subject in modern society, it is necessary to establish, primarily, some general conceptions about the terms nation, nationalism and identity. The derivative words from the term nation, such as nationality, nationalism, nationalist, have numerous meanings. Since there is no scientific, objective definition for nation, its origin may be connected to cultural aspects always intrinsic in history. As suggested by Anderson (2006), the conception of nation comes from particular cultural artefacts and, therefore, these communities would be imagined. There is a national narrative inscribed in history and literature which produces stories, images, scenarios, symbols and rituals which give life and significance to the nation. Although these cultural elements do not have sufficient meaning to create an absolute understanding, they harmonise with the sense of nationalism in society.

The European nationalism reached its peak in the nineteenth century. The structures of the movement were led by bourgeois elites which declared cultural-national independence; however, it functioned deficiently as an emancipatory movement. When nationalistic ideology was developed in Europe it cautiously created its structures accentuating some elements such as traditional culture, traditional literature, national essence and the promotion of an identical moral character among the people who were part of this national community. At the same time the movement, admirably adherent to traditional values, produced a form of resistance to modernisation, seeing it “as a process destructive of their integrity as separate cultures and their apparently retrograde refusal to join the global community.” (DEANE, 1989, p. 362-3). In this sense, another important consideration, especially because this study deals with Irish identity, is the idea of the emergence of nationalism from colonialism. In this regard, Deane’s (1989) arguments on the topic will guide the assertions which suggest that Ireland emerged as a nation due to the transition from colonialism to nationalism and that this fact caused changes in the Irish subject. In this connection, the

question of identity will be taken into account from Hall's observations (2000) on a new and fragmenting identity of the modern individual, more specifically, when he reflects on identities arisen from the sense of belonging to a particular national culture, apparently imagined as the idea of nation and nationalism proposed by Anderson. Indeed, one of the paradoxes of nationalism is the fact that it took shape through a cultural formation which, even though intricately articulated, was also amorphous and inchoate. As a result of this, the recent national culture gives scope for subversion of its discourse and for the deconstruction and disestablishment of standard texts ideologically contained within a well-accepted system of representation. In this respect, the present study seeks to ascertain a possible deconstruction, particularly, of the Irish female identity in the nationalistic context proposed, the Easter Rising of 1916. Repressed by ideas of singularity and passivity, some of those women could not simply accept the coherent unity imposed by nationalism and ignore their fragmented nature and may therefore be considered as subjects who subvert the homogenised national stereotype.

After these reflections, the chapter will examine the world of drama in order to examine Irish dramatisations which revived the Easter Rising of 1916 and how these works depicted the feminine figure on stage.

1.1 Nation, Nationality, Nationalism

PEARSE. What is this thing called patriotism? I don't know. Nationalism? I don't know. Nationalism is not a negotiable thing. Good. Is it selfish? Ask him who adores what is God. Good. Can you eat it? Write it? Smell it – catch it – see it – stop it – find it – lose it – trust it? Can you trust it?
Tom Murphy, *The Patriot Game*

Defining and conceptualising “nation” and its derivatives has been a demanding task for scholars due to the amorphous and almost incomprehensible features of the process of their formation. For Anderson (2006, p. 3), “[...] their explanation remains a matter of long-standing dispute. Nation, nationality, nationalism – all have proved notoriously difficult to define [...]” Notwithstanding these remarks, it is also a reality that “the end of the era of nationalism, so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time”. In addition, this conflicted attempt at definition makes the terms susceptible to

different uses, because once these definitions are created they may be transferred to a great number of social terrains with varying degrees of self-consciousness, and political and ideological results; however, the question becomes still more complicated when people commonly misconstrue the meaning of the terms, attributing to them an image of sovereignty and a subsequent deep attachment (ANDERSON, 2006, p. 4). A possible cause for people to formulate wrong conceptions about nation, for example, is the fact that nation has been conceived as a natural thing, as Gellner explains, “Having a nation is not an inherent attribute of humanity, but it has now come to appear as such” and he goes on to recall that nations are “not a universal necessity. Neither nations nor states exist at all times and in all circumstances.” (2006, p. 6). The issue has even been present in the literary world since, most particularly through the last century, many writers have touched on the subject. One, for example, was James Joyce, in the dialogue between Leopold Bloom and John Wyse in *Ulysses*:

- Persecution, says he, all the history of the world is full of it.
Perpetuating national hatred among nations.
- But do you know what a nation means? says John Wyse.
- Yes, says Bloom.
- What is it? says John Wyse.
- A nation? says Bloom. A nation is the same people living in the same place.
- By God, then, says Ned, laughing, if that’s so I’m a nation for I’m living in the same place for the past five years.
- So of course everyone had a laugh at Bloom and says he, trying to muck out of it:
- Or also living in different places.
- That covers my case, says Joe.
- What is your nation if I may ask, says the citizen.
- Ireland, says Bloom. I was born here. Ireland. (2002, p. 317).¹

It is not by accident that the example above refers to Ireland, since the Irish case is one of the most mentioned in studies of nationalism, and it is also the subject of this research. Bearing Bloom’s definition in mind, it is clear that before assuming an individual consciousness of identification, an interpretation of themselves, people have an awareness of themselves as a nation.

¹ This does not mean that Joyce held that conception of nation himself. Although he wrote the text, we cannot infer that he endorsed or believed it. Bloom is a fictional character, and he does not necessarily share the same thoughts and ideas as Joyce. The meaning and origin of a quote from a fictional character may be skewed if it is attributed directly to the author.

Nationality and nationalism pose the same problems with meaning because even though they are constructed products of modern society, the idea of something inherently related to humanity and/or nature has also accompanied them. The lack of these conceptions may cause a deep sense of subjective loss. Gellner exemplifies,

[...] a man must have a nationality as he must have a nose and two ears; a deficiency in any of these particulars is not inconceivable and does from time to time occur, but only as a result of some disaster, and it is itself a disaster of a kind. All this seems obvious, though, alas, it is not true. (GELLNER, 2006, p. 6).

Although Gellner rules out the definition of nation by cultural aspects, arguing that they make no sense when previous eras are considered, where cultural allegiances were independent of national ones, he agrees that, at least, in the era of nationalism, nation was defined in terms of culture, which means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating (2006, p. 55-56). In this sense, Gellner's considerations agree with Anderson's. The author of *Imagined Communities* understands that the multiple signification of nation-ness and nationalism are cultural artefacts of a particular kind (2006, p. 4). This connection of nationalism with culture seems to be one of the factors that make it difficult to assess nationalism's purpose and effects. For Deane, "Culture is, indeed, an amorphous term, especially when it is routinely and with every appearance of benignity locked it with its comparably ill-defined cousin tradition in the ideological cell of nationalism." (1989, p. 361). The conception of culture itself and its dogmatic standardisation, propagating a mythical unitary, leaves the way open for the diminishing of differences and otherness. When cultural systems create their own systems of representation, as happens in national culture, besides (and probably due to) political and psychological repression as a crucial part of that, they inevitably involve alterations to the structure of identity, a focus of the present study. In view of this and considering the existence of different definitions for the term "nation", the present study will construct its propositions specifically according to Anderson's definition of the nation, "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." (2006, p. 6).

As such, nationalism also seems to be constructed according to the imaginary aspect imbued in the idea of nation and national culture. In this connection, the 'necessity' of nation and nationality may be the central problem with nationalism. For Gellner, it is not nations that create nationalism, but the contrary, nationalism creates

nations, which is why thinker-elites need a common culture: in order to gather people. Again, there is the link with culture and he adds, “Nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority [...] of the population.” (2006, p. 57). There are many forms of nationalism and all of them have in common this principle, which claims to have its roots in a natural universe, being assumed as a natural state of human shape; more than that, it claims precedence for its own culture by identifying its culture with nature.

Besides the link with culture, another possible cause of the emergence of a national system and the creation of a national culture could be attributed to a prior system, in this case, colonialism. Despite its amateurishness compared to the well-articulated imperialist form, it seems to be powerful enough to give life to more complex and entrenched systems. Deane (1989) agrees with this suggestion and sees colonialism as a possible prior form of imperialism and nationalism as well. Post-colonialism’s characteristic of combining culture and power has favoured nationalism “by celebrating its inexhaustible capacity for minoritarian difference and that nationalism, by its endless plying of culture as a sufficient counteragency to power, has found in post-colonialism the future it deserves.” (DEANE, 1989, p. 368). In fact, nationalism in opposition to imperialism is, from some perspectives, nothing more than a continuation of imperialism by other means. Nationalism’s flexible internal structures manage an ideology which is rapidly absorbable by people who want to struggle against a reality of defeat, expropriation and enslavement. By closely corresponding to such yearnings, nationalism promotes a dutiful, powerful idea of an egalitarian and united civilisation which is able to overcome oppression, retrogression and bloodshed through an articulate national discourse: “External domination has been introjected to the point that a nation, so constructed, may be said to have learned nothing from oppression but oppression itself.” (DEANE, 1989, p. 361).

In effect, most critiques of nationalism claim that, as an ideology, it merely reproduces the very discourses by which it had been subjected. It asserts its presence and identity through precisely those categories that had denied them – race, essence, destiny, language, history – merely adapting these categories to its own purposes. Whatever the merits or demerits of this description of nationalism in relation to imperialism, it allows us to focus more closely on the role of “culture” in transforming nationalism in a successful ideological system. Thus, as it happens with colonialism, which is based on a national and religious formation, nationalism can be characterised

not only by an imaginary formation with the capacity of transforming its artificial condition into a consolidated natural one, but also, among other things, as a system which promotes a feeling of belonging and destiny.

So, on this basis, it is possible to understand the emergence of a national culture which reunites different human beings in an imaginary fraternity by utilising not only common culture, understandings and meanings, but also the acknowledgement that the other is a fellow national and the recognition of mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of shared membership in it (GELLNER, 2006, p. 7). Once united in one thought, the subsequent isolation provoked by the imposition of a new form of culture, the national one in this case, stimulates the imagination and breeds fantasies whose consciousness is replaced by a hermetic national formation. Anderson refers to these isolated groups as imagined communities (2006, p. 7).

The combined discourses uttered by created systems and these imagined communities promote a version of national identity which not only includes the idea of destiny, but also “heroism” as a form of duty (DEANE, 1989, p. 355), and this heroic national duty has generated a large number of sacrifices which may be explained by the deep attachment provoked by nationalism. This takes us back to the Irish case. According to Deane

Ireland is especially useful because its national independence movement was, from the beginning, closely involved with the production and recovery of a national literature and the question of a revival of the national language. In the process, Ireland also produced some of the masterpieces of literary modernism, thereby clarifying in a previously unprecedented manner the nature of the relationships between imperialism, nationalism, and modernism. (1989, p. 363).

Specifically in the nationalistic context of 1916, the programme of cultural nationalism cast its net as widely as possible in seeking to control society’s behaviour and reassure an authentic (nationalistic) independent image which meant to Irishmen and women the imposition of sacrificial roles through the claim of love for Ireland and a commitment with its freedom.

Ireland’s cultural roots, in one way or another, appear to come from the colonisation’s process and, also, from the process of rupture with the coloniser. Social and military movements, revolutions and battles occurred, among other reasons, because of the dissatisfaction with English oppressive domination. In a certain sense,

the flourishing of nationalism in Ireland occurred in reaction to a perceived natural enemy, the English coloniser. Thus, it may be reasonably concluded that the formation of Ireland as an independent nation as well as its nationalistic principles occurs at the moment the Irish community no longer accepts the impositions of the exploiter nation. Similarly, Hall argues that nations exist first as a form of competition against other ethnic nations and power (2000, p. 57). In this way, it is relevant to reflect on the conception of nation as an enemy and natural institution which enables the emergence of another nation. The rupture with the coloniser is followed by the search for the assertion of identity of the ex-colony, which wants to be an independent nation and part of a different realm.

This paradoxical route of the creation of nationality, involving the relationship between coloniser and colonised, the detachment of the colony and the emergence of a nation and its national ideals, seems to reinforce the relevance in analysing the individual subject who belongs to this national culture which, being one of the ramifications of cultural identity, ends up creating behavioural patterns for this subject:

A national culture is a discourse – a way of constructing meanings which influences and organises both our actions and our conception of ourselves [...] National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about ‘the nation’ with which we can identify; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it. (HALL, 2000, p. 613).

The discourse promoted by nationalism leads national identity to establish the location of the subject in the society when it creates a sense of belonging and loyalty through cultural aspects such as ideologies, symbols and values. However, although the transition from colonialism to nationalism empowered Ireland as a nation, ironically, there is evidence that this particular passage from one system to another caused the dissolution of the individual, the undermining of the Irish subject’s identity. The mutable individual identity was replaced by the immutable national one. One of the most important and intriguing characteristics of human identity is its natural diversity, its refusal to assume a single standard. According to Hall, “The subject assumes different identities at different times, [...] If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or ‘narrative of the self’ about ourselves” and he adds, “The fully unified, completed, secure, and coherent identity is a fantasy”, in other words, imagined (2000, p. 598). In the case of Ireland’s

nationalism, the replacement of the individual's mutable nature by national identity, specifically what we call Irishness, tried to cover the essential characteristic of identity. It is interesting to note that, in a certain way, the establishment of nationalism in a formerly colonised nation, especially in the twentieth century, contributed to the weakening of the Romantic version of the individual consciousness which in previous centuries functioned as a form of escapism from the modern society.

The complexity involved in dealing with the idea of identity is widely acknowledged, and thus, this research does not seek to form any conclusion or make judgements, but rather to produce formulations on the natural mutability feature of identity in order to contribute to further studies in the area. However, in order to avoid lack of clarity or questions related to the definition of identity in the present study, the classic sociological conception of identity, which defines it as being formed when self and society share the same social context, will be employed:

[...] The subject still has an inner core or essence that is "the real me," but this is formed and modified in a continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds "outside" and the identities which they offer.

Identity, in this sociological conception, bridges the gap between the "inside" and the "outside" - between the personal and the public worlds. The fact that we project "ourselves" into these cultural identities, at the same time internalizing their meanings and values, making them "part of us," helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world. Identity thus stitches (or, to use a current medical metaphor, "sutures") the subject into the structure. It stabilizes both subjects and the cultural worlds they inhabit, making both reciprocally more unified and predictable. (HALL, 2000, p. 597-598).

Additionally, with regard to twentieth-century social transformations, Hall talks about a distinctive type of structural change in modern societies which is causing a breakdown in cultural frames such as class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and nationality, and, subsequently, leading to a fracturing and/or, at least, a shift in personal identities. "This loss of a stable 'sense of self' is sometimes called the dislocation or de-centering of the subject. This set of double displacements - de-centering individuals both from their place in the social and cultural world, and from themselves - constitutes a 'crisis of identity' for the individual." (2000, p. 596-597).

The present study is particularly focused on two of the cultural landscapes pointed out by Hall (2000), gender and nationality, since it has taken up for analysis the dramatic representation of the Irish feminine figure located in a period of heightened

nationalism. In the context observed for this research, the interaction of self and society occurs due to the imposition of a national stereotype, spread through Irish nationalistic discourse, to personal identities; it is clearly an imagined one, since it propagates ideas of equality, coherence and complete unity. In this sense, Hall says that the national cultures into which we are born are one of the principal sources of cultural identity in the modern world, and, recalling Anderson's propositions in *Imagined Communities*, similarly to the imagined idea of nation and nationality we think of this national identity "as if they are part of our essential natures", even though "these identities are not literally imprinted in our genes (2000, p. 611-612). This reasoning seems to provide the basis for understanding the concept of Irishness for Irish people as being something inherent to their human condition, and, combined with nationalistic discourse, this conception created the idea of something Irish people could not escape from, and if they did it they it meant to deny themselves, and politically, they would be considered traitors. But Hall remembers, "[...] national identities are not things we are born with, but are formed and transformed within and in relation to representation. [...] People are not only legal citizens of a nation; they participate in the idea of the nation as represented in its national culture." (2000, p. 612).

For Irish women, this national identity meant the representation of a sorrowful role, since they suffered emotional and physical damages caused by the nationalistic spirit of 1916. However, they were almost entirely eliminated from the historical narrative and, when they were not, they were only remembered as covered by the national carapace which sought to stifle their 'real me' in favour of nationalistic events. This imposition of identity on the female image placed in Irish nationalism may be better understood according to some perspectives on the influences national culture brings to women. For McClintock, all nationalism are gendered, invented and dangerous (1997, p. 89), and assuming nationalism as an influence on the identities of the subject and extending this to the gender question, she talks about a uniformity (and subsequent imposition) that nationalism pushes onto the female image through an idealised family iconography, conceiving women in subordinate and domestic roles (1997, p. 90-91). This uniformity imposed on real-life Irish women seems also to be present in the dramatisations which revisited the insurrection of 1916. Irish playwrights mostly depicted feminine images corresponding to the national stereotype promoted by Irish politics. Due to Ireland's intrinsic relationship with the world of drama, such representations even worked as a role model for Irish women. Irish audiences were so

committed to the nationalistic cause that, when confronted with dramatisations which depicted non-standard national roles, they quickly reacted against what they were seeing. This negative reception made many playwrights follow the traditional path of Irish theatre by constructing female characters whose personal identity was influenced and organised according to the Irish national culture. On the other hand, just as in real life, there were women who did not undergo the imposed homogenised national stereotype, since not every single female dramatisation was influenced by nationalism. Some Irish playwrights were courageous enough to deviate from the nationalistic vein of Irish drama, and produced plays in which the female images express a sort of discontentment in face of the behaviour which was expected from them. Two of these dramatic texts will be considered in this study, Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* and Tom Murphy's *The Patriot Game*, respectively in Chapters Two and Three. But, before that, it is important to give a more detailed explanation of the construction of Irish identity and its relation with the national politics of 1916.



Figure 1. A little boy and British soldiers around the corner in Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1973. (<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/516928863456027168/>)

1.2 An Authentic Self-Image: The Irish Question

“Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will what you imagine and at last you create what you will”.

George Bernard Shaw, *The Serpent*, 1921, Act 1

On the margins of Europe, there is an island shaped of heroes and villains, lost battles and sad songs. Also gently called “The Emerald Isle”, Ireland is a country full of contrasts with a complex historical past. In its very early past, Ireland was considered a claustrophobic place, inhabited by people turned in upon themselves and victims of a powerful neighbour. Its history is a landscape marked by the change of centuries, the randomness of crimes, the rise and fall of kings, prosperity, war, revolution and faith. From the unpopulated countryside to the roots of the cities, the country has been shaped by waves of migration and invasion. New languages, faiths, cultures came from outside and continue to do so.

There is an old, mistaken view about Irish history which can be summarised as the simple prism of the conflict between the British and the Irish. Although the real history of Ireland goes beyond its successive impasses with Britain, this mistaken view arises primarily from the fact that Ireland suffered one of the most cruel colonisation processes of Europe’s history. British settlement extended for many centuries. Since the first British invasion of the island, Ireland’s history has been marked by stories of battles, hunger, poverty, rejection and exploration. For many years, Irish people were excluded in different ways by the English, including culturally and historically; the settlers came to the country in order to deplete the island’s resources, transforming it into a miserable place in which natives did not even have basic conditions for survival.

Its multicultural background and the exploitation it has experienced have caused serious effects to the isle and its inhabitants; in fact, the transformations and events in Ireland’s history have impacted on the very process of forming and affirming an Irish identity. The complexities of defining the Irish subject’s image are related to the indeterminacy rooted in Irish collective and individual identity. It has been a problematical question for Ireland since an early age of its history, being aggravated in 1800, when the country was incorporated as an integral part of the imperial power and central political formation, but concomitantly remaining a colony of the British state:

It was modernized and Anglicized; it was also devastated by famine and repression to such a degree that its population was halved and its old Gaelic culture, already in retreat since the seventeenth century, was rendered almost extinct. In addition, the Protestant/Catholic religious divisions, introduced by English invasion in earlier centuries, were coincident with complicity with British power on the one hand and resentment of it on the other. (DEANE, 1989, p. 363).

This dual, yet uncomfortable situation caused Ireland to experience a paradoxical case of identity formation. For Irish people the fact of being controlled by England came with an idea of “impurity,” “foreignness,” or “mixedness”, and they were never happy with that. According to Gellner, the lack of a national identification is a challenge to the human mind, “The idea of a man [*sic*] without a nation seems to impose a [great] strain on the modern imagination.” (2006, p. 6).

Deane (1989) analyses colonialism as a prior form of imperialism and nationalism. Thus, the pivoting point of the construction of Irish nationalism seems to have been the fact that Ireland first experienced colonialism with the extenuating principle, politically emphasised, that English colonialism fostered disunity in Ireland. According to O’Toole, it is evident Irish citizens’ particular dissatisfaction with being associated to English; although they were so resistant to English culture, they did not have many problems, for example, in accepting American culture, which occurred especially in the second part of the twentieth century:

One of the peculiarities of Irish nationalism and of the culture which surrounded it had always been the fact that while it was hyper-sensitive to possibly pernicious influences from England, it had no such sensitivity to America, for example. Such a fact underlines the Irish aversion to England created by the constant English presence and exploration in the island. (O’TOOLE, 1994, p. 144).

The Irish antipathy towards English influence seems to provide a basis for considering the images of Ireland and the Irish subject as creations established in opposition to the existence of the English Empire. Ryan describes it as a kind of “issue of national self-determination in the face of imperialist oppression.” (1997, p.21). The Irish people’s desire for a truly, original nationality happened due to the existence of the imposition of a foreign culture by England. Therefore, since the Irish saw the English as a kind of enemy, a threat against their cultural heritage, they felt the necessity of distinguishing themselves from their enemy neighbours. The simplest Irishman considered himself to be different to an Englishman, something meant to be of great

importance to them. But the rupture in relations with England and the consequent end of Ireland's existence as a colony required something more, something which could empower the Irish endeavour to become a free nation. The idea of being politically independent was not sufficient for them, they did not only want to be free, but they also wanted to be recognised as a different people with their own culture and traditions. Moreover, they embraced the idea that every Irish subject had the same story, the same background, and the same blood. The constructed image of Ireland was the image of a country without divisions, the mother of the same comradely sons; England was the only cause of division, hence the necessity of driving the English out of there. Mother Ireland, as a female image, could not be permanently degraded by a male image of England; the English were the guilty men who made Ireland suffer. Thus, the emergence of nationalism was very appropriate and contributed to the Irish necessity for Irishness.

But, if the term Irish is defined as the nationality of Ireland's native people, what does Irishness mean? The inconsistency and imprecision of the definitions of nation, nationality and nationalism open the possibility of considering how a particular population or group of people in a particular geographical context interpret these terms. The way Ireland's inhabitants incorporated the meaning of these terms created the country's image and the image they assumed of themselves. There was an oniric idea of Ireland as a true, original Gaelic nation and the nationalistic spirit supported this ideology by promoting the wish of being truly Irish in a free Ireland as an inherent part of their identity, something as an Irish individuality. Ireland was seen as the motherland in which the most important thing people should be proud was to be an Irishman, and thus Irishness took priority over any other aspect of identity in people's lives. The kind of nationalism propagated in Ireland argued that there was no problem with the existing differences (class, status) in the society; these divisions had no importance if they were all united by the fact of being Irish. "[...] the official ideology of nationalism had always placed country above class, founding itself on the belief that what united Irishmen was infinitely more important than the petty economic antagonisms which might divide them." (O'TOOLE, 1994, p. 41). Their reliance on the conception of Irishness was based on the idea that they all belonged to the same mystical community and belonged to a pure nationality. According to Anderson, this nationalistic feeling of fraternity produces a strong emotion which might also have negative consequences:

Finally, it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. (2006, p. 8).

The conception of Irishness was constructed and molded, in great part, by the Irish state which, even before Irish independence, worked on the strategies to form an idealised truly Irish nation. Family, for example, was one of the highlights of national discourse. Although the typical and imposed image of the traditional Irish family would be in crisis after the middle of the twentieth century, for years it worked as one of the tools which guided and gave a level of reliability to political discourse. The Irish family “was, in the political ideology of the state, much more than a mere social arrangement. It was the guarantor of social stability, the focus of continuity in a changing and threatening world [...]”, or according to the Constitution of the Irish Republic, “The natural, primary and fundamental unit group of Society... a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law”. ” (O’TOOLE, 1994, p. 73).

But Ireland’s status as a colony was finally drawing to a close in the second decade of the twentieth century. After centuries of wars and quarrels between the English and the Irish, after the Anglo-Irish War or Irish War of Independence, a guerrilla war fought from 1919 to 1921 between the Irish Republican Army and the British security forces in Ireland, the Irish Republic was proclaimed an independent country. The struggles for independence were not simply about the nationalist struggle, but also the quest for an authentic identity since determining identity seems to be an unsolved question in the problematic Irish scenario. Therefore, the inherent indeterminacy which lies at the borderlines of Irish culture and haunts Irish people’s identity was one of the instigating factors which drove Ireland to independence. A brief overview of its history reveals the nation’s obstinacy of praising its roots and preserving an authentic self-image even whilst a colony. Although the idea of the Irish as racially Celtic belongs to the nineteenth century, an intensification of this conception occurred in the transition for the twentieth century, reaching its peak during the years between 1916 and 1922. For nationalists of this period, their difference to the English enemy depended on belonging to an imagined finer race. The identification with national

culture was such that, for a long period, its adverse effects were kept buried and unnoticeable.

In order to understand more fully the formation of the Irish nation, it is relevant to draw an overview of its history during the years before and after the Irish insurrection of 1916, named the *Easter Rising*. The Rising began on Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, and lasted for six days. Especially during this period, a constant and intense nationalist discourse was spread through the entire island, making evident Ireland's dissatisfaction with its subordinate position as a colony. Irish collective discontentment may be understood as the essential element which, emphasised by a political discourse, culminated in the emergence of a free nation and its authentic nationality. What is more, the Irish wish to be recognised as an authentic people with a different culture resulted not only in a breakdown of the relationship with Britain, but also affected each Irish subject as individual.

The transition of Ireland from a colony to an independent country was linked to a ceaseless quest for the assertion of identity which began even before its establishment as an independent country in 1922. A consideration of some events around the end of the nineteenth century shows an increasing of the national discourse which was stimulated by the era of Charles Stewart Parnell's achievements, being followed by the creation of the *Gaelic League* in 1893. In this period, in order to reinforce patriotic convictions, Irish culture was intensely propagated through varied cultural products (ANDERSON, 2006, p. 141), such as for example, an emphatic discourse which created in the population a feeling of belonging and loyalty. Such was this nationalistic wave that in 1916 Irish leaders organised the unsuccessful Easter Rising rebellion.

Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–1891) is certainly an important name in the rise of modern Irish politics. During his life, Ireland experienced a resurgence of nationalistic feelings. Due to his vehement engagement in Irish politics as a great nationalist leader, some historians began referring to the period from 1833 to 1891 as the era of Charles Stewart Parnell. A major source of change during this time might be associated with the fact that Parnell used the prominence he had won in the land war years to fashion a new kind of Irish political party. His good reputation as a representative Irish leader in Parliament, which was predominantly occupied by English members, led to advances in spreading Irish ideals and vindications. Ireland had been promised *Home Rule*, which meant a large measure of self-government and, although Parnell was not successful in implementing that, it is evident that, during his period as

the Irish Parliamentary Party's leader, at the top of his career in 1880, he was able to reunite Irish citizens in a single national feeling. Thanks to its spark, some years later a series of other measures were adopted in order to promote the native culture, such as literary and revolutionary movements.

In 1890, there was a deep apprehension among the Irish members of the Parliament due to a scandal involving Parnell's personal life and,

Instead of making a tactical retreat into the wilderness for a few years and then resuming the reins at a more propitious moment, Parnell's pride drove him to fight to remain leader. The Irish Party split into pro- and anti-Parnell factions and the strain of the in-fighting killed Parnell who died, four months after marrying Kitty, in October 1881. The Home Rule movement did not die with him but it entered a coma that was to last for approximately twenty years.

Under the leadership of John Redmond, the Irish Party's wounds were eventually healed. Patient and temperate in method and approach, Redmond had been loyal follower of Parnell. (COOGAN, 2005, p. 19-20).

Accordingly, the group was reunited under the command of John Redmond, who saw a military alliance with Britain as something positive for Ireland. But Redmond did not have the support of all:

On 3 August 1914, Redmond put the support of his party behind the British war effort. He hoped that if Ireland proved its loyalty during the crisis, the passage of Home Rule would be more likely to be implemented following the war. Redmond actively encouraged Irishmen to fight on behalf of Britain. Radical Irish nationalism, however, absolutely opposed this approach, believing rather in the old Fenian slogan that 'England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity'. This radicalism manifested itself in a number of organisations in Dublin in 1916. (KOSTIC; COLLINS, 2000, p. 21).

In addition to those who rallied round this new political leader in Parliament, there were other nationalistic groups growing in Ireland, as such the Fenian movement, which, at the beginning of the 1890s, was undergoing a process of renovation and fought for an Ireland free of English political intervention. Even after the unsuccessful attempt of Parnell to provide more political autonomy for the Irish party in Parliament, it was apparent in that moment a stronger national feeling and an increasing aspiration for a political division.

A social transformation was apparent from some developments which characterised a more optimistic reality, such as a more organised agricultural sector, a rise in the banking sector and the development of the railway network. Many of the population believed that Ireland was ready to become an independent country. The preservation of the nationalistic spirit in the Irish atmosphere even after Parnell's death in October 1891 may be explained by the interaction of cultural, economic and political components occurring at an appropriate moment.

Despite the fact that Ireland was experiencing an important and more optimistic moment; the country still faced extreme poverty. A considerable part of the population lived frugally tenement houses, or, slums, in precarious conditions. The high infant mortality rate was an evident problem, and the children who survived were often living on the streets, always hungry and miserable, living without parental attention. Kostic and Collins describe, specifically, the reality of this period in Dublin:

Economy decay, encompassing the Great Famine of 1845-1848, had led to the growth of the darker side of the city. Slum tenements had encroached upon the huge weighty public buildings of the eighteenth century, so that they no longer appeared as spacious monuments to prosperity, but rather as 'big stones' among the rubble.

Twenty-five thousand families lived in tenements, seventy-eight percent in single-room dwellings; the two Dublin work-houses contained 6,500 paupers. The previous year pawnbrokers had taken four and a half million pledges. Accompanying the overcrowding and poverty were the deadly diseases of tuberculosis and pneumonia – which contributed to the grim statistic that while infant mortality was 103 per 1,000 live births in London in 1915, it was 142 for Dublin. (2000, p.15).

Despite this gloomy outlook, the era of Charles Stewart Parnell had an impact on the Irish belief in freedom. Impacted by the nationalistic wave of this era, which, now, seemed to gain new strength, Irish leaders promoted movements in order to emphasise the importance of national culture. The Irish Literary Revival, which also sought a revival of the Irish language, was another fundamental spark in the process of independence. Irish society was living a moment of transformation and a vested interest in the renaissance of national culture emerged.

The creation of two institutions, specifically, marked the beginning of the Irish Revival. In 1892, Douglas Hyde became the president of the *National Literary Society* and the following year he founded with Eoin MacNeill, the *Gaelic League*, which aimed to promote and preserve the Irish native language and, consequently, Irish literature, in a

period when there was a rapid decline in the numbers of native Irish-speakers as a consequence of high emigration and the imposition of the English language. Language was one of the badges of national culture. Regardless of differences, there was one single commonality among them, the Irish language. In partnership with *The Gaelic Athletic Association* (GAA), the League preached the idea that Ireland should not be seen as an English colony, but as a distinct country with an original culture. There were sincere attempts to try to keep these institutions free of politics, but over the years their double role became evident and it was possible to find poets, writers and playwrights interacting with the political sphere; many of them even maintained official activities in the two areas, such as Patrick Pearse and Thomas MacDonagh who, went on to participate in the Easter Rising in 1916. Years after the Irish Revival, John Eglinton (1935) referred to Ireland as a country whose poets made the mistake of being involved into politics.

Through their literary production, these authors formulated a fictional narrative depicting Ireland as the nation which recovered its old original traditions by remaining outside the sphere of influence of modernisation. “The Celtic version of Irish nationalism had its own world-civilization narrative, the discourse of culture as a peculiarly Celtic ‘country’, as a territory rescued from the dominance of an impoverishing modernity.” (DEANE, 1989, p. 364). Many writers were caught up in this idea and produced a literature based on the promotion of the old Irish costumes, the Gaelic tradition. Yeats, for instance, created a version of the Irish national character, a kind of hero “in whom the nation’s essence was embodied and through whom its destiny was articulated”, and because of that he suffered marginalisation under English colonisation:

Yeats’s cultural nationalism is created out of a series of marginalized discourses that almost vengefully become, in their combination, a central discourse. But then that central discourse is itself marginalized as the actual Irish Revolution begins with the Rising of 1916 and proceeds to what Yeats deems to be a very pallid and bourgeois version of the nation-state, catholic rather than celtic, seeking a compromise with the modernity it had (or he had) initially spurned. In this, Yeats exemplifies the experience of disillusion and disenchantment often repeated in later postcolonial countries. (DEANE, 1989, p. 364).

Although there was an attempt to escaping from this traditional view of the Irish hero causing an “ambivalent position between opposition that cannot be resolved but at

least can be exploited” (DEANE, 1989, p. 364), an intense production of national literature and political change was fomented in the years between 1880 and 1920. Much literary production at this time, mainly drama and poetry, revealed a political connotation inspiring a concern about a truly Irish identity. These works were shaped by the historical moment in the country. The increase and propagation of this kind of literature happened interspersed with an important moment for Irish politics which became known as the Irish Revival or Gaelic Revival. For example, there is a clear distinction between the literary constructed Ireland of the great writers like Bernard Shaw, John Millington Synge, William Butler Yeats and James Joyce, and the real-world Ireland. Literature constantly attributed to Ireland images of magic, humour, tragedy, a rural country. Problematic elements such as drinking, sexual guilt, Catholic rigidity, obsession with the past and the national culture, eloquence and violence were rarely remembered and not pointed out through the historical and literary narrative constructed about the country. Talking about the bonds between nation and literature, Casanova (2004) argues that both the formation of a new state and its literature come from the principle of differentiation. She states that no nation can form itself on its own and that a national State constructs itself because of the existence of other States, in great part against them. Focusing on the formation of the Irish state therefore, the need to be different from the English is very noticeable. The national spirit helped to emphasise these differences and two particular fundamentals for Ireland, were language and literature. Language became a crucial mark of this difference. Consequently and intrinsically related to language in the Irish case there is a kind of literary nationalism, in which writing finds a role by harnessing itself to the building of the nation state. Literature and language became vital instruments of political power in the Irish scenario.

This cultural and literary movement empowered the revolutionary ideals already existing in the minds of some Irish leaders. The creation of a new cultural meaning was a fundamental part for the process of construction and development of a new nation with its own political system. They desired to be a different people, truly authentic; it was not enough to be separated from United Kingdom, there was a great necessity to spread and preach the concept of Irishness. The need to redefine the role of Ireland in the worldwide scenario joined the wish to reinforce the pride of being Irish, the need to assume an original nationality without English stains, even if it meant being blood-stained by revolutionary wars:

While the gap between rich and poor in the city in 1916 was wider than ever, the last generation had witnessed one distinctive and important demographic change. A new Catholic middle class had developed and their houses formed the sprawling suburbs of the south side of the city. Their savings filled the deposits of the banks (which had doubled from 1890 to 1910) and their interests stimulated a revival in matters Irish: namely the history, the culture, the language and the sports.

This class formed the backbone of a renewed pride in Irish identity, and the Gaelic revival represented the overcoming of the post-famine years of demoralisation. [...]

Dublin was vibrant with social and cultural events, celebrating a somewhat mythical Irish past, this was the milieu in which political radicals strove to win supporters, an appropriate backdrop for the range of political voices and outlooks that existed within the city. (KOSTIC; COLLINS, 2000, p. 18).

1916 was a remarkable year in the history of Ireland for the ripening of Irish nationalism and its ultimate aftereffect, the Easter insurrection. Although those men and women were stimulated by powerful ideas and emotions originating in an intensified imaginary national culture, the bullet holes, the loss, the executions of the seven Irish signatories, and the death of many innocent people served as a stark reminder of the Irish rebellion. Much has been said about the real meaning of the Rising to Ireland and its people. Sometimes the battle has been defined as an irrational, bloody-minded and unrepresentative occurrence, or even, “a premature attempt to wrest the train of history from its rails, but ironically the subsequent experience of direct British military rule illustrated to hundreds of thousands the very points that patient nationalism argument had failed to establish.” (KOSTIC; COLLINS, 2000, p. 131).

Although the complexities in the subject's identity seem to be a problem that has existed since the very beginning of Ireland's history, an overview of the Irish historical narrative during the two last decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century, with the revolutionary outcome in 1916, gives an important perspective on Irish identity. It suggests that, in a particularly adverse context and under the pressure of nationalist discourse, the desire for an authentic self-image rose dramatically, producing a new sense for the country's and individual's images. “National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about the nation with which we can *identify*; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it.” (HALL, 2000, p. 613). The image of the Irish subject was influenced by the image

first shaped for Ireland, the nation. An idea of the country as an ancient nation was constructed, richly cultural, which had remained united until the English come and shatter the untouchable Irish unity. According to this conception, the reconstruction of a united and Gaelic Ireland depended on the existence of truly Irish individuals and in order to achieve this ideal image of Ireland, nationalistic discourse tried to give a new meaning to Irish identity. The formation of this national subject's image was structured through a process of iterative appropriation. The Irish people understood that such an identity, continually conscripted for them, was a means of obtaining their autonomy, their space, of having their nationality recognised by other nations. Such was the incorporation of this politically established identity that many of those people involved in the armed Rising had never loaded a gun, but, according to the new conception they had of themselves they would be able to do anything for the national cause.

However, along with the desire for Irishness and the acceptance of this appropriately planned identity, there were many other factors involved. It could be said that to perform this identity meant different things for different people, according to their class, status and gender. The idea of homogeneity had its focus on the importance of belonging to the same pure nationality; there was no scope for reflection or questions about consequent and actual differences in the roles each one had to assume, which often meant huge and problematic divisions. Such divisions exposed the existence of differences which Irish national discourse insistently tried to cover up by strategically pushing an idea of equality. Gellner (2006, p. 2) calls this attempt to assimilate differences as the "political roof" of the nation-state which worked as an important instrument of construction for cultural identities.

But, if such differences exist, they cause a rupture in the national discourse, promoting a re-articulation of subjectivity. Since the common notion of identity is articulated as "arrested, fixated form of essence" it is interesting to observe what happens when the identity is reconfigured and shows signs of deviation, trying to escape from the alienation imposed by the culture (BHABHA, 1994, p. 75). For Bhabha, identity is negotiated in nations and cultures because there is a "particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation." (1990, p. 1). Whether nation is surrounded by an idea of ambivalence, the individuals of a nation who incorporate the national discourse may also be exposed to an ambivalent situation.

The present study addresses, specifically, the ambivalences of the female subject, and aims to consider how women's behaviour was affected by the imposition of

Irish national culture. In fact, it is possible to see that many of those women hid their feelings and their real essence. Irish political ideology operated as a form of constraint on the individual, constructing a way of thinking about society, preventing individuals from considering alternative structures, and thus limiting their thought. In the case of Irish women, they were supposed to be domestic, passive and sacrificial, even though some of them participated actively in military activities, unsettling the idea of the apparent patriarchy as an unconquerable monolith which was able to define woman's identity as nothing more than the product of male power and privilege. This feminine figure meant an attack on the assumption that these nationalistic structures of meaning were stable, universal, or ahistorical. Additionally, it represented a subject who was deemphasised, overlooked, or suppressed in the patriotic way of thinking, exploring how this marginalised subject confronted the national dominant principles. If these exceptional or marginal female representations are taken seriously, they might displace the dominant passive female behaviour, demonstrating that their controversial feelings were not unique to them. The theatrical representations of this ambivalent female subject suggest not only the escaping from the nationalistic version of the feminine image in Irish drama, but also the deconstruction of the normal order imposed by Irish national politics, since the real representation had already been demonstrating the incoherence of its discourse and also revealing that the powerful discourse used by Irish nationalism was not enough to include every single Irish person.



Figure 2. *Ginger boy*, Igor Maykov (<http://www.saatchiart.com/art/-Ginger-boy/115805/12049/view>)

1.3 A Particular Question: Woman's Image and Nationalism in Ireland

Oh Kathleen ni Houlihan, your way's a thorny way.
Sean O'Casey, *The Shadow of a Gunman*, Act. I; p.13.

The symbolic construction of the female category seems to be a complicated aspect of nation building involving a more rigorous analysis of the public and the private. Although much has been written about the feminine experience and female gendered symbols in literature, not many specific analyses of the impact of nationalist discourse on women's lives have been undertaken. While feminist ideology has been obstructed by patriarchal culture, which promotes the concept of submissiveness for women, nationalist ideology, though an untiring promoter of equality and unity, also contributes, in practice, to accentuate the difference and the weakening of the feminine image. There is no denying that nationalistic ideals influenced and shaped women's real-life roles, on account of the anticolonial and nationalistic campaigns which infiltrated the domestic sphere and transformed it into a politicised locus. Although this idealism of nationhood is a powerful influence in configuring feminine experience, the natural aspect of the subject's identity is to experience any form of culture in different ways. In other words, it can be said that due to the inherent mutability of human identity, the subject may range between adhering and rejecting imposed behavioural patterns. Thus, women have conformed to, and confronted, nationalist expectations and aspirations in different ways, which show that it is not right to imply notions of hegemony or singularity for feminine experience interspersed with nationalism.

Feminism seems to be intrinsically associated with other movements and constantly influenced by male prerogatives in a particular culture. In fact, a feasible consideration of feminism needs to be placed, first, in a specific context because a society controlled by men does not share a single political narrative but differs according to specific contextual circumstances and movements:

[...] in order to fully comprehend the historical range of possibilities of feminism, we must locate the origins and growth of these ideas within a variety of cultural traditions, rather than postulating a hegemonic model for their development on the experience of any single national or sociolinguistic tradition [...]. (OFFEN, 1988, p. 151).

The case of the Irish feminist movement, for instance, is a seminal proof that Offen's observation needs to be taken into consideration. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Ireland was caught up in feminist and nationalist movements simultaneously. The intersection of these two cultural movements in the same period unleashed an unexpected and non-conventional behavioural change. Before the Rising, women involvement in the political Irish scenario was quite evident. Feminist organisations struggled for prioritising women's interests and, in general, they tended to adopt an anti-war attitude, refusing to engage in any act that might prolong the war. These associations involved the participation of women as Cissie Cahalan (1876-1948), Countess Constance Merkevicz (1868-1927), Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington (1877-1946), Helena Molony (1883-1967), Jennie Wyse Power (1858-1941), Kathleen Lynn (1874-1955), Louie Bennett (1870-1956), Margaret Cousins (1878-1954), Margaret McCoubrey (1880-1955) and Mary Hayden (1862-1942). The ones most attached to the feminist cause organised speaking tours and suffrage meetings in which they argued that, like home rule question, women's enfranchisement remained unresolved. The divisions caused by Ireland's political situation added the struggle for freedom had a detrimental effect on the neutrality intended by the feminists. Some Irish feminists, for example, participated actively in the nationalist movement; they did not only limit their participation to the revolutionary struggles, but also acted in areas generally controlled by men, which, controversially, granted them an empowered image. So, if women were initially seen as passive and inferior to men by incorporating the traditional behaviour, these real-life examples represented the subversion of the role designed to them. Feminist or not, these women, even while living in a patriarchal society, broke from the traditional feminine role model by assuming controversial characteristics and were no longer inferior individuals; some of them even superseded the masculine figure.

The distinct development of Irish feminism and the peculiarities of Irish women's behaviour suggest that condition of women may differ according to their national experience; in fact there can be varied performances even among women of the same nationality. For example, according to Ward (1997, p. 61-62), within the Irish feminist movement of the first two decades of the twentieth century there were differences of strategy, most evidently, two variants represented by the two most significant suffragists of the early feminist movement in the country. These two dominant strands were called by Ward "nationalist feminism", associated with Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington's view, which emphasised a connection of the struggle for

women's rights with the national question; and "essentialist feminism", which fundamentally highlighted feminism and excluded any political questions, associated with the views of Louie Bennet.

Basically the differences between these two activists within Irish feminism can be associated with their life background and approach. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington was the daughter of an Irish nationalist member of Parliament. She took her Master's degree in French and won the coveted Gold Medal. While being committed to women, she was also a prominent republican figure and propagandist. She was married to Francis Skeffington, who was also engaged with the feminist cause. Her main argument was "that the war, which was being fought ostensibly for the rights of small nations, could provide an opportunity for feminists from Ireland to stake a claim for the nation and for the women of that nation." (WARD, 1997, p. 66). In 1916, during the Easter Rising, she and her husband were directly involved in the insurrection. She helped the Irish fighters in the headquarters by carrying supplies and acting as a messenger among the several outposts.

From a wealthy Protestant family in Dublin, Louie Bennet, initially, was completely engaged with social issues which focused on the suffrage movement and did not support the nationalist cause. She insisted upon a feminism rooted in a belief in the superiority of female qualities. Conforming to a pacifist and anti-national perspective, Bennet was not concerned with the cause for the rights of small nations in order to prevent any future pursuit of war. Although she never gave up her pacifist convictions, it seems she became more sympathetic toward the national question and even toward the ideals of the Rising of 1916, probably because of her good relationship with James Connolly,² who was closely involved with the insurrection, and also the murder of Frank Sheehy Skeffington, who worked on the suffragist journal, *The Irish Citizen*, and for whom she had great respect.

There were, thus, great differences of strategy within the Irish feminist movement and, although my point is not specifically concerned with the phases and the development of the movement, the consideration of some ideologies and types of behaviour introduced by the feminists will be relevant to the examination of women's condition during this period of Irish history.

² James Connolly (1868 – 1916) was one of Ireland's most famous political figures in 1916. He was a socialist and patriot. During the Easter Rising he was a commander of the Republican forces and acted from headquarters at the GPO.

A careful biographical analysis of these two women reveals that they occupied very different positions within the broad parameters of feminism. On the other hand, both feminists had political careers and seemed to be involved, directly and indirectly, with the cause of Irish national identity, because exactly at this time Ireland was facing a stormy nationalistic wave. Although it seems that only Sheehy-Skeffington's views were more intrinsically connected to the national perspective due to her direct involvement with the political and historical framework of the period, it was quite evident that woman's rights and Ireland's right to self-government were inseparable. Later, even Bennett admitted that 1916 convinced her of the force of nationalism, arguing that the Rising had clarified what her order of priorities had to be (MAC CURTAIN, 1979, p. 54).

In the Irish case, the struggle for these two elements requires consideration of a range of traditional cultures associated with them:

We need to draw upon evidence not only from within feminism, but from areas where the feminist movement touches on other movements. We need also to insist on the specificity of the Irish national experience and to criticize historians who fail to realize that feminists cannot share the same views on every issue. What is defined as "the coercive power...that upholds male prerogatives" may be different in various situations and may require different strategies to ensure its defeat. (WARD, 1997, p. 61).

The desire for both peace and freedom was strongly shared by all, men and women; it could be very difficult to choose between feminism and nationalism. In fact, this brief overview of Irish feminist history reinforces two important things; one is that Irish feminism as well as women's experience in Irish society can be not constituted by a simplistic characterisation; and the other is that it was very difficult for those involved with women's ideals and conditions to avoid a dialogue with other political movements. Indeed, the national question represented a huge weight on every aspect of Irish society's formation; thus, a historical understanding of the origins of Irish feminism is related to the Ireland's most evident and inherent particularity, its nationalism.

Thus, some of these women understood that the female question was tied to the nationalistic cause and, like Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, they participated directly in the 1916 insurrection, prepared to give their life. A particular female group, Cumman na

mBan ('Association of Women'),³ played an integral role in the Rising, in which many members participated:

Whilst Dublin burned, the female members of the Citizen Army tended to fight alongside the men, whilst the women of the IRB's sister-organisation Cumann na mBan were more likely to feed and nurse the soldiers, or carry dispatches, although this distinction between combatants and non-combatants was often blurred. Many of these women indeed felt that they were soldiers in their own right, and after the fighting had ceased these radicalized women played an even more important role, fundraising and organizing protest meetings whilst the British kept the male rebels under lock and key. (MORAN, 2005, p. 20).

Countess Constance Markievicz was the most recognised female figure in the Citizen Army and was elected to its Army Council by James Connolly due to "the assistance she rendered the strikers by working in Liberty Hall's soup kitchens during the great lockout" in 1913 (COOGAN, 2005, p. 41). She was an Irish republican and the first woman to be elected to the British Parliament, as a candidate of Sinn Féin, a political group which emerged in 1905 under the leadership of Arthur Griffith. Daughter of a Protestant landowner, Markievicz studied painting and produced plays, and was engaged in Irish social issues, moving freely among several movements of the period such as the nationalist, women's and labour movements. Her previous involvement in Irish politics had been so intense that it seemed natural for her to participate in the strife, even directly involved in the military side. In 1916, she played an active role in the insurrection among the insurgents responsible for leading the taken up of prominent buildings in central Dublin. Along with Michael Mallin, she stayed in the College of Surgeons on Street Stephen's Green. When the Rising finished and the British court martial sentenced the Irish insurgents to death, of all the signatories and leaders, she and Eamon de Valera were the only reprieved from execution on account of their gender and their nationality respectively (WELCH, 2000, p. 101).

Another example, Kathleen Boland (1889-1954), Harry Boland's sister, certainly took a relevant part in Irish freedom's cause. She was a revolutionary woman who was active at every stage of the independence movement from the Easter Rising to Bloody

³ The female division of the Irish Volunteers, launched in Dublin in April 1914. By 1916 it had forty-three branches. Its memberships included several of the leading Republican women of the period, and it was active in the War of Independence. A majority of its members rejected the Anglo-Irish Treaty. (FERRITER, 2005, p. viii).

Sunday⁴. She participated in the republican movement at a very high level, working for Michael Collins storing and transporting weapons and messages around Dublin. An interesting event in her life was that she ended up with the Russian crown jewels hidden up her chimney.

However, nationalistic ideology very often employs conceptions about gender that grant women a traditional role, in general, in a domestic realm, or, when involved in military issues, as sacrificial helpers. For example, although men greatly appreciated women's involvement during the Rising, they were praised mostly for adding conveniences and homely service to guarantee the welfare of the garrisons. In the diary of Seosamh de Brún, member of the Irish Volunteers who served in Jacob's factory⁵ during the Easter Rising, there are records of his gratitude for women's contribution: "Provisioning here is perfect – tons of flour, sugar, and biscuits and those girls working so hard", he added, "Only in great moments like those does one get a true glimpse of womanhood, patient self-sacrificing and cheerfully brave." (DE BRÚN, in O'FARREL, 2014, p. 35-6). Though the national narrative does not include the notion of singularity and it is well-known that all the different forms of nationalism are invented, it is possible to see that all these forms are gendered, employing a familiar iconography that places women in a subordinate position.

All nationalisms are gendered, all are invented and all are dangerous. . . Nationalism becomes. . .radically constitutive of people's identities, through social contests that are frequently violent and always gendered. However, if the invented nature of nationalism has found wide theoretical currency, exploration of the gendering of the national imaginary has been conspicuously paltry. (MCCLINTOCK, 1997, p. 89).

Mosse says that nationalism idealises national manhood and at the same time represents a national womanhood by depicting women as a kind of guardian of the traditional order. He explains that "woman as a national symbol was the guardian of the continuity and immutability of the nation, the embodiment of its respectability." (1985, p. 18). That kind of idealisation may suggest that, since women were seen as guardians

⁴ It was an incident occurred on 30 January 1972 in the Bogside, Derry, near the Rossville flats, when soldiers of the British 1st Parachute Regiment opened fire on unarmed civilians; thirteen were shot and a number of others wounded.

⁵ Jacob's is a brand name for several lines of biscuits and crackers in Ireland and the United Kingdom. In 1916 Jacob's Biscuit Factory on Bishop Street was occupied by up to 150 Irish Volunteers.

of the traditional culture, they were restricted to specific roles and apart from outside influence:

Nationalist movements invite women to participate more fully in collective life by interpellating them as 'national' actors: mothers, educators, workers, and even fighters. On the other hand, they reaffirm the boundaries of culturally acceptable feminine conduct and exert pressure on women to articulate their gender interests within the terms of reference set by nationalist discourse. (KANDIYOTI, 1996, p. 312–313).

Irish nationalism, especially during the first two decades of the twentieth century, created in Ireland an interesting context for the analysis of its confluence with gender experience. This encounter resulted in significant implications for Irish identity and consequent effects on female identity as well. Such an intersection can even be considered a particularly interesting question in the history of this people. Indeed, it is quite complicated to talk about the condition of Irish women without thinking of many aspects of nationalism and its influence on Irish society. Since the peculiar national culture existing in Ireland has shaped Irish identity, female identity did not prove immune to its effects, which undeniably impacted on women's lives. In such a national context, the behavioural pattern of the Irish woman in 1916 was subject to considerable variations, which can be considered to be a modification in identity due to an overemphasis on national culture.

Referring to the Irish nationalistic case, Meaney affirms that gender identity and national identity are reciprocally dependent, because it is difficult to disassociate the images of the suffering Mother Ireland and the sacrificial mother; they were constructed and imposed on women since both of them sought to obfuscate the real condition of Irish women. Meaney also relates the combination of the Irish female stereotype with an authentic concept of nationality, something of inestimable value in Irish culture. According to her, with the independence of the country and the establishment of the New Irish State in the 1920s, a subordinate role, centered on the domestic realm, made a distinct shift towards women; acting in accordance with this model was intrinsically associated with the notion of being Irish (1993, p. 230).

These observations seem to be references of a female image in opposition to the feminist ideas, creating for women, almost exclusively, a domestic and maternal role. The sacrificial mother's image, derived from the nationalistic narrative, appeared

frequently in the national context. Women complied with this sacrificial role by accepting the death of a son in favour of their nation as something natural, or even necessary. This fact abruptly draws us into the central problem of nationalism:

These deaths bring us abruptly face to face with the central problem posed by nationalism: what makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices? I believe that the beginnings of an answer lie in the cultural roots of nationalism. (ANDERSON, 2006, p. 7).

According to Anderson, it might be possible to say that, as death was seen as a tolerable consequence of the imposition of national culture, so was the compliant acceptance of death itself. This willing attitude in the face of nationalism's controversial consequences is explained by Hobsbawm (1990, p. 14) as something completely condoned thanks to the conception of national identification as something natural, fundamental and permanent.

Besides the thriving advance of nationalism, Irish society at the beginning of the twentieth century was also feeling the effects of the First Feminist Wave which had spread through Europe and was part of Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington's and Louie Bennet's daily lives. This movement began in the last two decades of the eighteenth century and promoted women's struggle for equality and equal rights. Considered, politically, second-class citizens, women in western society were designated to traditional roles (mother, wife and daughter) and to essentially female occupations which were restricted to a highbrow inferiority status. Violating this condition meant contravening the religious tradition and the purpose established for them. In these terms, Charlotte Brontë argued that,

It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do

more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (2008, p. 76).

Two seminal works in this movement, Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869), argued basically against the idea of inferiority associated with women:

[...] from the very earliest twilight of human society, every woman (owing to the value attached to her by men, combined with her inferiority in muscular strength) was found in a state of bondage to some man. Laws and systems of polity always begin by recognising the relations they find already existing between individuals. They convert what was a mere physical fact into a legal right [...]. (MILL, 1869, p. 8).

This conception of female inferiority meant stagnancy and/or decline for society. Mill added that those who deny women any freedom or privilege that is rightly allowed to men are opposing freedom and recommending partiality (p. 4). Despite that, it is only in the first two decades of the twentieth century that women acquired their rights and took an important step towards being recognised as what they really were and not according to a role imposed by men.

It is interesting to observe that in Ireland the incorporation of European feminist ideology was articulated simultaneously with a particular feminist experience due to nationalistic and political aspects of the peculiar Irish scenario. Different feminisms reflect, and react to, the national context in which they find themselves. Thus, although Irish feminist ideology was based on European feminist ideas, the experience of women in Ireland proved to have its own characteristics dating back to the dawn of Irish civilisation. Talking about ancient Irish history, Ó Corráin remembers that, in the context of Gaelic tradition, women's status was very similar to men's in many aspects (1995, p. 45-47). Moreover, according to Daly (1997), the contribution of Irish women to history has been underrated because of the emphasis on the singularity of the Irish experience. The author explains that economic and political implications must have faded the female image. According to her, the modern Irish history is characterised by prioritising the political track, which in turn moves female participation away and assigned women a marginal role.

With regard to the connection between political interests and the image of women, Meaney talks about the insistence on feminine subjectivity applied to the country, and she argues that the conception of this image is important because "a history

of colonization is a history of feminization”, since “colonial powers identify their subject peoples as passive, in need of guidance, incapable of self-government, romantic, passionate, unruly, barbarous.” (1993, p. 233). Ireland’s mythic feminine personification was a masculine view and a historical image politically elaborated by the projection of the British “civilizing mission” and later, ironically, revisited by Irish politics. Whereas the Irish male was constructed as wild and savage and a threat to Ireland/Irish womanhood, colonial discourse gendered Ireland as, for example, “the virginal young woman awaiting union, her role is to be wed to John Bull or England.” (INNES, 1993, p. 8):

In colonial ideology, the subject peoples came to be seen as innocent and incapable children, crying out for discipline and betterment to be imposed by the selfless motherland. The Victorian image of the Empire as a family, with the Queen as the loving mother bringing her children under strict but beneficent tutelage, is the apotheosis of this ideological vision. The Irish were the first and most direct objects of this imperial motherhood and the theatre, with its stock character of the Stage Irishman, half-devil and half-child, was an important vehicle for its promulgation. (O’TOOLE, 1994, p. 87).

Ireland’s typical image as a mother was depicted in the theatre for many years and internalised by Irish writers. This symbol had a strong repercussion in Irish drama which sought to promulgate the image of the ideal nationalist Irishman and ideal maternal Irish woman. “It is certainly the case that a highly racialized and rigidly gendered identity was promulgated by both church and state in Ireland as true Irishness.” (MEANEY, 2012, p. 5). Although that conceptualisation was part of a colonial and imperial ideology, diminishing Ireland’s status and placing it as a nation born to be a colony, paradoxically, it favoured Irish nationalistic goals, which based their principles on the familiar symbol of a beloved mother image:

The idealization of the national mother in the home reinforces the limited role of women in the newly established nation-state. Whatever rights women may have won at the earlier part of the national conflict may be lost later on in the nation-building project. (KANDIYOTI, 1996, p. 315).

Although Irish literature absorbed, mainly, the European conception of female image, entirely destined to a domestic role, having to be polite, decorative, a personal doll, and submissive in order to please men; the representation of women in the Irish canon sustained a greater variability due to the influence of Celtic culture and to its

close bond with nationalism respectively. In fact, the connection between Irish literary production and the feminine figure seems to have developed in a peculiar way.

The Irish theatre of the twentieth century was one of the greatest promoters of this discussion, producing plays which addressed this intersection of nationalism with gender issues. During this period of Irish history, most intensely at the dawn of the century, the nationalist spirit flourished throughout the country bringing out a strong commitment to national culture. Many playwrights, inspired by the theme “national culture versus national identity”, produced plays in accordance with the national ideology which eventually established notions of Irish women’s behaviour. One notable example is W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory’s *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1903), a play essentially committed to the standards of Irish national culture, which uses a female image to represent Ireland. The main character, Cathleen, is portrayed by two distinct feminine figures. At the beginning, referring to Ireland as an English colony, she assumes the image of a poor old woman who seeks for help, especially the support of men. At the end of the play, when she gains their support, she is transformed into a beautiful young woman with the walk of a queen, a reference to Ireland as an independent nation:

That transformation, miraculous, instantaneous, brought about by the willingness of the young man to lay down his life, is infinitely desirable for a nationalist community as it figures a revolution capable of restoring the country from its oppressed state of colonisation to renewed sovereignty. (GRENE, 1999, p. 71).

The play, distinctly, sustains masculine superiority by symbolising the country using a female role based on characteristics such as passiveness, weakness, dependence. This Irish literary characteristic of depicting Ireland as a female figure seems not to be enough to construct a solid image, or even empower it. Although the fact of depicting Ireland as a woman seems to confer a powerful image to women, because it represents the whole nation, this female figure, at the same time, loses power when she calls for men’s help. She (the country) needs to be saved from the clutches of the British Empire and without men’s help she is nothing. At the end of the story, woman is the fragile other.

But, if at some moments these female characters incorporated the image of Ireland itself, symbolising the figure of Mother Ireland, at others, women are depicted according to the role model propagated by Irish national drama, associated prevalingly

with the image of a sacrificial mother. “This silent, suffering, and self-sacrificing mother bore many similarities to Mother Ireland as nationalist and Catholicism symbolism became increasingly intertwined.” (INNES, 1993, p. 40–41). Many historical records, literary and dramatic works depict Irish woman simply as a passive figure, even in the face of loss and death, limited to domestic and maternal activities. Women played an active and crucial part in the Irish struggle for independence, but their participation in rebellions, wars, revolution and in other important moments of Irish history was frequently undermined. During the years which preceded Ireland’s independence, especially 1916 with its extreme nationalistic context, women were gradually dislocated from their real position:

While outside the home, women were increasingly used as intelligence agents, couriers, and dispatch riders, in the domestic sphere women provided a network of “safe houses” across the country. With tens of thousands of British troops in Ireland, women risked the ever-present threat of attack, arrest, and imprisonment. (THAPAR-BJORKERT; RYAN, 2002, p. 308).

During the battle of the Easter Rising, the life of Irish women was composed of heavy activities and sorrow; women fought for Ireland; nursed and fed men involved in the rebellion; stayed at home watching their husbands or sons leaving home for bloodshed; suffered the pain of losing their men for the glory of Mother Ireland. They could do nothing but accept their powerlessness and act as exemplary sacrificial Irish women because their real maternal feelings did not match the national purposes.

Both portrayals, sacrificial mother and Mother Ireland, contributed to the weakening of woman’s image. However, since drama may play a social role in society (ESSLIN, 1978), there were Irish playwrights of this period who promoted, through their works, a different perspective on the nationalistic implications for the female gender, staging female portrayals which embodied feminist ideals and the image of women and, consequently, destabilised the untouchable patriarchal ideology. The effective participation of women in this nationalistic scenario and their direct involvement in battles and revolutions in the framework of this national ideal made some authors adopt a more realistic representation of the Irish woman’s identity. Placed in a national framework, but also breathing the reinvigorated feminist air at the dawn of the twentieth century, the condition of Irish women condition was likely to be affected by countless factors which were transformed into standard shapes for her image. An

overview of 1916 Irish society, with a focus on its nationalistic and feminist convictions, in parallel to the Murphy's and O'Casey's plays, permits us to distinguish these counterpoints in the female image, and consider the performances based on the feminine behaviour inside the confluence "feminism versus nationalism".

In both plays examined in the present study, the representation of the female image subverts the ideological constructs conventionally used to blur women's real condition and performance. It is clear that this articulation of female figures with the national context takes a different form in each of the plays. For instance, in *The Plough and the Stars*, Sean O'Casey tries to reveal the human and individual essence of female subject, and, in order to do so, he depicted the feminine figure controversially (BENSTOCK, 1976, p. 189). O'Casey upset the false arrangement of the Irish scenario when he courageously refused to hide the reality of Irish women's lives of his period and then took to the stage of the most famous Irish theatre an Ireland very different to that one painted by nationalism.

In *The Patriot Game*, Tom Murphy, draws his female characters differently to O'Casey, but like him, sustains the importance of women in the national context. Although, depicting them, maybe, more passively than O'Casey, Murphy is clear in pointing out the female attitude and feelings toward the national question. His play functions as an instrument for reflection about Irish female identity due to his idea of putting two women in a relevant position in a play which deals with nationalism. Whereas many authors preferred to avoid the feminine question and, consequently, buried the participation of real women in the tempestuous Irish national context, Murphy and O'Casey emerged from the bottom of the dark waters of nationalism and provided Irish people with a sharp and clear view of their society.



Figure 3. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Mrs. Pearse, (circa 1921)
 (http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/exhibition/dublin/government_politics/G_Hanna_SheehySkeffington_indh100.html)



Figure 4. Louie Bennett (<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/louie-bennett-1870-1956-1.553514>)



Figure 5. Countess Constance Markievicz
(<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/century/century-women-and-the-vote/a-role-in-home-rule-1.553496>)



Figure 6. Margaret Pearse in the centre with her children. Patrick Pearse in characteristic side-on pose. (<http://www.independent.ie/opinion/comment/pearse-found-wanting-in-bruton-review-30409307.html>)

1.4 The Easter Rising 1916: The Irish Revolutionary Imagination

“The ghosts of a nation sometimes ask very big things...”

Patrick Pearse

“The Rising 1916 was both profoundly important and profoundly unnecessary.” (COOGAN, 2005, p. 1). That sentence opens Tim Pat Coogan’s book *1916: The Easter Rising* and, it is a reasonable definition of the most controversial armed rising in Irish history. It is entirely true that throughout the history of Ireland there were, and still there are, several conflicts encompassing internal and external political issues. A significant proportion of those conflicts occurred at the turn of the twentieth century when the British Empire had been the leading world power, ruling Ireland, its closest colony, for about seven hundred years. In this regard, 1916 is, undoubtedly, the most crucial year for Irish history, and the Easter Rising is the reason for that. Defined as a moment of terror and tragedy because of the irreparable and irreversible loss of human lives it caused, controversially, the premature Irish rebellion would change the nature of English rule forever, bringing freedom to Ireland. Although the Easter rebellion was just one part of the whole Irish independence process, which also involved the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) and the Irish Civil War (1922-1923), it was an indispensable spark to free Irish people from the dark English colonialism and transform Ireland from just another British colony into the first nation to, at least partly, throw off that yoke. Most probably it was thanks to the Easter rebellion that the English began to see Irish people in a different way; they realised the strength of the Irish people and their attachment to the national cause. Although the insurrection did not succeed immediately, the Irish example to the rest of the world was a powerful one and often cited by Indian, Israeli and Algerian revolutionaries, among others, in subsequent years.

Thanks to its significance, albeit with its controversial aspects, almost one hundred years on, the insurrection is still a central topic among Irish politicians, intellectuals, literary critics, academics, historians and, also, ordinary people. Much has been said, researched and revised about the event which has been a double-edged sword in the Irish history. “The genesis of 1916 has an uncanny resemblance to contemporary Irish events in certain significant regards.” (COOGAN, 2005, p. 1). Irish society seems to be interested in the particularities and significances of the insurrection and as the

anniversary of the centennial approximates, new perspectives on the topic have been raised and have provided a new insight into the most important week in Ireland's history. For instance, the National Library of Ireland organised and made available an online exhibition entitled *The 1916 Rising: Personalities and Perspectives*. It was based on documents such as books, newspapers, photographs (over 500 images), drawings, proclamations and manuscript material from the collection of the Library assembled for study and analysis. In addition, according to Ireland's leading newspaper, *The Irish Times*, film footage of the 1966 Rising celebration was recently discovered, making possible to step back in time and witness Dublin during the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising⁶. Furthermore, there is a great anticipation about the centenary celebrations, which will be held not only in Ireland, but also in other countries such as England, France, U.S.A and Argentina. The anniversary is part of the 2016 Ireland calendar and will be hosted as an international agenda which is part of the global and diaspora programme as an initiative by the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The programme for the centenary has seven categories; State Ceremonial, Historical Reflection, Cultural Expression, Community Participation, Global and Diaspora, An Teanga Beo, and Youth and Imagination. "We want to invite an international audience to get involved in the centenary celebrations with arts events, concerts, exhibitions and so much more. It is also vitally important that we engage with our Diaspora and recognise the huge contribution they have made to this country over the last 100 years."⁷ In the same article, The Minister of State says that the cultural character of the ideals of 1916 is stronger than the political one, saying, "The Gaelic and Literary revivals helped to inspire a new generation who believed Ireland could flourish as an independent nation."

Yet the real history looks rather different. When the Easter Rising happened in 1916, Ireland seemed to be tired of waiting for reasonable English response to its incessant request for freedom. The rebellion was the spark for the most direct struggle for Irish freedom and "a serious attempt at insurrection by people whose beliefs were soon to move from the fringe of political life of its very heart." (KOSTIC; COLLINS, 2000, p. 132). Although there was a representative Irish group in Parliament, this group had been always limited by the English. On many occasions the Irish were impotent to

⁶ <http://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/Videos-of-Easter-Rising-Commemorations-unearthed-after-five-decades-VIDEOS.html>

⁷ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/easter-rising-international-commemoration-programme-unveiled-1.2267062>

operate because of treaties which prevented them from becoming great and powerful. This was in old story. For instance, in 1800 an Act of Union was passed and,

The members of the Irish Parliament were persuaded to support the Act by inducements and pressures of all sorts, including peerages and huge bribes. The Act of Union had the effect it was intended to have. It deprived Ireland of real political power and in addition had the collateral effect of destroying the briefly flowering artistic, economic, and political life of Dublin. [...] The country sank into a slough of decay, mismanagement and landlordism. At best, the Great Famine of the 1840s was both inevitable and the most glaring example of the policy of depriving the Irish of the ability to address their own problems. [...] Far from becoming 'too great and too powerful' Ireland lost one million of her population to starvation and a further million to emigration. (COOGAN, 2005, p. 13).

Thus, for twentieth-century Ireland, the patient form of nationalism seemed to have achieved little or no effect. For some more diplomatic Irish leaders, such as John Redmond, Ireland's good relationship with England was something that would lead them to future independence. But it was a false scenario; life in the island was extremely difficult, English colonisation was extremely severe. In fact, Irish prospects for Home Rule were limited by the secret and binding assurances to the Unionist north by British leaders who assured the Unionists that Home Rule would never happen. It was misleading to assume that Ireland was on a path to Home Rule peacefully awaiting the end of World War One to achieve that.

Facing such a predicament, a representative group of Irishmen understood that political posturing was never going to deliver Home Rule. The men of the IRB (Irish Republican Brotherhood)⁸ embraced a militaristic character instead of the traditional idea of a cultural nationalism; its idea of progress by revolutionary means was concomitant with the fact that the World War I was England's main concern; the opportunism of the Irish group was based on the principle that England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity (TOWNSHEND, 2006, p. 94). Radical Irish nationalism began to emerge giving rise to a revolutionary spirit which would spare no efforts to break the predatory alliance with English politics. "At the time of the revival there was the notion of a new Ireland about to emerge, in the nationalist revolution." (O'TOOLE, 1994, p. 69). Thus, "in 1916 a small segment of the physical force school of Irish Nationalism, like their counterparts in the Volunteers of 1916, have declared no confidence in the

⁸ A secret society founded in Dublin in 1858 which aimed to overthrow British rule in Ireland. In 1916 the group infiltrated the Irish Volunteers and its plans for the Rising.

constitutional process and have placed their faith in violent means to achieve their ends.” (COOGAN, 2005, p. 2).

The armed insurrection, organised by seven men (Patrick Pearse, Tom Clarke, Séan MacDiarmada, Thomas MacDonagh, Éamonn Ceannt, James Connolly and Joseph Plunkett), started on Easter Monday, 24 April 1916; conflicting orders resulted in a turnout much smaller than hoped for. From about twelve o’clock, the insurgents occupied strategic points in Dublin: The General Post Office (GPO), their headquarters, and other buildings in O’Connell Street area;⁹ Fours Courts, Mendicity Institution; St Stephen’s Green, College of Surgeons; Boland’s Mill and surrounding area, including Mount Street Bridge and nearby houses; City Hall and several buildings overlooking Dublin Castle; Jacob’s biscuit factory, Davy’s pub by Portobello Bridge; South Dublin Union and James’s Street area and Magazine Fort in Phoenix Park. Patrick Pearse, the most influential leader, read out the Proclamation of the Republic which established the new provisional government at the outside of the GPO. But just five days later, 29 April, a Saturday, the leaders surrendered to the quick British initial response.

Political divisions and the failure of arms to arrive from Germany led the organisers to a general confusion hours after the collapse of the Easter Rising, and some of them were even surprised by the announcement of the battle a few hours before it started (KOSTIC; COLLINS, 2000, p. 31).

Although the attack in Dublin was led by the seven Irish signatories of the proclamation, many personalities and organisations, of different perspectives, were involved directly or indirectly in the 1916 Rising: the IRB, the Irish Volunteers, the Irish Citizen Army, the Irish Parliamentary Party, Sinn Féin, Cumann na mBan, the GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association), and the Gaelic League. In fact it is very difficult to demarcate clearly the level of involvement and the real motivation of each group for participating in the rebellion, because it was evident that Ireland was living a moment in which every single Irish person had decided to act on their own initiative. “During the years 1912 to 1918, it seemed like a giant vacuum existed in Ireland, into which a variety of organisations and movements were being sucked, often with conflicting aims, personalities and visions of the future.” (FERRITER, 2004, p. 110). Even among the Irish Volunteers, the most directly involved group in the plans for the Rising, there were political divisions. On account of the fact that, in the inter-war period, secret societies

⁹ At the time of the Rising, O’Connell Street was named Sackville Street.

planned and rendered its own justice in a greatly idealised posture and a large killing spree occurred through all the country.

The Rising in Dublin was not a popular event when it happened; the feeling of most Irish people was against the rebels' attitude. When the rebels decided to surrender, the situation in Dublin was sorrowful and unexpected. The popularity and significance of the Irish rebellion seems to be related to its subsequent consequences, destruction and deaths. In that sense Kee (1982, p. 171) comments that "nothing like this had happened in Ireland for well over 100 years." As Yeats wrote, "a terrible beauty is born":¹⁰

The Rising had killed and severely wounded some 1350 people. The centre of Dublin was gutted. Approximately 61,000 square yards of buildings were destroyed. Damage was estimated at some £2,500,000 Sterling in the values of the day. On top of this, approximately one-third of the city's population had to be given public relief. The interruption of food supplies meant that throughout the week the threat of starvation had hung over the city. The initial outrage that greeted all this was hardly surprising. Dubliners, some with husbands and relatives at the Front, had hooted and jeered at the prisoners as they were marched through the city they had shattered. Vegetables were thrown at them, even the contents of chamberpots, as they passed by, dirty, weary, hungry, yet still with sufficient defiance in their ranks for some to continue singing their 'scaffold songs'. The metamorphosis of this band of bungling idealists into a host of heroes is one of the most amazing transformations in Irish history. (COOGAN, 2005, p. 142, 143).

Despite its drastic extent, the insurrection's short duration only confirmed the immaturity and strong imagination of the small unprepared group which lead it. When it took place, it was clear that there was no chance of success. Kee (1982, p. 153) points out that "until about twelve o'clock on Easter Monday, 1916, there seemed to the outside world not the remotest possibility of them ever changing anything." People on the streets did not even understand what was happening in front of them. Some of them believed they were watching a live dramatic performance:

According to some historians, the dramatic fixation of the rebels demonstrates that the Rising was a crazed poetic folly. Ruth Dudley Edwards' *Patrick Pearse* and William Irwin Thompson's *The Imagination of an Insurrection* portray the leaders of the revolution as misty-eyed idealists who gloried in the symbolism of the stage world rather than the brutal realities of militarism and death. To die for the sake of an inane cause is the height of neurosis, and writers such as

¹⁰ In the poem "Easter, 1916", by William Butler Yeats.

Ruth Dudley and Thompson emphasise the inanity of a military campaign that takes its cue from the playhouse, implying that the rebel's interest in the theatre led them to stage a doomed rebellion that was obsessed by madcap fictional notions. Even in 1916 the theatrical proclivities of the rebels were censured. (MORAN, 2005, p. 18).

What they had in their minds was therefore more important than the reality they faced every day; they went forward, many of them with enthusiasm, even if the actual conditions were not favourable.

Such was the relevance of the insurrection in Ireland's latter day imagination that it has even reached the stage, with various plays which, in one way or another, portrayed the troubled week of 1916 in Dublin. Since the factual event itself involved some theatrical elements, it is easy to see the Easter Rising as being profoundly associated with Irish drama. Many historians and literary critics have observed and also inscribed in their works this undeniable connection between the Easter Rising and the theatre; some of them have even recognised the dramatic obsessive feeling on the part of the rebels. According to Kee, despite this theatrical aspect, the Rising resulted in a fundamental change in Ireland's relationship with England.

The Dublin Rising of 1916 was such a surprising, dramatic occurrence, and such great changes in the relationship between Britain and Ireland were eventually to flow from it that to view it as it was viewed at the time is even more difficult than in examining most important historical events. (1982, p. 153).

Moran contributes to this association of the 1916 insurrection with the theatrical environment pointing out that "in 1916 it was easy for Dubliners to mistake the Easter Rising for an Easter dramatising", adding that "when the Easter Rising began, some bystanders believed they were witnessing the opening of a play." (2005, p. 15). Also some Irish politicians directly involved with the insurrection expressed a similar perception about the opening of the event. Michael Collins, an Irish revolutionary leader, remarked, "Looking at it from the inside (I was in the GPO) it had the air of a Greek tragedy about it." (COOGAN, 2005, p. 126).

In this case, the process of drama becoming part of a real-life event fulfills the arguments about the *nature of drama* addressed by Esslin:

The immediacy and concreteness of drama and the fact that it forces the spectator to interpret what is happening in front of him on a

multitude of levels, compelling *him* to decide whether the tone of voice of the character was friendly or menacing or sarcastic, means that drama has all the qualities of the real world, the real situations we meet in life – but with one very decisive difference: in life the situations we are confronted with are real; in the theatre – or in the other forms of drama (radio, TV, the cinema) – they are merely acted, they are make-believe, *play*. (ESSLIN, 1978, p. 19).

The beginning of the Easter Rising, on a Monday morning, gave Dubliners, who were witnessing the moment, the possibility of experiencing this interpretation on a multitude of levels; it could be an Easter dramatisation, Greek tragedy, or a patriotic national play. The spectators were free to decide what was happening, whether it was fiction or real life.

One of the factors which provided support for this theatrical context of the insurrection was that Dublin is a city with many theatres and Dubliners were accustomed to watching patriotic fighting performances around Dublin streets or in governmental buildings, such as the GPO. The connection does not stop here: there was also the participation of members of Dublin's theatrical world in the Rising.

Another noteworthy point concerning this dramatic atmosphere during the fight for freedom is that almost all of the seven 1916 rebels had at least a small involvement with Irish drama. It is exactly that involvement which seems to bridge another gap between the rebellion and drama. Since the leaders were indeed involved with the theatre world, they might have had in their minds a fixed imagination of the revolution, mixing real and imaginary elements. According to Esslin, one of the particularities of the theatrical world is its imaginative power:

This seems to me one of the chief characteristics of drama and one of its fascinations: that a play in performance is a fusion of the wholly imaginary – the products of writer's imagination fixed once for all and, in that sense, a dead letter – with an element of the living reality of the actors, their costumes, the furniture which surrounds them, the things they handle, such as swords or fans or knives and forks. Every performance of a play from past centuries can thus be seen as an act of resurrection: the dead words and actions are reincarnated by the living presence of the actors. (ESSLIN, 1978, p. 87).

This fusion of illusion and reality provided them with a very strong feeling culminating in the decision to put their ideas into practice. It may be seen as an interesting process which happened over some months, or even years, before the occurrence of the 1916 revolution. The rebels' imagination of a revolution was evident and might be one of the

explanations for the premature character of the rebellion. Although the revolutionary war was supposed to be an *illusion* at the beginning (something almost inconceivable at that moment in Irish history), they were capable of mixing this illusion in their ordinary life, reaching the highest development of fusion, *real* action. Esslin suggests that dramatic characteristics may also be found also in daily life:

There is thus much theatre, much role-playing, much illusion in ordinary life. Shakespeare spoke of the world being a stage and all men and women merely players, actors on it. And of course the nature of reality itself is problematic. Our senses are fallible; we can perceive reality only through these imperfect senses and so what we perceive may itself be an illusion. Indeed, judged with the knowledge of a physicist, our reception of everyday reality is illusion. (ESSLIN, 1978, p. 94).

Although the existence of strong and purposeful nationalistic ideals implicated in the actual context cannot be denied, illusion and reality, as part of the universe of theatre, might even explain the Irish leaders' motivation in starting a flustered war, because it was clear that "in 1916 the Dublin insurrection was the rebellion of a small nationalist group convinced that a successful Irish revolution could happen when the British were fighting an international war." (MORAN, 2005, p. 9). Why were they convinced? How did they become convinced? It seems that they could not see everything that was really involved in deciding to start a revolution. The influence of theatrical elements on these leaders, since they were actually connected with theatre life, may explain their impulse to fight. They were caught up in the spirit of the mythical national question, holding,

[...] the dream of nationalist Ireland, the dream of a country in which the common name of Irishman would serve to diminish differences of class and status. The political ideology of the Irish state was founded on the faith that all lesser divisions were subsumed in the greater unity of being Irish. In this ideology, the peasant and the businessman, the poor and the rich, the worker and his boss all belonged to the mystical body of nationality. [...] Nationalism sought, not to abolish the actual differences between the rich and the poor, but to treat them as ultimately less important than what poor and the rich had in common with each other – Irishness. (O'TOOLE, 1994, p. 67).

Therefore it can be understood that they were partly driven by illusory aspects present in everyday reality. An example which illustrates this is the fact that, before the actual

insurrection in 1916, one of the leaders, Thomas MacDonagh, wrote a play which portrays the struggle for Irish independence coordinated by a minor group of Irish men and women whose leader acted secretly. Although *When the Dawn is Come* is a play that emphasises the participation of female thinking in the nationalist revolution, it also seems to be the prelude to a close future, much desired by MacDonagh himself and also by the other leaders. The persistence of thoughts of rebellion is clearly indicated by the fact that, although the play was first performed in 1908, MacDonagh was still revising it in 1914 or 1915 (JOHANN, 1980, p. 52). Moran adds, “as the bloodshed of the GPO drew closer MacDonagh was obsessed by thoughts of secretive insurrection that would advance the national cause.” (2005, p. 24, 25).

The men and women of 1916 were set on an alabaster pedestal for much of the twentieth century, deified by many for their deeds, either sanctified, considered holy of holies, or deplored depending on the perspective of Irish history. Firstly, the revolt, which sought Irish independence, was seen negatively by most of the Irish people, but the severe British reaction and the respective executions of the leaders, fifteen in ten days, would change public opinion.¹¹ When the British army decided to execute almost all of the rebels who took part in the rising, Irish people began to change their minds, understanding the Easter Rising as a pivotal moment for Irish freedom and condemning the English authorities’ draconian attitude. The seven impetuous leaders were quickly transformed into national martyrs. Especially from 1922 on, when Ireland became an independent nation, the Irish government was interested in promoting the remembrance of the rebellion from its own benefit. The first reenactment of the revolt occurred in 1917, but it was in 1935 that a notable commemoration at the GPO took place: “the recreation had a Machiavellian motivation: to establish members of Fianna Fáil party, and in particular its leader Éamon de Valera.” (MORAN, 2005, p. 69). Thanks to that active and enthusiastic approach by Irish leaders in power, the annual celebration of the Easter Rising became very popular in the following years. About the theatricality of the battle, Moran points out that this continued even when the revolt was finished, “Dramatisations of insurrections could be extremely influential, and so the Irish leadership set about re-staging 1916 for the advantage of the Fianna Fáil party.” (2005, p. 68). Thus, after independence, the Irish government was engaged established the

¹¹ All the seven signatories were sentenced to death by a British court martial and executed from 3 May onwards. Even James Connolly, who was badly wounded in the fighting, was sentenced to death and executed strapped to a chair on 12 May.

celebration of the Easter Rising as a symbol of national achievement and reaffirmation of an authentic Irish identity:

The Fianna Fáil memorial of 1935 certainly avoided engagement with the important social issues of the day, such as the hardships that Irish people faced as result of the trade war with Britain, the educational alienation of city children by the imposition of a Gaelic curriculum, and the brutal sectarian animosity in the North of Ireland. Instead, de Valera's re-staging of the Rising attempted to distract people from their everyday concerns and to unite them in common enthusiasm for a simplified and romanticized nationalism. (MORAN, 2005, p. 72).

If in 1916 a relevant part of Irish society condemned the bloodshed, deaths and losses caused by the thoughtless decision of the rebels, some years later that negative feeling was changing. Firstly seen as crazy poets and fool dreamers, the rebels were, especially due to focus of the political ceremony of 1935, becoming national martyrs and heroes of Irish history.

As already seen, nationalism carries symbols and images according to cultural elements which become involved with it over time. It also became clear, through Ireland's historical and literary narrative, the intertwining of Irish patriotism with cultural aspects and how it strongly influenced men's and women's lives, constructing and fixing images strategically imposed by national culture. Ireland seems to have symbolism and imagery as integral parts of its history, so, like the symbolist aspect of Irish nationalism, much can be explored about symbols and images constructed by the nationalistic revolution of 1916, and, what is more, how the revolutionary imaginative ideals composed images for the Irish subject's identity. Thus, in the same way that the Irish insurrection followed by its leaders' executions ended up creating a heroic image for those men who were influenced by a heroic blood sacrifice ideology, it was able to fully develop feminine figures according to the national mythos. Irish feminine images have functioned as a metaphor for Irish women and have permeated Irish nationalistic rhetorical for centuries:

Every Irish rebellion has had its share of female heroes, many unsung. Grace O'Malley herself is sometimes praised as the mother of rebellion in Ireland for her strong stance against Queen Elizabeth and instigation of several minor rebellions. 1798 was replete with the deeds of female heroines who earned their place in the ballad tradition and were not only praised for their ideological stance, but for bearing arms and dressing as men to fight, such as in "The Boys of Wexford." In the 1803 rebellion, there were also women memorialized for their

staunch stance, such as Anne Devlin, who was commemorated in an eponymous ballad for withstanding years of torture and imprisonment where strong men would have broken. And 1916 finally formalized the fight for equality between the sexes with the inclusion of Cumann na mBan and the Irish Citizen's Army in the rebellion as in the text of the Easter Proclamation where equal rights and liberties were guaranteed. (JEAN, 2012, p. 11).

In the case of Ireland, the nationalistic imagery associated with the figure of woman supported varied models which implied positive and negative consequences in women's routine. For example, "women were expected to do military service for their *tuath*¹² if they were able bodied. Given the profusion of warlike goddesses that appear within not just the Irish but wider Celtic tradition." (JEAN, 2012, p. 11). That particular image might even be seen as a form of resistance, a subversive element, and constitutes a challenge to the traditional nationalistic rule and Ireland's patriarchy.

Nevertheless, while some female representations, as the strong symbolic female incorporation of the land, seem to empower the woman's image in confrontation with the traditional one, and to contribute to a progress in the struggle for gender equality, other female symbols constructed by Irish nationalism diminished and blurred women's real experience in Irish patriotic society. For Luddy, the insurrection,

[...] brought about great changes in Irish politics. About sixty women from Cumann na mBan acted as nurses and cooks during the week-long rebellion. Women who had formed part of the Irish Citizen Army acted as ambulances corps, and also took an active part in the fighting. Helena Molony and Constance Markievicz, for example, were armed. (LUDDY, 1995, p. 309).

That was the situation for women in 1916, for the most of whom the main activities for those permitted to take part in the insurgence were nursing and cooking, when, in fact, some of them were acting as combatants. The history of women in the rising was imbued with a discreet anti-feminist ideal; there was, in varied degrees of intensity, a feeling against the presence of women from those who understood that during the Easter Rising women should act passively as men's auxiliaries:

[...] women were forced to accept the traditional gendered 'division of republican labour'. Kathleen Clarke, wife of IRB husband Tom, although she had 'begged' to march out with the insurgents, was

¹² People, tribe or band of warriors.

forbidden by her husband, who insisted her role was 'to ensure the well-being of the dependants of those involved in the rising'. (FERRITER, 2004, p. 142).

It is clear that the roles proposed by Irish nationalism for women were very different to those women really assumed and experienced during that time because in the same manner that men, influenced by the discourse of national culture, constructed a national identity and imagined themselves heroes of a glorious cause, they also constructed a woman's image in the way they imagined to be appropriate for the national model. It was an imaginative process, which began with the creation of Ireland's image as an independent nation. First, an imaginary conception of community was elaborated, consequently giving rise to the conception of an individual with a specific set of characteristics, defined as Irishness. Like the image of Ireland, the Irish subject, female and male identity, was also an imaginative construction which assumed particular models due to the nationalism of 1916. The actual despair in the atmosphere of the Rising provided the leap of imagination. The required traditional female role was that of a passive, maternal woman, destined to the familiar domestic sphere. Otherwise, real women's lives proved to act against the roles men imagined for and imposed on them, but this real image was forgotten in most historical and literary writings: "Later in the century, women were completely written out of the narrative of the Rising." (FERRITER, 2004, p. 142). There were, at least, two forms in which these real experiences opposed the national principles. Those who confronted the traditional female role by involving themselves in the military sphere controlled predominantly by men, and those who subverted the passive woman's image by exposing their real feelings and refusing to accept their role of sacrificial mother.

Talking about the atypical women's participation in line of attack, Ferriter points out this different aspect of the Easter Rising:

One of the main differences between the 1916 rebellion and previous ones was the ease of movement which the putative insurgents enjoyed through government inactivity. This allowed about 1,000 men and 200 women, members of the Volunteers, the ICA and the IRB, to answer the call of an Irish Republic, with Patrick Pearse as Commander-Chief of the Volunteers, and, in theory, at least, president of the Provisional Government. [...] Many of the women involved in 1916 considered themselves combatants and not auxiliaries, with Cumann na mBan, the female wing of the Irish Volunteers, formed in 1914, maintaining their own command structure. (2004, p. 139).

An example of military engagement was Constance Markievicz who had an active and direct participation in the Rising; two other female figures who participated actively in Irish politics at the time of the rebellion were the republican Maud Gonne¹³ and the suffragist Hanna Sheehy Skeffington. The participation of women on the battlefield is a controversial aspect of the particular form of the nationalism of 1916 due to the fact that national ideals predicated a passive female role, but nonetheless it became possible for women to participate actively during the process in a way which supported the feminist cause and empowered their image. According to Thapar-Bjorkert and Ryan, there is another way the image of women is empowered in a war context, “the militarization of the domestic sphere can also mean that gender roles are challenged as men leave their homes and families and women become the defenders of the domestic space and the mainstay of the guerrilla army.” (2002, p. 308). Even though the active participation of women was written out of the history of the 1916 revolution, much about the condition of the women who remained in the domestic sphere can be explored. In fact, there are very few records in respect of the lives of ordinary women during the battle. It seems that those women were completely forgotten by most historians and authors. Most women did not directly take part in the insurrection; at home, they had to fulfill the domestic role they were expected to play in order to assume their Irishness. However, something was blurred about the real situation of those women; while their sons entered the bloodshed of the rebellion they were left at home as sacrificial mothers, but the truth is that they were worried about their son’s safety. Luddy, in her accounts of the conditions of women during the insurrection, tells some personal experiences of women who lived during the rising. Among these reports, there is the narrative of Nora Tynan O’Mahony, who told about her experience during that bloody week:

Reports came constantly of people being shot down, in some cases accidental no doubt, the victims being children. It was not safe for any man to be seen out in khaki; and a poor wounded officer, home on a few days’ leave from the front, was, on the first day of the outbreak, shot through the brain, just a few seconds after he had laughed at a friend’s warning entreaty to take cover in a neighbouring house. (LUDDY, 1995, p. 310).

Nora also told about her major concern, her son’s safety. He was a cadet in Portobello Barracks:

¹³Maude Gonne was known as the great love of Yeats and played the role of the central character in one of his plays in 1902, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*.

Finally they reached the gates; the visitors were successful in seeing my son, who looked well and happy as only a boy ardent for adventure could be. My ambassador was besieged before he left barracks with many messages from husbands and fathers – members of the veteran and other civilian corps temporarily imprisoned willy nilly, to worried wives and families at home, anxiously waiting for news, and not knowing whether their beloved ones were living or dead. (LUDDY, 1995, p. 311).

Men's decision to leave home for the national cause most certainly brought tears to the eyes of many women and girls who had to stay at home all day and night during that most sombre week listening to the roar of the guns, watching from the window strong fires, huge flames, motor-cars carrying the wounded or dead, concluding that it would be madness to be outside in the dangers of the street. Even living this daily nightmare, it was expected that the ardent love for Ireland in their hearts, stronger than any other sentiment, would convince them of the absolute necessity of strife for freedom. Such a nationalistic view of women assuming a sacrificial identity in face of so many hostilities was interspersed with the patriarchal structure of Irish society. The female role was imagined from the male point of view. In a letter to his mother two days before his execution, Patrick Pearse, the most prominent leader of the Easter Rising and the first to be executed on 3 May, clearly expresses his nationalistic convictions from a patriarchal perspective, since he extends male feelings to his mother:

We are ready to die and we shall die cheerfully and proudly...You must not grieve for all this. We have preserved Ireland's honour and our own. Our deeds of last week are the most splendid in Ireland's history. People will say hard things of us now, but we shall be remembered by posterity and blessed by unborn generations. You too will be blessed because you were my mother. (ROSA, 1990, p. 5).

Although there were women who questioned this credulous and despairing love for Ireland, if they demonstrated any form of feeling against the national purpose it would mean they were harming or rejecting the country rather than serving it. Most of Irish society accepted that a blood sacrifice was needed to purify Ireland and, even acknowledging the failure of the Rising, they believed that they had struck the first blow for freedom. Destruction, loss, death and other forms of damage were justified and easily accepted in the hope of seeing Ireland as a sovereign nation. It was easy to dismiss this group of discontented Irish women precisely because the courageous ones to raise the female voice were small in number and because so few of them have been

preserved in the history and literature. However, these women illustrate the dilemmas which faced Irish women in the past and continue to face today.

The female image variably inscribed in the historical narrative is the one imagined by men and constructed according to nationalistic discourse. Such is the predominance of this imaginative image that most Irish writers were convinced by the idea of nationalism and transferred it into their dramatic and literary production. On the other hand, a few playwrights have deviated from this nationalistic perspective and produced plays exposing the reality experienced by women in 1916. Sean O'Casey and Tom Murphy are two great playwrights who have courageously written about some problematic questions for Ireland. O'Casey in 1926 and Murphy in 1991 staged female characters who seemed to have been hidden in the Irish scenario. Through their dramatic representation they breathed life into those 1916 women who suffered one of the most bloody and sorrowful moments of Ireland's history.

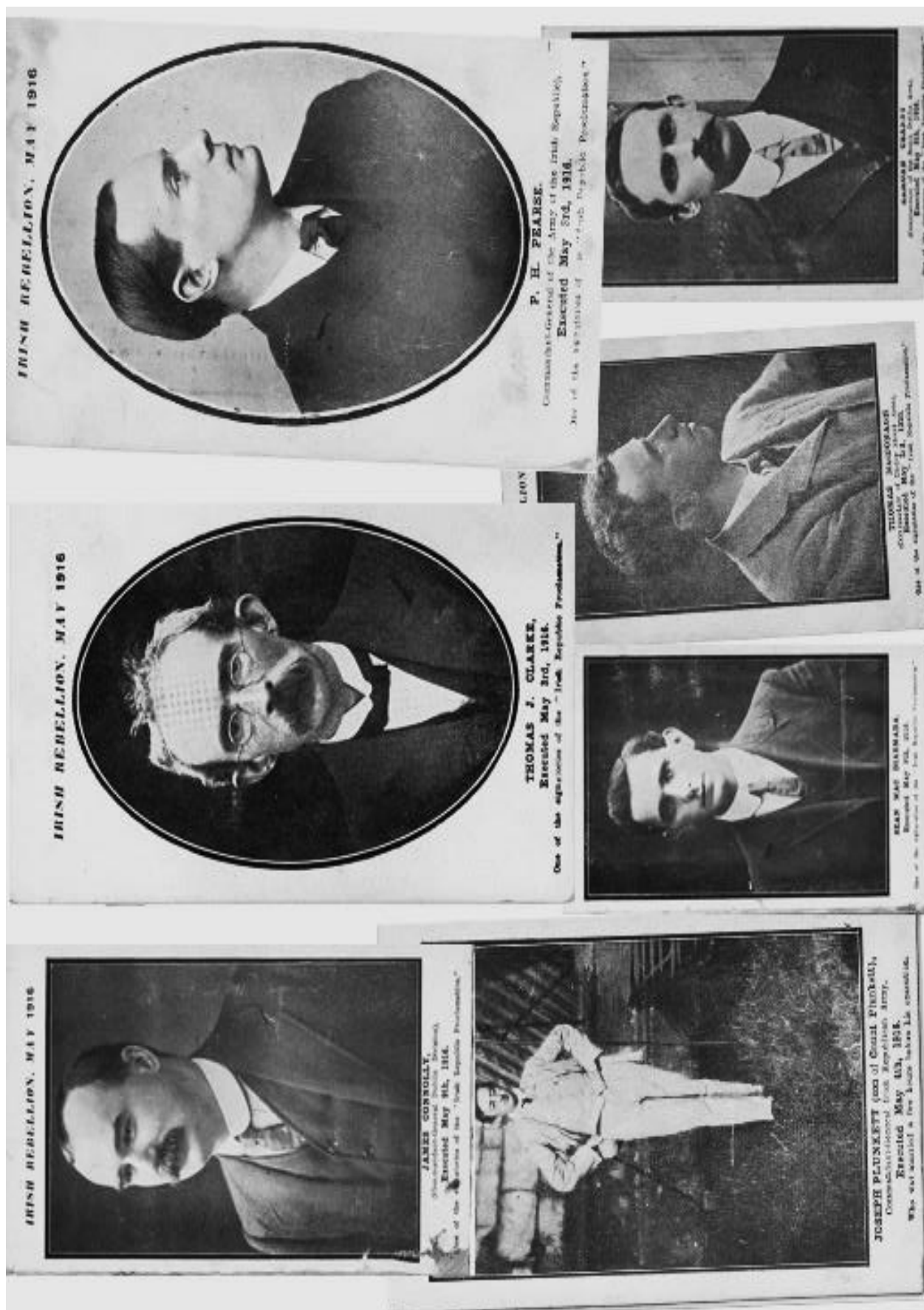


Figure 7. The seven signatories of the Irish Proclamation (<http://www.easter1916.ie/index.php/people/signatories/>)



Figure 8. Part of O'Connell Street, Dublin, after the Easter Rising,
(<http://www.theirishstory.com/tag/sectarian/>)

1.5 The Irish National Theatre: The Rising on Stage

I'm merely saying that I don't understand what a national theatre is any more. I don't understand the need for a national theatre because it would imply that there is some kind of national voice.

Brian Friel, *Interview by Laurence Finnegan*, in *Essays*, p.131.

Throughout its history Ireland has been the subject of its own dramatic productions. For many playwrights and critics Ireland has been a “matter for interpretation, a space, a place, a people needing explanation.” (GRENE, 1999, p. 48). Based on that and on Irish history itself, it is observed that many dramatists have used the Irish stage as a place of meditation, placing Ireland between themselves and the audience in order to revise images and concepts of the country and its society. Irish drama is recognised as one of the most prominent worldwide. The relevance of Irish theatre reaches not only artistic and cultural expressions; its most singular characteristic is its powerful influence on the social and political spheres. Grene measures this interlinking saying that “Irish drama has been so closely bound up with national politics that the one has often been considered more or less reflection of the other.” (1999, p. 1). Due to its connection with political issues and Ireland’s preoccupation with its national identity as a colonised people, drama played an active role in Irish society and affected the incorporation of Irish identity; it ended up formulating a sort of standard identification for each individual. About this involvement of drama with human identification, Wilder recognises “theatre as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being”.¹⁴ Therefore, Irish people’s behaviour has been highly influenced by historical events and also by theatrical productions which have revised Irish history. In addition, specifically in the case of Irish theatre, the dramatic tradition seems to need to explore, investigate and represent a particular question, the meaning of Irishness. The representation of Ireland on the stage reveals so much about its people. In view of this need to understand themselves and show the world what being Irish means, the non-Irish audience is invited to meet and discover Ireland and its people through drama.

¹⁴ In an interview with A. R. Goldstone, published in n. 16 of *The Paris Review*, 1965.

The Irish Theatre of the twentieth century is very interesting for the reason that in this period drama and Ireland's national culture have closely dialogued with each other:

The extent to which the dramatic movement was implicated in cultural nationalism needs fully to be recognised. [...] the Irish historical experience of drama (the creation of texts for performance) and theatre (the formation of the means of production and conditions of reception of drama) were both instrumental in defining and sustaining national consciousness. (MURRAY, 2000a, p. 3).

More importantly, twentieth-century Irish drama intersected with the debate on an authentic Irish self-image constructed from the national culture's ideology. A variety of movements were taking place in the country, and Grene understands these national movements as "an integral part of the broader cultural nationalism of the turn of the century which sought to create for a long-colonised Ireland its own national identity." (1999, p. 1). Considering its strong link with the national agenda, drama represented for Ireland the same role that fiction plays in the construction and setting of national symbols and images in many countries. In the 1900s Ireland was in quest of an unadulterated nationality and a distinct Irish identity which resulted in a new period of political and cultural activity. The country overflowed with cultural manifestations and "ideas of an 'Irish-Ireland.'" (FERRITER, 2004, p. 30). According to the historical narrative, few years later, particularly from 1913 onwards, Ireland's literary and cultural movement made way for a more political form of movement, profoundly inspired by nationalism. The 1916 Easter Rising was the height of a series of events based on intense nationalistic commitment. At this moment of Irish history, the political system was clearly set on achieving autonomy even if it meant taking into account only the interests of a few and sustaining huge losses for most the population.

Although the Rising of 1916 did not succeed, due to the violent English reaction, the limited Irish rebellion was the sparking point which fostered the process of independence. The despairing and unthinking character of the rebellion suggests how powerful the nationalistic spirit which flourished throughout the country was. Irish people understood that the national revolution would guarantee their individuality, their Irishness. Revolutionary expressions were wide spread, posters and banners inviting the population to join the cause of freedom, speeches loaded with national ideology, and the arts, in general, were articulated with the propagation of an original culture. James Connolly, one of the seven signatories of the Proclamation, understood very clearly the

relationship between arts and politics by writing, “No revolutionary movement is completed without poetic expression.” (CALLAHAN, 2013, p. 55).

Anderson calls these nationalistic artistic expressions “the cultural products of nationalism”. He understands that poetry, prose fiction, music, fine arts reveal this love for the nation in thousands of different forms and styles of national feeling (2006, p. 141-142). Irish society experienced intensely all those cultural products during this period of its history and it helped to consolidate national feelings even more. Drama functioned as a crucial part of it and, thus, it can be understood as one of these cultural products of Irish nationalism. So, if Irish society needed something more to understand its past and find out its authentic identity, theatre was the perfect place. The open space of the stage “is the place where a nation thinks in front of itself” (ESSLIN, 1978, p. 101), “where a collective response can negotiate terms of belief, identity and freedom. Narration becomes dramatisation, in this context; in Ireland the nation is staged rather than told.” (MURRAY, 2000a, p. 6).

The founding of the Abbey Theatre in 1904 contributed to support a national self-image and was another important aspect which energised the revolutionary spirit in Ireland. In fact, the Abbey Theatre was the first anti-Empire institution in Ireland; it therefore played a central role in the Irish Literary Revival in the early decades of the twentieth century. For Esslin, Ireland’s national theatre is a notable example of how drama can play an important role in creating national images and reflecting changes in the nation’s mood:

This political aspect of theatre is underlined by the fact that most modern, developed nations have their national theatre (an institution which makes an important contribution to each nation’s image of itself and defines it in relation to its neighbours) and, indeed, their national play which is performed at important occasions as a kind of ritual reaffirmation of nationhood. [...] When the Irish nationalist movement got into its stride in the last century, Yeats and Lady Gregory founded the Abbey Theatre with the express purpose of producing such an identity-defining national theatre and national drama. (1978, p. 29, 30).

As such, the Abbey Theatre plays an essential part in Irish history; it has given voice to the soul of Irish people through its poetic, naturalistic and realistic plays which seemed to be a step toward accomplishing Irish imagination, through productions whose style, according to Murray, “was likewise to have its base in realism but to aspire to something beyond naturalism, something poetic and transcendent.” (2000a, p. 3).

When the Abbey was founded, the theatre's directors, William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory and John Millington Synge, agreed that it was not only a typical theatre; it was a place for art, for public debate, a forum. However, some contradictions arose since it was too complicated to combine aesthetic drama with the ideals of nationalism. Before Irish revolutionary framework and politics became the new national passion, it was not an easy task to maintain the leitmotif of art for art's sake. Thus, when they founded the Abbey, the directors' attitude was, initially, to support the existing bond between literature and politics. For instance, the premiere of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* on the Abbey stage was of great influence because it constituted an unparalleled moment of strengthening the preservation of Gaelic culture and revolutionary struggles. Plays such as *Cathleen* promoted potential nationalistic feelings and provided inspiration not only for the audience, but also for the actors in the play. A good example is the story of Seán Connolly. He was an actor at the Abbey and was the first to be shot in the Easter Rising. His last appearance on the Abbey stage was precisely in a production of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* on 7 March 1916. His description is a testimonial of the theatrical nationalistic influence in his decision to take part in the Rising:

Sean Connolly, a small, lean man, was on edge like the rest. His thin chin quivered, he breathed heavily through the nostrils of a prominent nose, his narrow eyes got narrower. A professional actor, he knew little or nothing about warfare. He took it for granted that the Castle was swarming with troops who would soon come rushing to them. (ROSA, 1990, p. 261).

Other members of theatrical world also took part in the revolution. Fifty years after the Rising, the Abbey Theatre remembered its members who had been involved in the 1916 rebellion by producing a plaque on which were written their names, including Maire nic Shiubhlaigh, Helena Molony and Arthur Shields, people who no one would imagine carrying a real gun, but whose love for their nation had been modulated into a personal emotion, as a result of which they were caught up in a fanatical devotion to Ireland's freedom.

The Abbey directors and writers might have been under pressure from the nationalistic movement to reproduce propaganda, or, they might also have been involved in nationalistic issues. This was the case of Ernest Blythe, who directed the Abbey from 1941 to 1967 and was directly involved with political matters. He had been the Finance Minister of Ireland and also a member of the IRB at the time of the Rising

before his connection with the Abbey. What was immediately obvious was that if Ireland was experiencing a nationalistic movement, remaining outside its scope would be extremely difficult. Much drama did not reflect the real life of Irish society since it was being produced by playwrights who were influenced by the patriotic thoughts and emotions that were sweeping the country. The version of Ireland on stage “might be recast as vision, the dream of an alternative reality. Representation, mirroring of reality, was from the outset to be bound up in dreams and symbols.” (MURRAY, 2000a, p. 3).

The early productions of the most prominent figure in the Abbey’s history, W. B. Yeats, were also affected by the development of cultural nationalism. Yeats himself revealed his strong link to national ideals, “the fascination of the national movement for me in my youth was, I think, that it seemed to be an image of a social ideal which could give fine life and fine art authority.” (YEATS, 1972, p. 180). For example, his and Lady Gregory’s *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* reinforced the nationalist credentials of the Irish people. It had a great impact on the process leading to the Easter Rising. According to O’Brien, the play caused an enormous influence on the development of Irish nationalism in the fourteen years after its first performance on Dublin’s stage, and he argues that it is the most nationalist and propagandist Yeats’s plays (1994, p. 61). One unforgettable moment of the one-act play is the old woman’s answer when she is asked what had started her wandering. Her answer, “Too many strangers in the house” establishes the trope of the country’s problem with its oppressed state of colonisation and “brings out the peculiar nature of that imagined dream of liberation.” (GRENE, 1999, p. 71). Additionally, in a considerable number of his poems, Yeats also sought to express patriotic emotions. His literary production was the inspiration for many other Irish works whose writers, influenced by Yeats, transformed the cultural nationalism into a more specific literary nationalism:

Yeats’s idea of Ireland required a national literature. He wanted Irish writers to be conscious of a past; he wanted the native legends and folklore to be known widely enough to be the medium of their image-thinking which is the wisdom of poetry and the language of a national mind. (STOCK, 1961, p. 20).

In fact, it can be said that, throughout the twentieth century, most intensively in the first half of the century, the cultural movement was reflected in the work of the Abbey Theatre and drama was based on the same ideals and principles established by this cultural nationalistic movement, and the playwrights who neither took part in this

movement nor shared its ideology even had some of their plays rejected by the Abbey. According to Murray, one of the problems of Irish drama at this time is that, since it was under the influence of a narrow nationalism, the audience did not have the real image of Ireland, they had images of a perceived, yet constructed reality (2000a, p. 9). The Abbey's dramatists, in general, tried to depict typical Irish life often associated with the past and its national provincial traditions. "This revivalist identification of national life with rural life led to a theatre often dominated by the pull of the past where a displaced modern individual sought to recover an identifiable place in a traditional community usually associated with his or her peasant ancestry." (KEARNEY, 1988, p. 163).

In contrast, the representative force of Irish drama was also a form of revisionism. It is true that not everyone was in agreement with the popular nationalistic style of drama Ireland had been producing. Consequently, some playwrights made the national question alive in theatre in a different way, writing plays whose main purpose was to reveal the unfortunate shadow side of Irish nationalism. It is even possible to talk of a division in Irish drama of the twentieth century, because there was not only the production of a domestic national drama, but also playwrights who produced plays approaching the universal. Moreover, some of these playwrights had a different vision of the country; they confronted Ireland or, in other words, they faced the unpleasant truths of Ireland and managed to deal with them. Thus, apart from the national theatre, they produced plays which subverted mythical national Irish drama, showing its failures and pointing out the disillusion Irish people faced due to the nationalistic cause. Although these playwrights were not opposed to the impact of drama on the lives and identity of the Irish, they were aware of the necessity of showing these same people the real consequences and problem of incorporating such ideologies. While many Irish authors, seemingly encouraged by political ideals, took the road of nationalism and gave the audiences plays which matched their imaginary state of Irishness, a minority, whose works were not shaped by imaginative conceptions imbued in the nationalistic feelings, deviated from the national path, producing plays which would make the audience see behind the curtains of Irish society. A play on the stage was not only a form of entertainment, but an essential component for reflecting on social questions. Seen in these terms, the Irish stage was the place to remember those who had been forgotten and in doing so, these authors put their finger on the weak spots of Irish political discourse and, for some of them, it was even impossible to stay in Ireland.

Revisiting the past proved to be one suitable alternative for playwrights who wanted to explore the ambiguities of Irish nationalism. The Abbey Theatre, for example, has been the stage of many historic revivals which revisited important moments of Ireland's history. Of all the events in the modern twentieth-century Ireland's history, it is the Easter Rising that has most fascinated playwrights. The profound scars the insurrection caused in Irish people's lives have inspired the production of dramatic texts as an attempt to revive the nationalistic atmosphere of 1916 on Irish stage. In addition to the official government portrayals of the Easter Rising as part of the annual anniversaries, other dramatic works alluding to the Easter Rising are: Maurice Dalton's *Sable and Gold* (1918); Daniel Corkery's plays, *The Labour Leader* (1919) and *Resurrection* (1924); Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* (1926); W. B. Yeats' *The Dreaming of the Bones* (1931); Donagh MacDonagh's radio play, *Easter Christening* (1940); Robert Farren's verse play, *Lost Light* (1943); Roger McHugh's and Alfred Noyes' *Roger Casement* (1957); Brendan Behan's Irish-language play, *An Gaill* (1958); Denis Johnston's *The Scythe and the Sunset* (1958); Hugh Leonard's *Patrick Pearse Motel* (1966); Richard Stockton's *The Prisoner of the Crown* (1972); David Rudkin's radio play, *Cries from Casement as his Bones are Brought to Dublin* (1972); Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985); and Tom Murphy's *The Patriot Game* (1991).¹⁵

Curiously, there is also another play which, somehow, presages the Easter Rising since it was staged for the first time at the Abbey before the actual rising, in October, 1908. Thomas MacDonagh's *When the Dawn is Come* tells a story which would be mirrored in Dublin in eight years' time. The play imagines a future attempt at revolution in Ireland and almost Rising itself; in the play the plans for a rising are directed by a council of seven people, exactly as matters unfolded in 1916. The protagonist, who at the end of the play is revealed to be the leader, is not a man of guns, warfare or revolution; he is a visionary poet and writer. In fact, these characteristics bear a strong resemblance to MacDonagh himself, who must have been inspired to

¹⁵ Other artistic and literary works which recall the 1916 insurrection are the 1941 German production *Mein Leben Fur Irland* (My Life for Ireland), directed by Max W. Kimmich; Liam O'Flaherty's novel, *Insurrection* (1950); Hugh Leonard's RTÉ broadcast, *Insurrection* (1966); Margaretta D'Arcy's and John Arden's cycle play, *The Non-Stop Connolly Show* (1975); Neil Jordan's film, *Michael Collins* (1997); Roddy Doyle's novel, *A Star Called Henry* (1999); Jamie O'Neil's novel, *At Swim Two Boys* (2001); Ronan Bennett's television drama show, *Rebel Heart* (2001); Daithí Keane's series, *1916 Seachtar na Cásca* (2010).

participate in the insurrection thanks to his own poetic and dramatic texts. Kiberd supposes that MacDonagh accepted the theories of that time since he understood that people were willing to make sacrifices not just for Ireland but for society. MacDonagh's mindset, like Pearse's, was that revolution was necessary. It was the conscious of his entire generation, whether they took part in the Rising or not.

The Easter week revival performances proved to be as controversial as the Rising itself. The disputes and divisions which followed the attempted revolution affected the way each writer represented the event on the stage. The playwrights who decided to re-enact the Easter Rising on the Irish stage held different views and political standpoints, demonstrating that 1916 "debates and contradictions were a nightmare from which the Irish theatre was powerless to awake." (MORAN, 2005, p. 103).

Although the Easter Rising's theatrical productions were far from being characterised by homogenised form, structure or approach, "dramatists eagerly assisted the government by writing plays that aligned the insurrection with the social attitudes" of the New State politics, and the ones who wrote afterwards "consistently repeated the arguments that had already been conducted by dramatists in that formative period after the revolution." (MORAN, 2005, p. 103-104). Thus, once the newly established Republic's structure and discourse had been strategically organised according to political interests, the writers, influenced by the government's vision and its own Easter Rising representations, showed a conservative attitude in their works. According to the government version of the Rising, the aspects which prevailed over the real circumstances were a Catholic vision of the nation's foundation rebellion, celibate heterosexual rebels, idolised patriotic motherhood, family life, and a patriarchal gender message. Moran understands this national version, with its insistence on the image of Irish masculinity, as a response to the colonial feminised image of Ireland and points this fact out as one element which helped to erase all hints of female involvement and women's rights (2005, p. 7). After independence these idealised personifications of the 1916 Irish rebellion became still more inscribed in society's conception from 1932 onwards, when Eamon De Valera, who was one of the Rising commanders who had refused to fight alongside women in 1916¹⁶, had won the election and influenced his new party, Fianna Fáil, on the theatrical commemoration of the Easter Rising at the GPO. The government re-staging of the Rising, cautiously prevented the insurrection's

¹⁶ He later told Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington that he regretted this decision as it meant some of his men had to be assigned cooking duties (KOSTIC; COLLINS, 2000, p. 76).

ambiguities from being remembered. One thing that De Valera and his ministers did not want, was to reinstate women's active participation or remember their real condition during the rebellion:

In addition, Fianna Fáil had clashed with the Abbey over the theatre's portrayal of Irish women, and the government planned an enormous Easter commemoration that would promote the preferred ideal of the passive and sacrificial Irish mother. Fianna Fáil's depiction of womanhood at 1935 memorial service dovetailed with the constitution that de Valera would publish two years later, and set an influential precedent for subsequent depictions of the Rising. (MORAN, 2005, p. 68-69).

Thanks to this idealised model of the revolution in the realm of imaginative practical politics, a general prudery in the way of representing the women of 1916 remained among the plays alluding Ireland's most controversial insurrection. An example is the very first play written about the Easter Rising, *Sable and Gold*, the second play by Maurice Dalton. The first production was in Dalton's city, Cork; in Dublin it opened at the Abbey on 16 September 1918. Most reviewers and critics, though not overly enthusiastic, praised the play, recognising the merit of its characterisation, for example. Hogan and Burnham comment on the play's prematurity, since it was written only two years after the historical event it depicts. They said that in the 1970s it was possible to find as-new copies of the original play in one Dublin bookshop, which suggests that this very early play about the insurrection was not very popular (1984, p. 149). Besides this fact, there is another aspect which reveals the play was really written according the ideals and principles which operated during the Easter Rising. The play's message about gender roles followed the Irish government's imaginary symbol of passive women and sacrificial motherhood. The feminine characters are essentially defined as sacrificial women who fulfilled their role by the sending men to fight against the British Empire:

The women of *Sable and Gold* never ask whether they might themselves be able to leave the house and help with the revolution that they support. They are content with the domestic role assigned to them, powerless to influence national events unless through the actions conducted by their men. The first scene depicted as the curtain rises sets the tone for the rest of the play. Two men and two women play seven card tricks together, but the women are unable to win a single hand between them. (MORAN, 2005, p. 36).

Through the play's narrative it is understood that women automatically support the revolution without questioning its ambiguities nor the unfair role it cruelly imposed on them. The terms used in description of the women reveal them to be unworthy of consideration. On the contrary, men are mentioned as glorified heroes; they are described with adjectives which confer on them qualities such as bravery, courage and righteousness.

In the same vein, Daniel Corkery's revival of 1916, *Resurrection* (1924), confirms the old sacrificial female role and women's domesticity, with the character Mary inspiring and encouraging her grandson to join the insurrection. Moran considers this character to be a reincarnation of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, establishing this resemblance by the characterisation of the two female figures, two old women. Thus, the first representations of the Easter Rising suited the government's model in representing gender roles; plays containing a conception of gender equality were, in great part, refused, except one, *The Plough and the Stars*, by Sean O'Casey. O'Casey's play was the first 1916 revival with an evidently subversive representation of Irish women. The women in O'Casey's play are not fighting in the revolution, they are ordinary women, generally forgotten by drama and historical records, who stayed at home, dealing with the revolution's aftermath. "O'Casey's tenement characters were the urban poor whom the early Abbey drama had ignored in favour of the rural peasantry." (GRENE, 1999, p. 219). The play, first performed in 1926, has revisited the Abbey stage as well as those of other important theatres until the present.

In the second half of the twentieth century, posterior re-enactments of the Easter week continued to portray a different Easter Rising to that which had been happened in 1916. Like the government's versions of the insurrection, playwrights preferred to keep women far away from the performance space. However, like *The Plough and the Stars* in the first half of the twentieth century, there were a few productions which challenged the government's very well elaborated dramatic form. In 1965, Tom Murphy wrote a play for the BBC's 50th-anniversary celebration of the Easter Rising which was only staged in Dublin only 1991.¹⁷ Unlike most plays remembering the Easter revolution, *The Patriot Game* follows an opposite road in the way it represents women on the stage and in the Rising. In Murphy's version of 1916, the Irish rebellion is recounted by a woman who stays on the stage for most of the performance.

¹⁷ In Chapter 3 there are considerations about the possible reasons why *The Patriot Game* was only staged twenty-six years after it was written.

Both O'Casey and Murphy presented versions of the Easter Rising on the Abbey stage which recalled not only the presence of women, but also their voice and attitude towards the revolution and its consequences. In contrast with nationalistic versions which portrayed Ireland as a place where only men fought for the country's glorious independence while women stayed at home, encouraging men to engage in a conflict surrounded by brutality and bloodshed, O'Casey and Murphy's plays adopt a more radical view about equality, and place women who are disdainful of nationalism in central roles expressing their feelings and ideas in such a way that is easy to see that they are real-life women. It is through these two dramatic texts that I propose to conduct a comparative analysis on how these two playwrights played a significant role in ousting the imaginary female image promoted by Irish nationalism.



Figure 9. The Abbey Theatre, (*circa 1904*)
(http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/behind_the_scenes/article/history)



Figure 10. The Abbey Theatre, (*circa 2012*)
(<http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/about/>)

2. SEAN O'CASEY'S *THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS*: NATIONALISM IN DUBLIN SLUMS

"[...] I know the heart of Ireland because I am one of its corners [...]"

Sean O'Casey, *Feathers from the Green Crow*, p. 164

Seán Ó Cathasaigh was the kind of person who could not stand hypocrisy, and, as a playwright, he took on every Irish taboo, evoking strong and ambivalent reactions in his audience. "Never one to fear the cut and thrust of polemics himself, [...] Sean O'Casey has always divided his audience into the most vehement camps of supporters and detractors." (HARRIS, 2004, p. 1). His controversial stance in a turbulent Ireland provided him with a life full of ups and downs. It is not by accident that Harris (2004) used the expression "reflections of a radical ambivalence" in the subtitle of his book about O'Casey's autobiographies and letters.

As patriotic revolutionary fever spread in Ireland, O'Casey watched the needs of the working class take a back seat in the country's growing political goal of independence. Although the playwright was not against the idea of a free Ireland, he could look beyond it and understood that the idea of changing the flag, separating Ireland from England, was not going to make Ireland the kind of place he wanted it to be, especially for the people he cared about. In fact, Ireland's liberation did nothing to solve some fundamental questions, because people continued to live in slums, being poor and exploited.

2.1 Sean O'Casey: Humanity above Nationalism

"It's the civilians that suffer; when there's an ambush they don't know where to run. Shot in the back to save the British Empire, an' shot in the breast to save the soul of Ireland. [...] I believe in the freedom of Ireland, an' that England has no right to be here, but I draw the line when I hear a gunmen blowin' about dyin' for the people, when it's people that are dyin' for the gunmen! With all due respect to the gunmen, I don't want them to die for me."

Sean O'Casey, *The Shadow of a Gunman*, 2000, Act 2, p. 39, 40

The author of *The Plough and the Stars* was born in Dublin in 1880 and grew up in a troubled Ireland. In those years Dublin was a raw and desperate place with a high death-rate and one-third of its population living frugally in tenements, Dublin slums, where O'Casey himself lived for his first forty years. O'Casey had descended into extreme poverty by the time he was ten. He was frail and suffered from ulcerated eyes which threatened to leave him completely blind. He was one of thirteen children and the youngest of the seven surviving ones of a Protestant working-class family and knew what it meant to struggle every day to survive. He lost his father when still young and had to start working at the age of fourteen. He had little formal education. He didn't learn to read until he was twelve, but when he did, even with those bad eyes, he read plays. O'Casey inherited from his father a love of books, especially, Dion Boucicault's melodramas and Shakespeare's plays which he enthusiastically read and acted in his brother's small company. Since he was not educated or conditioned by the school system, he was able to think for himself and to come to his own conclusions; and when he became a playwright, he learned his craft by his own methods and influenced by the things he read and the plays he saw. Writing plays was not easy for him, as he himself attested: "When I write a new play, when I sit down to try to write a new play I've had the experience of many plays before, yet that new play that I am going to try to write gives me the same agony, the same trouble, the same effort, the same herculean work as the very first play I ever wrote gave to me."¹⁸

O'Casey worked in various manual labour jobs while living with his mother and, in 1903, he became a labourer on the Great Northern Railway. In 1911, he joined the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, starting activities as a secretary in its

¹⁸ Interview "Sean O'Casey in Conversation"(ca.1961)<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOjR4rc8BFU>

political arm, the Irish Citizen Army, which later became directly involved in the planning of the Easter Rising. The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union leader, James Larkin, was an avowed socialist and mentor to O'Casey, who became his loyal assistant and secretary. Later he also wrote for the *Irish Worker*. When working for the Union, O'Casey observed the appalling conditions and unfair practices at the hands of labour bosses which inspired him to join Dublin's workers' rights movement to fight for the rights of Dublin's poorest citizens, most of whom lived in the overcrowded, breeding grounds of disease and starvation, tenement houses. O'Casey did not accept the fact that working-class, or poor, people assumed that they neither needed nor wanted anything other than material necessities, and for him, Larkin was someone who could change the reality of these people.

Prior to his professional involvement in the Irish political realm, O'Casey became concerned about the ideals of the Gaelic League, wrote articles and stories for Gaelic journals and even changed his Christian name from 'John' to 'Sean'. In the early 1900s, he was a member of the IRB (Irish Republican Brotherhood), a secret organisation dedicated to the establishment of an "independent democratic republic" in Ireland, and which later was one of the groups responsible for the organisation of the Rising. Socialism became an article of faith with O'Casey. His revolutionary spirit and fervour were revealed by his behaviour and attitudes as Desmond Ryan describes him at a meeting of a Sinn Féin Club:

Sean O'Casey sits in silence at the back of the hall during the lecture, a dour and fiery figure swathed in labourer's garb, for he works on the railways just then. His neck and throat are bound in the coils of a thick white muffler, and he looks like a Jacobin of Jacobins as his small, sharp and red-rimmed eyes stab all the beauty and sorrow of the world. He speaks first, and very fluently and eloquently in Irish, then launches out into a violent Republican oration in English, stark and forceful, Biblical in diction with gorgeous tints of rhetoric and bursts of anti-English nationalism of the most uncompromising style. He will have none of the Socialists who have turned in to heckle the lecturer and he rends them savagely and brushes their materialism aside. Yes, he reminds them, when roused by his sharp words they murmur interruptions taunting him with the poverty and degradation of the Dublin workers, there is all that in life. Half to himself he speaks, lowering his voice to an intense whisper, but there is something else: joy. He speaks the word, and his tone gives a meaning to it even as he sinks down into silence on the bench, his fierce small head and angry star over all the others in the rear. (1934, p. 82).

The years when O'Casey was involved in Irish politics not only influenced his conception of and attitudes towards the real interests of Irish politics, but also, since part of his job was as a socialist orator, helped him to develop his rhetorical skills which would later be applied in many speeches of his plays. He could not stand hypocrisy and the pompous patriotic speeches that were heard all the time in Dublin and so developed his own style. O'Casey's rhetorical style won worldwide acclaim in the 1920s and 1930s, especially among emerging black writers, for whom Langston Hughes spoke when he wrote: "The local and regional can become universal. Sean O'Casey's Irishmen are an example. So I would say to young Negro writers, do not be afraid of yourselves. You are the world." (GEMIE, 1976, p. 28, apud KIBERD, 1996, p. 221). So, when he became a dramatist, he built on the techniques he learned from people who despised the poor, in order to give voice to the marginalised.

O'Casey's connection with the tenement houses goes beyond the fact that they were where he was born and grew up. In fact, he lived in various slums in Dublin. For instance, towards the end of his teenage years, he lived in a two-roomed tenement at 18 Abercorn Road; late in 1920, he moved to 35 Mountjoy Square to live with a friend; and after his first success, *The Shadow of a Gunman*, at the Abbey in 1923, he moved to a one-room tenement at 422 North Circular Road. Actually, O'Casey worked as a labourer until *Juno and the Paycock's* financial success which allowed him to quit his job as a manual labourer and write full-time. The tenements were not only part of O'Casey's reality for almost half of his life, but also continued as a memory until his last days. Therefore, it is no surprise that, when he started writing plays he used these Dublin slums as the scenario for some of his plays. He was the first playwright to write about the slums and, much more than this, he made them come to life on the stage.

In 1904, Dublin's Abbey Theatre became the core of Ireland's cultural revival. The Abbey's directors decided to give voice to an Irish authentic drama, to show that Ireland could be more than a place of ludicrous and easy sentiment. Counting from this year, it took fifteen years before O'Casey knocked on the Abbey's door hoping to get his plays produced. Ireland finally welcomed playwright Sean O'Casey into its literary circle for the first time in 1923 with a play set in the tenements, called *The Shadow of a Gunman*. It takes place during Ireland's War of Independence and satirises the violent strategy and Catholic rhetoric of the war's so-called heroes. Audiences loved *The Shadow of a Gunman*. Reviewers declared O'Casey's Ireland a new gift to the world. In this initial phase, the playwright wrote candidly about the Irish as he saw them in the

slums of Dublin. As Ireland entered a war of independence against England in 1919 O'Casey watched the needs of the poor get further eclipsed, and so, he began to write plays to give them voice.

The Shadow of a Gunman would become the first of three tenement plays frequently referred to as *The Dublin Trilogy*. There is a political background to all of the plays each of which confronts a different event in Irish history. "All three plays are bound together by war, its violence and tragic disruptiveness. O'Casey's humane response, his passion for honest dealing and clear thinking on the national question [...] underpins the Dublin plays and suffuses them with pity, anger and sorrow." (MURRAY, 2000b, p. xiii). However, they also represent the daily problem of struggle and survival that is more important than saving Ireland, or fighting for Ireland. The second play of O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy, *Juno and the Paycock*, tackled the Irish Civil War, a conflict erupted due to a treaty, dividing Ireland into North and South, signed to end the War of Independence. The result was a bloodbath in which brothers who had fought together just weeks before against the British were now pitted against each other. *Juno* drew such large crowds in its first week that it had to be extended. It was the first time in the Abbey theatre's twenty-year history that a play had run longer than one week. The third play, *The Plough and the Stars* would test O'Casey's relationship with the Abbey. O'Casey set the play during the 1916 Easter Rising, and, instead of glorifying its martyrs and the cause they died for, O'Casey mocked the mindless attitudes of those heroic rebels and, on account of that, Abbey directors balked at its controversial content. When the play reached the Abbey's stage in 1926, O'Casey's satire of war and violence ended up inciting riots. But, despite the standing ovations the play received, the sting of protest lingered. Apart from their controversial form in satirising economic, political and religious tensions, the three plays were wildly popular.

O'Casey's next play, *The Silver Tassie* (1928), an attempt to break away from realism, was rejected by Yeats and the Abbey. For the first time, after the Dublin Trilogy's glorious years, O'Casey was rejected. He blamed Yeats and took their fight public in a debate played out in the daily newspapers. But as much as he fought publicly against it, privately he was crushed by the rejection. Already living in England, the rejection of *The Silver and Tassie* and his all disillusionment with the ideologies of the new Irish State helped him to decide not to return to Ireland. O'Casey remained in

London and then, after marrying and starting a family, moved to a coastal town in Devon, but he continued to use Ireland as the setting for his dramatic work.

O'Casey was a remarkably prolific writer. In a professional career spanning approximately forty years he wrote twenty-five plays, of which twenty-two were staged, the first in 1923 and the last in 1962. Among these plays, besides the three Dublin Plays and the rejected *The Silver and Tassie* (1928), which marked a transition in O'Casey's naturalistic style to an experimental expressionistic one; mention can be made of *Within the Gates* (1934); *The Star Turns Red* (1940); *Purple Dust* (1945); *Oak Leaves and Lavender* (1948); *Red Roses for Me* (1946), the most autobiographical of his plays; *Cock-a doodle Dandy* (1949); *The Unholy Trade* (1952); *The Bishop's Bonfire* (1955), O'Casey's return to the Irish stage; *The Drums of Father Ned* (1959); and *Behind the Green Curtains* (1961). O'Casey also wrote seven one-act plays. However, he did not restrict himself to writing for the stage alone. There is a total of 661 contributions to periodicals and a further 77 to books from O'Casey's pen and typewriter. The most important of O'Casey's writings are the six autobiographical volumes published between 1939 and 1954, *I Knock at the Door*, *Pictures in the Hallway*, *Drums Under the Windows*, *Rose and Crown* and *Sunset and Evening Star*; whose "graphic prose and richly varied authorial techniques [...] give the reader a privileged insight into the personalities who built the Abbey Theatre" and of O'Casey himself. (HARRIS, 2004, p. 175).

Although later in his career a number of his plays were rejected by the Abbey Theatre, at the beginning of the 1920s O'Casey received immediate acclaim from Dublin audiences and it is even suggested that he saved the Abbey as an organisation from financial ruin with his energetic Dublin Plays, because he brought in money at a time when the theatre was struggling. Although the Abbey's directors, respected poet and playwright, William Butler Yeats, and fellow playwright Lady Augusta Gregory, had rejected his politically-charged work just a few years previously, they seemed to be intrigued by O'Casey's writing style, whose unity, intensity and complexity are incomparable (ARMSTRONG, 1967, p. 23). O'Casey brought to the Irish stage very vivid characters who were funny and witty, but also very touching and heartbreaking. The new kinds of character in an urban setting and his commendable potential with characterisation, which pleased Lady Gregory tremendously, represented a variety-show in the traditional Abbey Theatre. In point of fact, Lady Gregory was probably the biggest influence on him and proved to be the figure who most believed in O'Casey as a

promising playwright, encouraging him to continue writing about the tenements and their people.

“Ireland, the Irish character, and Irish civilization are basic themes in Sean O’Casey’s finest plays, so the man and his work are best understood if they are related to the period in which he lived, the most momentous in the history of the nation”, and for that reason when we talk about history and social involvement with drama in Irish society, O’Casey comes up as an iconic symbol of engagement in sociological reflection; in fact, he was a controversial man in a time of controversy, “few Irishmen played a more active part than did Sean O’Casey in the cultural and political movements” of his times (ARMSTRONG, 1967, p. 5, 7). However, O’Casey’s engagement emerged controversially, reaching a point in his career when he could even be considered an alienated figure, at a time when the Church and the patriots were trying to run the country and anybody who criticised them would be considered unpatriotic, anti-religious, as O’Casey was. In some of his plays O’Casey tried to expose Irish society: who they were, how they were, how they acted and how they were conducting their lives. O’Casey’s main concern was about the workers: he insisted upon an Irish ‘Workers’ Republic and, being deeply influenced by Marx, he began to realise that Irish politics predominantly gave importance to cultural and political liberation, while overlooking the importance of economic liberty. So, when he realised that the groups he had been engaged with were unable to be imbued with his convictions, his enthusiasm diminished and he distanced himself from them.

Very probably, this point in O’Casey’s life was the initiation of a process of disillusion with the Irish political system which resulted in changes in his relationship with Ireland and its national ideals, whose main concerns seemed to favour the interests of a few individuals. In addition, due to his opposition to the use of uniforms by the Citizen Army, he resigned his post as secretary in 1914. Later, already recognised as a playwright, O’Casey alluded to this passage of his life in *The Plough and the Stars* in Act One where he demonstrates the patriots’ delight in the use of uniforms. Furthermore, the playwright did not agree when the group and the Volunteers joined the IRB to fight in the Easter Rising. O’Casey began to criticise rebels, patriots and the Church for abandoning Dublin’s poor and, in a published article, the playwright lashed out at the largest patriotic group at the time, the Irish Volunteers Army. Consequently, he did not take part in the Rising; however he worried about the implications of it for

non-combatants during and after the fighting which, according to Armstrong, seems to be related to O'Casey's strong emotional tie with his mother:

[...] These sympathies were largely generated by his deep affection for his mother, who narrowly escaped being hit by English bullets during the Rising. O'Casey had often lived on her old age pension of ten shillings a week, and he never forgot 'her gleaming black eyes, her set mouth, forever smitten with a smile; ragged and broken-booted, still looking forward as if she saw freedom and everlasting truth beside her', or the bright flowers she cultivated in biscuit tins on the window sills of slum-tenements. Susan O'Casey must be ranked even higher than big Jim Larkin as an influence on O'Casey's mind and imagination. (1967, p. 10).

All these disappointing experiences added to his dissatisfaction with the direction Irish nationalism was taking and created in O'Casey a strong disillusion. Then,

At some point between 1918 and 1926, however, O'Casey decided to lambaste the Easter revolt in *The Plough and the Stars*. Scholars such as Desmond Greaves, Jack Mitchell, and Ronan McDonald disagree about exactly when and how O'Casey changed his position and switched from supporting the principles of the Rising to supporting communism. Yet it is more appropriate to describe not only how O'Casey abandoned the Rising in the years following 1916, but also how the Rising turned away from him. (MORAN, 2005, p. 32).

Nonetheless, the Easter Rising would provide O'Casey with literary inspiration. In the midst of the revolutionary movement O'Casey was modulating his voice as a writer in a political tonality. The voice of Ireland he echoed was not of the shouts of deluded volunteers, but the hunger cry of the nation's poor in horror-filled one-room tenements. Hence, the combination of O'Casey's apathetic feelings towards the Easter Rising and his memories of the tenements gave life to his literary inspirations, resulting in the third play of Dublin Trilogy, *The Plough and the Stars*, for some critics, O'Casey's finest play.

Investigating *The Plough and the Stars* is worthwhile since O'Casey questions things that were considered sacred in the Ireland of his time, and most often, these things were what the priest and the patriot said. Another interesting reason is the involvement of O'Casey in political and military issues years before and during the insurrection. The title of the play is evidence of how his experiences in Ireland's political environment reflected in his work. *The Plough and the Stars* is a reference to the Irish Citizen Army's banner, "Starry Plough". The flag originated in 1914, but it

was used during the Easter Rising. James Connolly, one of the co-founders of the Irish Citizen Army, explained the significance of the banner saying that a free Ireland would control its own destiny from the plough to the stars,¹⁹ words that might have provided O'Casey with inspiration for the title of his play. The riots in the theatre, the attacks in the press due to his polemical dramatic version of the Easter Rising transformed the play into an even more interesting object for analysis and reaffirmed the playwright's significance for Irish drama. Yeats's appreciation of the impact O'Casey's drama had on Irish society at that time surprised O'Casey himself:

Yeats came bounding out on to the stage to oppose the howling mob. And he's shouting out at them, You have disgraced yourselves again! And then when the roaring became worse and they shouted against O'Casey he roared out at them with all the venom and vehemence that was in the great man, This is O'Casey's apotheosis! I was wondering all the way home what in the name of God was the meaning of apotheosis and what had happened to O'Casey that he'd had such an honour conferred on him? It was only when I got home and quietly and secretly, you know looked up the dictionary. I discovered that O'Casey was translated up into the gods!²⁰

O'Casey's depiction of Ireland during the event considered the birth of the nation puts the national question in evidence. O'Casey's play stands out from many nationalistic productions of the same period because his theatrical texts prepared the ground for a revealing comprehension of the national cause, deviating from the traditional and domestic nationalistic path taken by the Irish national theatre. For Murray, "O'Casey updated and deconstructed the heroic ideal (MURRAY, 2000b, ix). Bearing this in mind, and given the focus of the present research on representations of women in the Easter Rising, *The Plough and the Stars* is a rich source due to its three female characters placed in the Irish nationalistic context. O'Casey's sensible yet daring writing portrayed the Irish woman controversially, creating and placing a contrastive female image on the stage. The ordinary women, residents of the tenements, represented by O'Casey were characterised in powerful images of determination, qualities contrary to the national stereotype of women. It also tested O'Casey's relationship with the critics in Dublin and London; however the author usually dismissed these reviews, considering them to be completely irrelevant (HARRIS, 2004, p. 170).

¹⁹ <http://irahistory.com/post/127263160063/the-irish-people-will-only-be-free-when-they-own>

²⁰ Interview "Sean O'Casey in Conversation" (ca. 1961) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOjR4rc8BfU>

O'Casey's impressive female characters in *The Plough and the Stars* are clear evidence that he wrote about forgotten individuals, not only women, but also the poor, the oppressed, the drunk, always very human subjects. It seems his personal working-class experiences in the tenements were manifested in his drama which, instead of focusing on politicians, warriors, or leaders, took note of ordinary Irish people, the daily struggle for life against the backdrop of the nationalistic cause. He gave humanity to these characters that nobody else was paying attention to or interested in. O'Casey's drama emphasised that, although God and nature had given the world a colourful, delightful and abundant variety of peoples, we are all one. Even with all its negative repercussions it on his personal life, in later years, O'Casey spoke of his enduring love for his home country, where he never lived again. Ireland lost O'Casey in 1964, at the age of eighty-four. The words in his obituary translate the main concern of his life and his drama: "From the bitterness of poverty in the drab streets and two-storied brick boxes of Dublin slums until his aging years of self-driven British exile, this gaunt, fiery writer never abandoned his faith in the dignity of man."²¹

²¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0330.html>

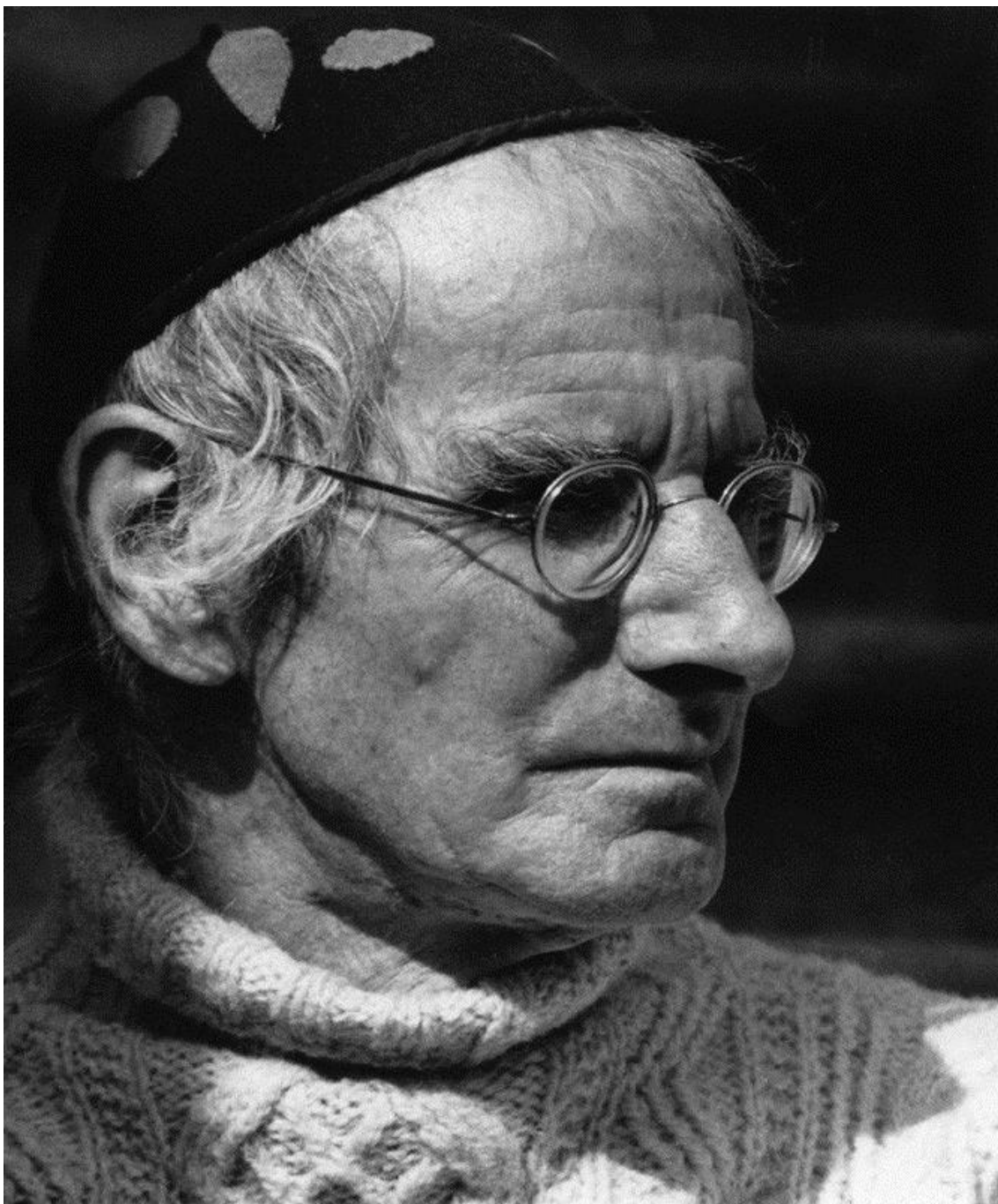


Figure 11. Sean O'Casey, by Wolfgang Suschitzky, October 1955
(<http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portraitLarge/mw07743/Sean-OCasey>)

2.2 *The Plough and the Stars*: 1916 and its Forgotten Women

*“I think being a woman is like being Irish...
Everyone says you're important and nice, but you
take second place all the time.”*
Iris Murdoch

After comprehending the historical and political Irish scenario of the first half of the twentieth century, it is understandable that plays depicting the events of 1916 in Ireland should have had different views about what really happened in that Easter week in Dublin. In his analysis of the representations of the Rising, Moran observed that “when the rising is re-told it is not necessarily the same event that is remembered each time.” (2005, p. 1). What lies behind this is the fact that it is almost impossible to be sure about the real battle which occurred on the streets of Dublin. If the Irish population did not show approval for the events during the period following the insurrection, nowadays there seems to exist a mixed feeling among Irish people; some dutifully remember the Rising, glorifying the Irish rebels as true heroes, whilst others do not feel like remembering it at all. Similarly, the plays portraying the Rising have been much influenced by the respective author’s point of view on nationalism or by political imposition.

Although it is difficult to understand O’Casey’s feelings towards nationalist political life, especially concerning the Rising, it is precisely his direct involvement with Irish politics which transformed him into the author of the most famous play about the rising, *The Plough and the Stars* (1926). O’Casey’s play is not only the best-known account of the Rising, it is also considered by many critics to be the finest play in O’Casey’s career. It is one of his most renowned works partly because it is the kind of play which makes the audience reflect on how Ireland was cruelly affected by the problematic form of nationalism; it represented a courageous threat to the nationalistic version of the rebellion. After the premiere of *The Plough and the Stars*, the *Irish Times* praised O’Casey for courageously depicting Dublin life the way it was. O’Casey’s anti-heroic depiction of the Rising staged for a nationalist audience inflamed by the execution of the martyrs could only have resulted an angry reaction. There were riots and organised protests to prevent the continuation of the play first run at the Abbey. Led by Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, whose pacifist husband, Francis, had been shot by the British during the Rising, the nationalists were furious about O’Casey’s portrait of the Irish nation on the stage of the Abbey Theatre.

The Plough and the Stars (1926) tells the story of Jack and Norah Clitheroe, a newly married young couple, who live in a typical tenement house in Dublin. They do not live on their own. Their daily life is influenced by Norah's uncle, Peter Flynn, and Jack's cousin, the young Covey, who share the tenement with the couple; the alcoholic carpenter Fluther Good; the curious Mrs. Gogan, a charwoman in Clitheroe's house; Bessie Burgess, a nosy neighbour and others. The couple tries to live a happy married life until Jack gets involved with the ardent nationalist ideals of the period, being promoted to the rank of officer in the Irish Citizen Army. Jack switches from being an amorous husband to a stern authoritarian one just because of this promotion. Unlike many other Irish women, his wife does all that she can to prevent his participation in the fight for Irish freedom. She wants her husband to stay at home with her. Her efforts are futile and Jack is killed in the fighting. He is shot through the arm and the lung, and disappears in the flames of the Imperial Hotel, a tragedy in Norah's life. At the end, Bessie assumes a heroic role and she is the only person who protects the now-mad Nora, but she is shot indoors by stray bullets just as she is trying to drag Nora away from the window. The story takes place between November 1915 and Easter Week in 1916. The first two acts, in 1915, are set respectively in the Clitheroe flat and a pub while a patriotic meeting is being held outside. Portraying 1916, Act Three takes place on the street outside the tenement house where the characters live and Act Four, in Bessie Burgess's room.

O'Casey's intelligence and brilliance are matched by his technical and theatrical abilities; it is his honest preoccupation with human beings and hope for humanity which transform his drama into a universal classic. It is the playwright's sincere concern with the individual, especially the unremembered ones, which makes *The Plough and the Stars* so interesting in connection with identity questions in a nationalistic context:

In this play, O'Casey certainly concentrates attention on the vanity and fanaticism of men who make a religion out of patriotism and consequently destroy what he regards as finer and more fundamental human relationships. [...] O'Casey finds that the bravest people during the Rising were non-combatants, especially women. (ARMSTRONG, 1967, p. 15-16).

Nationalistic discourse had spread throughout the entire island in the years before the insurrection and served to maintain a well elaborated historical narrative in which bloody nationalism was seen as the only logical and reasonable way for Ireland

and its people to reach freedom. During this time, intense Irish nationalism, through its cultural artefacts, created a patriotic stereotype for the Irish subject and, as a result, many of the Irish population were willing to sacrifice themselves, even if it meant the loss of life for the love of motherland. Irishmen were destined to save Mother Ireland from the English Empire, becoming glorified heroes. In turn, inserted in the nationalistic context, women were seen without sexuality as dehumanised subjects. They were obliged to assume this role as part of the national project structured by Irish politics. In such a situation Irish women resembled the maternal personification of Ireland. The loss of a son (or husband) who would no longer return from the sacrificial battle was understood as worthy of honour because she would be recognised as mother of someone who had given their life for the country's sake. However, there were also women who rejected nationalistic discourse and refuted this idea of sacrifice.

In view of this, just as in the historical narrative, there are in O'Casey's play characters who do not fit the national stereotype of 1916, representing those who resisted the imposition of the national culture's ideologies in their lives. The play's female characters provide a good measure of contrast between the feminine figures who behaved according to the models of the national identity and those who challenged the often-idealised nationalistic behaviour. The three female characters who will be emphasised in the present analysis represent different patterns of behaviour with regard to the influence of Irish nationalism. Nora Clitheroe, Bessie Burgess and Mrs Gogan represent the condition of ordinary women during the Easter Rising. All the three are powerful characters, portrayed as strong images, revealing their intensity and decisiveness. What is more, O'Casey's female characters are contrasted with the play's male characters, who are depicted as day-dreamers, confused, easily caught up in and disturbed by national events.

Nora is Jack Clitheroe's wife and the central character which reveals a reversal of the common sense of the male figure as the main image of the Easter Rising for, although Jack clearly aspires to a heroic performance in joining the fight, it is Nora who is actually the heroine of the story, bravely acting against the influence of Irish nationalism. She is twenty-two years old and has no children. Her first appearance in the play reveals her beauty and her feminine charm. She is a vain woman, interested in her appearance and achievements. Her preoccupation about keeping up appearances is revealed when trying to bring order and calm down her uncle and Clitheroe's cousin, "Are you always goin' to be tearin' down th' little bit of respectability that a body's

thryin' to build up? Am I always goin' to be havin' to nurse yous into th' hardy habit o' thryin' to keep up a little bit of appearance?" (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 165). But she is neither silly nor futile; on the contrary, she is 'firm', 'alert', 'full of energy'. When she has a disagreement with Bessie in Act One, Bessie comments on Nora's lofty attitudes "Why is she always thryin' to speak proud things, an' lookin' like a mighty one in th' congregation o' th' people!" (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 167).

Nora is O'Casey's subversive protagonist. She has a crucial role in the play. A first glance at her in comparison with her husband, Jack, tells us so much about the role she will be playing through the story. O'Casey's female protagonist annoyed many of the audience, who believed there was no woman like that in Dublin. O'Casey's representation of Nora is more detailed than that of Jack at the beginning of the play, and it is evident that Nora and Jack disagree about nationalist principles. Whereas Jack is sympathetic to the nationalist movement, Nora rejects it. There is a clash between her behaviour and the standardised behaviour imposed by the national culture, indicating a deconstruction of the stereotypical female Irish identity. Her attitudes match with Hall's (2000) observation of a fragmented identity which ruptures the female image absorbed by the Irish society. O'Casey's description of her first appearance in the play, announces her contrastive function:

Nora enters by door, right. She is a young woman of twenty-two, alert, swift, full of nervous energy, and a little anxious to get on in the world. The firm lines of her face are considerably opposed by a soft, amorous mouth and gentle eyes. When her firmness fails her, she persuades with her feminine charm [...]. (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 164).

While the national ideals created a female image characterised by passivity, weakness and asexuality, Nora's description is punctuated with elements which contradict these characteristics. O'Casey elaborated Nora's description with adjectives which helped to construct a strong female image. Expressions which indicate strength, like "alert", "nervous energy" and "the firm lines of her face", are intermingled with other characteristics which demonstrate femininity, such as her facial features. Another interesting detail in this passage which is contrary to the female stereotype formulated by the Irish patriotic pattern is the reference to Nora's sexuality. The women of 1916 were imagined as asexual, so, charm, elegance and sensuality were not elements associated with their image and they were not usually expected to demonstrate

femininity; instead, they had to stay at home destined to carry out the household tasks and sustain family well-being. O'Casey's mode of thinking does not preclude the representation of women as nurturers and home-makers, but he uses this as a premise for an anti-nationalistic point of view:

[...] It is a premise or a given of this play, in particular, that masculine and feminine values are sharply differentiated: war and destruction of life are here destructive of the home, fertility and new life.

Nora in this regard has a symbolic function. She stands for everything that is not death-bringing and is life-preserving. In Act Three we see clearly Nora's hatred of war as the agent of destruction of domestic life. Her passion makes her see only the fear and 'cowardice' of the combatants, 'afraid to say they're afraid'. (MURRAY, 2000c, p. 109).

As observed here, Nora's characteristics related to domesticity and family are symbols which produce an antagonistic effect. Her domestic life has nothing to do with the nationalistic project; instead O'Casey transforms Nora into a victim of Irish nationalism.

Besides being seen in a way that agreed with an imaginary stereotype, these women had to live under male control. Generally, according to patriarchal ideology, women were condemned, from birth, to be submissive or an object for male purposes. In the Irish case, this submission meant submitting to men's willingness to assume risks and die for the glory of the mother land. In this regard, Nora confronts the traditional submissive female image. Besides manipulating and tricking her husband for him not to take part in the revolution, she makes outspoken comments on her disagreement with Ireland's actual situation and contests the glorious character of the national cause. In Act One, when Jack, furious at discovering she has burned the letter with the dispatch which appointed him as Commandant, she answers:

I burned it, I burned it! That's what I did with it! Is General Connolly an' th' Citizen Army goin' to be your only care? Is your home goin' to be only a place to rest in? Am I goin' to be only somethin' to provide merry-makin' at night for you? Your vanity'll be th' ruin of you an' me yet... That's what's movin' you: because they've made an officer of you, you'll make a glorious cause of what you're doin', while your little red-lipp' d Nora can go on sittin' here, makin a companion of th' loneliness of th' night. (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 178).

Nora's intention is to pit Jack against nationalism. She tries to convince him of the negative consequences the national cause could bring to women, yet Jack does not listen

to her. Hypnotised and dehumanised by the savage rhetoric of a patriotic spirit he abandons his wife and marches off on vain manoeuvres answering the Irish Citizen Army's call. In face of his attitude, Nora pleads "[...] Oh, Jack, I gave you everything you asked me... Don't fling me from you, now!" (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 223). Even listening to Nora's supplication, he does not give up joining the struggle for Irish freedom, the nationalistic spirit prevails over every other circumstance. Like most Irishmen, Jack assumes the nationalistic stereotype. In contrast to Nora, he adheres to the national identity and acts according to the role constructed and fixed for him by nationalistic discourse. His dream is to serve Ireland and be recognised as a national hero. O'Casey's description of Jack, "[...] He is a tall, well-made fellow of twenty-five. His face has none of the strength of Nora's. It is a face in which is the desire for authority, without the power to attain it." (2000, p. 167), shows how O'Casey strategically inverted the idea of strong/weak and thus, deconstructs the national archetype which elaborated a strong male image, conferring on men a powerful representation, while women, representing the lack of power, received a dull image. Jack is clearly a construction of the national culture; he represents the subject whose identity was jeopardised by human imagined conceptions. According to Murray, "Clitheroe is shown caught up in a romantic battle fueled first by fanaticism and then by fear." (2000c, p. 107). When O'Casey includes this sort of nationalistic representation on the stage, he does not support the national ideology, but rather, subverts it, assigning to Jack characteristics which are the opposite of the nationalistic ones.

Jack's behaviour changes throughout the play. Early in the play, Jack's dialogue with Nora reveals him to be a loving, caring husband. In Act One, minutes after bickering with Bessie, Nora is sunk, frightened, on the couch when Jack arrives, goes over to her, putting his arm around her and shows his worry saying, "There, don't mind that old bitch, Nora, darling; I'll soon put a stop to her interferin'." (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 168). Besides talking to Nora tenderly, contrary to what might be expected of the 1916 guerrilla fighters, Jack, initially, is not depicted as a celibate heterosexual. O'Casey shows the couple having an intimate time together, minutes before the scene in which Captain Brennan arrives at Clitheroe's house and Jack discovers that Nora had burned the letters General Connolly had sent him:

Clitheroe (*with his arms around her*) Little, little, red-lipped Nora!
Nora (*with a coaxing movement of her body towards him*) Jack!
Clitheroe (*tightening his arms around her*) Well?

Nora You haven't sung me a song since our honeymoon. Sing me one now, do...please, Jack!

Clitheroe What song? 'Since Maggie Went Away'?

Nora Ah, no, Jack, not that; it's too sad. 'When You Said You Loved Me'.

[...]

Nora kisses him. A knock is heard at the door, right; a pause as they listen. Nora clings closely to Clitheroe. Another knock, more imperative than the first. (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 174-6).

Nora does not imagine that on the other side of the door it is Irish nationalism demanding Jack's life. When he is officially called upon to take part in the revolutionary deeds as a commandant, his desire for authority leads him to trample on his love for his wife. As an important member of one of the groups which would plan the rising, Jack was overtaken by a sense of belonging and loyalty. At a certain moment, he even argues with Nora aggressively:

Clitheroe (fiercely) You burned it, did you? (He grips her arm.) Well, me good lady –

Nora Let go – you're hurtin' me!

Clitheroe You deserve to be hurt... Any letter that comes to me for th' future, take care that I get it... D'ye hear... take care that I get it!

He goes to the chest of drawers and takes out a Sam Browne belt, which he puts on, and then puts a revolver in the holster. He puts on his hat, and looks towards Nora. While this dialogue is proceeding, and while Clitheroe prepares himself, Brennan softly whistles 'The Soldiers' Song'. (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 178).

In Clitheroe's mind the national cause was more important than anything else. Ireland assumed a beloved female image and many Irishmen were willing to fight for her. Aware of this idealised image of Ireland as a mother, and also of the image of the real women as sacrificial mothers, O'Casey seeks to disclose the tragic consequences arising from this powerful nationalistic imagery. The same discourse which should bind families together, subtly professed family and human relationships to be less significant than patriotic fanaticism. Indeed, it finally destroyed the value of humanity when it claimed that bloodshed was necessary for national redemption. Through the declarations of some characters, O'Casey reveals how society was controlled by inverted values, placing nation before any other institution.

Clitheroe You have a mother, Langon.

Lieut Langon Ireland is greater than a mother.

Capt Brennan You have a wife, Clitheroe.

Clitheroe Ireland is greater than a wife.

(O'CASEY, 2000, p. 200-201)

According to the principles of Irish nationalism, Ireland deserved to be bravely saved; the nation was the only female image which was above the position of men. Paradoxically, O'Casey portrays the ordinary female characters as the bravest people. Nora and Bessie show genuine courage and fight for the life of people they love. Nora bravely searches for her husband during the battle, Bessie protects Nora when she goes mad and has a heroic death trying to save Nora's life. But the sorrowful end of these two characters represents the disastrous gamble of the Rising's attempt at redemption. For O'Casey, true struggle was waged by these unthinking women, and not in the imaginative performances of men exalted by patriotic hyperbole.

Another feminine figure in *The Plough and the Stars* is Mrs Gogan. She is the first feminine character on stage. She is a forty-year-old widowed mother who works at Clitheroe's house as a charwoman. Gogan is the only female character in the play to be persuaded by Irish nationalism, and ironically, although she utters nationalistic rhetoric, she does not accomplish the nationalistic role projected for Irish mothers; she spends more time wanting to know what is happening to others and arguing with the neighbours, rather than taking care of her own children. In fact, her attitudes and behaviour are the antithesis of nationalistic maternal imagery. O'Casey describes her negatively as a fidgety, nervous, talkative, curious woman, a description which is entirely contrary to the patriarchal and national conception of womanhood, and the audience discovers worse things about her during the unfolding of the play. The playwright even goes so far as to suggest that Mrs Gogan's excitement about patriotism leads her not to pay due attention to her children. Mollser, her consumptive fifteen-year-old daughter, complains to Nora that she was left alone at home because her mother had gone to the 'meetin', where a non-identified figure, O'Casey's implied reference to Patrick Pearse, is giving a speech which justifies bloodshed as a cleansing and sanctifying thing when it comes to national redemption:

Mollser (to Nora) Mother's gone to th' meeting', an' I was feelin' terrible lonely, so I come down to see if you'd let me sit with you, thinkin' you mightn't be goin' yourself....II often envy you, Mrs Clitheroe, seein' th' health you have, an' th' lovely place you have here, an' wondherin' if I'll ever be sthrong enough to be keepin' a home together for a man [...]. (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 179).

There is another irony here: Mollser, feeling lonely, looks for someone to talk and to be with, and, knocks at Nora's door. Abandoned by her own mother, Mollser goes over to Nora. At this moment, Nora, not even being a mother, is the only friendly figure around who is available to welcome the sick girl, precisely because she had not taken part in the patriotic meeting. While Mollser's real mother is attending a nationalistic event and, due to that, is no longer taking care of her suffering daughter, Nora, an anti-nationalistic character, is the feminine figure who receives her. Mrs Gogan's daughter appreciates Nora's health and the lovely place where she lives, things she cannot see in her own mother's image. For Murray, Mrs Gogan is not an action-character. One of the few actions she takes part in is the fight with Bessie, but when it comes to Mollser's disease, she does nothing, preferring to believe the girl will get better. The macabre side of her personality is her need to avoid the realities of her own position: a widow who lives in the tenements with the responsibility of supporting her children. "Mrs Gogan fights with Bessie Burgess for the perambulator only to use it for looting [...] Rising or no Rising, she has to feed and clothe her family and will steal to do so." (2000c, p. 105).

Mrs Gogan's atypical maternal performance does not stop there. In Act Two, undoubtedly, the most polemic and humorous act of the play, Gogan's anti-maternal attitude is shocking, but also draws laughs from the audience. After returning from the meeting she comes into the pub carrying a baby in her arms. Following Peter and Fluther, she goes over to the counter and, with the baby still with her, she starts drinking with the two men. Some time later, Bessie and Covey also come in and they go over to the opposite end of the bar but stay gazing at the other three. Then, Mrs Gogan, drinking and holding her infant, begins to argue with Bessie:

The Covey (*to Barman*) Two glasses o' malt.

Peter There he is, now; I knew he wouldn't be long till he folleyed me in.

Bessie (*speaking to the Covey, but really at the other part*) I can't for th' life o' me undherstand how they can call themselves Catholics, when they won't lift a finger to help poor little Catholic Belgium.

Mrs Gogan What about poor little Catholic Ireland?

Bessie (*over to Mrs Gogan*) You mind your own business, ma'am, and stupefy your foolishness be gettin' dhrunk .

Peter (*anxiously*) Take no notice of her; pay no attention to her. She's just tormentin' herself towards havin' a row with somebody.

[...]

The Covey (*to Bessie*) when I think of all th' problems in front o' th' workers, it makes me sick to be lookin' at oul' codgers goin' about dhressed up like green-accountred figures gone asthray out of a toyshop!

Peter Gracious God, give me patience to be listenin' to that blasted young Covey proddin' at me front over at th' other end of th' shop!

Mrs Gogan (*dipping her finger in the whiskey, and moistening with it the lips of her baby*) Cissie Gogan's a woman livin' for nigh on twenty-five years in her own room, an' beyond biddin' th' time o' day to her neighbours, never yet as much as nodded her head in th' direction of other people's business, while she knows some as are never content unless they're standin' senthry over other people's doin's! (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 189-190)

The discussion becomes more and more heated. So, it seems she loses her senses and acts wildly. When she leaves the pub, the mother completely forgets her baby inside it which ends up causing sill greater confusion.

Bessie (*jumping out to face Mrs Gogan, and bringing the palms of her hands together in sharp claps to emphasize her remarks*) Liar to you, too, ma'am, y' oul' hardened thresspasser on other people's good nature, wizenin' up your soul in th' arts o' dodgeries, till every *dhrop of respectability in a female* is dhried up in her, looking at your ready-made manoeuverin' with th' menkind!

Barman Here, there; here, there; speak asy there. No rowin' here, no rowin' here, now.

Fluther (*trying to calm Mrs Gogan*) Now Jinnie, Jinnie, it's a derogaroty thing to be smirchin' a night like this with a row; it's rompin' with th' feelings of hope we ought to be, instead o' bein' vice versa!

Peter (*trying to quiet Bessie*) I'm terrible dawny, Mrs Burgess, an' a fight leaves me weak for a long time aftherwards... Please, Mrs Burgess, before there's damage done, thry to have a little respect for yourself.

Bessie (*with a push of her hand that sends Peter tottering to the end of the shop*) G'way, you little sermonizing, little yella-faced, little consequential, little pudgy, little bum, you!

Mrs Gogan (*screaming*) Fluther, leggo! I'm not goin' to keep an unresistin' silence, an' her scattherin' her festherin' words in me face,

stirrin' up every dhrop of decency in a respectable female, with her restless rally o' lies that would make a saint say his prayer backwards!

Bessie (*shouting*) Ah, everybody knows well that th' best charity that can be shown to you is to hide th' thruth as much as our throe worship of God Almighty will allow us!

Mrs Gogan (*frantically*) Here, houl' th' kid, one o' yours; houl' th' kid for a minute! There's nothin' for it but to show this lassie a lesson or two... (*To Peter*) Here, houl' th' kid, you. (*Before Peter is aware of it, she places the infant in his arms. To Bessie, standing before her in a fighting attitude*) Come on, now, me loyal lassie, dyin' with grief for little Catholic Belgium! When Jinnie Gogan's done with you, you'll have a little leisure lyin' down to think an' pray for your king an' counthry!

Barman (*coming from behind the counter, getting between the women, and proceeding to push them towards the door*) Here, now, since you can't have a little friendly argument quietly, you'll get out o' this place in quick time. Go on, an' settle your differences somewhere else – I don't want to have another endorsement on me license.

Peter (*anxiously, over to Mrs Gogan*) Here, take your kid back, owner this. How nicely I was picked, now, for it to be plumped into me arms!

The Covey She knew who she was givin' it to, maybe.

Peter (*hotly to the Covey*) Now, I'm givin' you fair warnin', me young Covey, to quit firin' your jibes an' jeers at me... For one o' these days, I'll run out in front o' God Almighty an' take your sacred life!

Barman (*pushing Bessie out after Mrs Gogan*) Go on, now; out you go.

Bessie (*as she goes out*) If you think, me lassie, that Bessie Burgess has an untidy conscience, she'll soon show you to th' differ!

Peter (*leaving the baby down on the floor*) Ay, be Jasus, wait there, till I give her bach her youngster! (*He runs to the door.*) Ay, there, ay! (*He comes back.*) There, she's afther goin' without her kid. What are we goin' to do with it, now?

The Covey What are we goin' to do with it? Bring it outside an' show everybody what you're afther findin'!

Peter (*in a panic to Fluther*) Pick it up, you, Fluther, an' run afther her with it, will you?

Fluther What d'ye take Fluther for? You must think Fluther's right gom. D'ye think Fluther's like yourself, destitute of a titther of undherstandin'?

Barman (*imperatively to Peter*) Take it up, man, an' run out afther her with it, before she's gone too far. You're not goin' to leave th' bloody thing here, are you? (O'CASEY, 200, p. 192-194)

The scene is comic, but equally sad. Watching a mother forgetting her child inside a pub could have upset the audience. When she leaves without her baby, it is clear that the baby's future will be like Mollser's current reality. The situation is then made even worse when we realise that the fight between Mrs Gogan and Bessie Burgess was sparked by a disagreement over their different points of view on national issues. O'Casey is showing how disgraceful these people's lives can be when they forget their human identity on account of a series of imaginary conceptions. Mrs Gogan's representation of motherhood also raises questions about the idealised maternal image associated with the female national identity. Her patriotic stereotype, constructed according to nationalism's principles, contributed nothing to an expected maternal role; on the contrary, what O'Casey does is to portray her negatively when it came to her image as a mother.

Bessie Burgess, a forty-year-old mother, is the third female character in this analysis. Probably widowed, she has a son fighting in the World War against the Germans. She is a physically strong female image and her behaviour is coarse because of drunkenness. For much of the play, she is represented negatively, and, although her manners have nothing to do with Nora's, she is equally dubious about the promises of the nationalistic discourse. She is a Protestant unionist and courageously opposes the Easter Rising. She does so without showing fear or cowardice about expressing openly her opinion, as shown in the following passage taken from Act Three when she talks to Fluther and Covey:

Bessie (*as she is passing them to go down the street*) You an' your Leadhers an' their sham-battle soldiers has landed a body in a nice way, havin' to go an' ferret out a bit o' bread God knows where... Why aren't yous in th' GPO if yous are men? It's paler an' paler yous are gettin'... A lot o' vipers, that's what th' Irish people is! (*She goes out*). (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 210).

Bessie is one of the most important representations in *The Plough and the Stars*. For Murray, Bessie is one of the major characters in the play and reveals O'Casey's greatest skill in characterisation. He comments that, in addition to besides her courage, her attitudes are "a mixture of hostility and generosity, aggression and tenderness, cruelty

and uncommon kindness”; she confronts Nora and Mrs Gogan; “she is a fighter, literally” and “verbally [...] and at most other times.” (2000c, p. 112). Moreover, O’Casey portrays Bessie with attitudes of a good mother. Her maternal side is completely different from Mrs Gogan’s. Although most of the time she has a rough attitude towards the adult characters, she is very gentle with Mollser, for example. In the scene in which Nora is coming back to the tenement led by Mrs Gogan after looking for Jack on the streets, “Bessie comes out with a shawl around her shoulders. She passes by them with her head in the air. When they have gone in, she gives a mug of milk to Mollser silently.” (O’CASEY, 2000, p. 210). Besides confirming Mrs Gogan’s worry about other lives instead of taking care of her own children, this moment reveals the tender maternal side of Bessie. She does not speak loudly about her attitudes; her actions are louder than words. Other moments also demonstrate her kind and gentle motherhood image, like her preoccupation with Nora at the end of the play, despite their initial misunderstandings. The discrepancies between the manners of the two female figures can be seen when Bessie comes on stage for the first time in a scene where, being drunk, she incites an argument with Nora. In front of Clitheroe’s door, she begins complaining about Nora’s air of superiority, saying Nora wants to look like “a mighty one”. Bessie accuses her of being afraid of her own neighbours. In this first moment, it is easily seen that the two women do not have any affinity with each other. They portray very different female images, contrastive characteristics, though both, unlike Mrs Gogan, represent anti-nationalistic images. But, the reversal of this initial situation, when Bessie becomes the only figure who welcomes Nora, after her life is transformed into a real tragedy, is O’Casey showing the value of humanity over nationalist ideology. The nationalistic spirit was not able to bring these two women closer; it was precisely their human nature which made them strong enough to withstand the tragedies caused by nationalism. As Murray says, “[...] the extent of her generous humanity is seen when she mothers, nurses and protects the damaged Nora in her own cramped apartment. Bessie is killed trying to preserve Nora’s life.” (2000c, p. 112).

For Armstrong, Bessie is the most heroic character in the play (1967, p. 16). These considerations about Bessie reinforce the argument that O’Casey really tried through his female characters to show his dissatisfaction with the 1916 imagery existent in Ireland ten years after the Rising. Bessie’s bravery and heroic representation do not support Irish national culture, since its imaginary ideology projected Bessie’s characteristics not onto female but male figures. Her exemplary motherhood is not

helped by the fact that she is an anti-nationalistic character; actually her representation confronts the nationalistic discourse which associated nationalism's ideology to the imagery of motherhood.

Besides these vivid and realistic female characters who attributed richness, colour and vitality to O'Casey's 1916 revival, there are other features which explain the play's enduring prominence. Although O'Casey was a self-taught playwright and was more attached to the popular tradition, his theatrical skills gave him a place alongside writers who were more aware of theatrical theory and techniques. In the case of *The Plough and the Stars*, the intricate link the play establishes with the actual Easter Rising and its theatrical aspect reveal O'Casey's relationship with drama theory. Let us first recall three aspects of drama addressed by Martin Esslin in *An Anatomy of Drama* (1978) as being particularly useful in the study of *The Plough and the Stars*. First, Esslin's notions and delimitations of the terms tragedy, comedy and tragicomedy, as well as their inadequacy for the classification of many plays provide some arguments about the genre of O'Casey's play. Second, the author's view on the link between drama and society will be explored in *The Plough and the Stars* as a confirmation that O'Casey saw drama as a powerful political weapon influencing Irish society. Last of all, Esslin's propositions about drama as a collective experience permit an investigation of the implications and polemical consequences of O'Casey's play on the audience, considering their reaction as an important element when a play is being performed.

In order to define the genre of *The Plough and the Stars*, Sean O'Casey himself described his play as "a tragedy in four acts." (2000, p. 149). Esslin (1978, p. 67) addresses one of the simplest definitions about the two basic genres, comedy and tragedy, which really meets O'Casey's classification of his play, "a play with a sad ending is a tragedy, a play with a happy ending is a comedy." Additionally, although modern literary classifications seem to be mostly based on Aristotle's rhetorical concepts, there are some simplified ways to look at the question. For example, if a story treats characters and situations in a humorous way and ends happily, it is considered a comedy; but if the story ends unhappily, mainly for the protagonist, it is a tragedy. Another definition differs, taking into account the final outcome of the protagonist. It is a comedy if the protagonist succeeds in the end and if the protagonist fails it is a tragedy. *The Plough and the Stars*, like the other two "Dublin plays", *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923) and *Juno and the Paycock* (1924), readdresses traditional forms of modern tragedy and actually has a sad ending. Everything that occurs after Jack is killed

in the Rising, Norah's madness and Bessie's death, is entirely tragic. Christopher Murray's study of O'Casey's plays connects the use of tragic elements with feminist engagement, "like Zola and Ibsen before him, O'Casey showed that environment was, tragically, all-powerful. Unlike those writers, however, O'Casey always emphasized the role of women in transcending tragic circumstances." (2000b, p. vii).

Despite this basic and simplistic definition, a play cannot always be accurately described by one of these classic genre terms alone, due to the many different forms which compound the theatrical universe. According to Esslin, there is much more involved in the definition of the genres:

As a critic I am, of course, fascinated by the difficult problems of the definition of the genres and their aesthetic and philosophical implications. But as a practitioner of drama, a working director, I look at them from a completely different angle. This is not to say that, even from this practical point of view, I think the definition of the genres is unimportant. Quite the contrary. But that importance is practical rather than theoretical. As a director one has to make a decision about the genre to which the play one tackles should belong. Not from some abstract principle, but simply from the point of view of how it is to be acted. Indeed, it is quite possible to act a play as either comedy or tragedy. (ESSLIN, 1978, p. 68-69).

Based on that, a single play may be treated as comedy and as tragedy, or even both. Everything depends on the different points of view of actors, audience, and especially those of the playwright and director. Throughout a reading of *The Plough and the Stars* it is clear that, although the playwright himself delimited it as a tragedy, there are not only tragic elements in the play. Robert Welch's description of the play stresses the existence of a different genre, "vociferous arguments raging between the characters provide a satirical view of contemporary Irish passions." (2000, p. 308). Satirical and comic elements appear at various moments. The scene where Mrs Gogan forgets her baby inside the pub after an argument with Bessie Burger is hilarious; and that comic scene follows another satirical situation where the same character talks to her companions in the pub "dipping her finger in the whiskey, and moistening with it the lips of her baby." (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 190). Christopher Murray, concerned with the existence of non-tragic aspects in the play, adds that "the energetic conflicts between Uncle Peter and the Covey or between Mrs Gogan and Bessie in *The Plough and the Stars* bring us into the world of farce." (2000b, p. ix).

It therefore seems evident that a tragicomic aspect surrounds the play. O'Casey's drama places high demands on the audience, making them laugh and cry during the same performance, and this is what happens to the audience during a performance of *The Plough and the Stars*. "Blending farce, satire, and tragedy, the three plays just examined deploy a remarkable variety of moods and attitudes." (ARMSTRONG, 1967, p. 16). Murray agrees with this classification in two different prefaces to the three O'Casey plays staged at the Abbey. In the preface of *Dublin Plays*, he states that "melodrama underpins O'Casey's tragicomic plays" (2000b, p. ix) and in *Sean O'Casey: Faber Critical Guide*, he writes, "Without a doubt, *The Plough and the Stars* is O'Casey's greatest play. It is the one with greatest intensity, the one which most ambitiously addresses the human comedy at the point where violent public events suddenly transform it into tragedy." (2000c, p. 91).

Concerning the interaction between theatre and social change, especially when drama represents a form of art which may be used as an influential artefact in political and social issues, the analysis of *The Plough and the Stars* is particularly significant because throughout Irish modern history, drama and politics have been strictly connected. The literary revival, manifested through a variety of forms, gave expression to a rising nationalist movement, based on political and material conditions in Ireland. It was not just a literary phenomenon; it was clearly a political one. This revolution also happened in the theatre, and consequently the theatre movement reinforced and fed into the radical nationalist movement. Thus, like politics itself, drama was a great influence on Irish society.

In terms of political and social involvement with drama in Irish society, O'Casey is certainly one of the most actively engaged dramatists. Throughout his career, O'Casey tried to show Irish people to themselves, how they were, how they acted and how they were conducting their lives. O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* was the kind of play which made the audience reflect on the dangers of nationalism, and it constituted a threat to the nationalistic version of the Easter Rising. The play contributes to social and political revisionism since it depicts a significant historic moment for Ireland, when Irish people were at the heart of Irish political life. Although, theatre, in that particular period, was mostly a form of reproducing nationalistic discourse, it had also been transformed in to a form of challenging the national rhetoric. O'Casey was certainly part of this radicalism in the Abbey. After the staging of *The Plough and the Stars*, the *Irish Times* praised O'Casey for courageously depicting Dublin life the way it

was. Thus, if drama can be a political weapon, in the case of O'Casey's play, it was used as a knife cutting into the linear and artificially-homogenised narrative of the Easter Rising.

Another of the most fascinating aspects of theatre is its interaction with the audience. For Esslin, "without an audience there is no drama." (1978, p. 23). If a play is not merely literature because it needs to be performed, then it wholly depends on the existence of an audience. It could be said that the audience is responsible for what is dramatised on the stage, and is, therefore, a crucial part of the dramatic experience. The director and the actors are not completely in control of the play; their performance on the stage is affected by the audience reaction:

[...] this is one of the most attractive and mysterious characteristics of drama – some sort of collective reaction, a consensus, will often develop in an audience, and will in a stage performance tend to become manifest both to the actors and to the audience itself. Anyone who has ever acted on a stage will confirm that the collective reaction to a play is palpably real. The audience, in some senses, ceases to be an assemblage of isolated individuals; it becomes a collective consciousness. (ESSLIN, 1978, p. 24).

Such a process produces both individual reactions and a collective reaction; or yet, the reaction may start individually and at some point it becomes something collective. Whether or not every single member of the audience is experiencing the same feeling, negative or positive, at the same moment, it sets in motion a process which operates from the individual to the collective sphere:

There is nothing mystical about this. After all, if they are concentrating on the same action in front of their eyes, all these people, identifying with the action and the characters on the stage, are inevitably also responding to each other: it can be said that they all have the same thought in their minds (the thought which is being expressed on the stage) and experience something like the same emotion. (ESSLIN, 1978, p. 24-25).

The impact of this singular theatrical characteristic may generate such an intense reaction, being almost possible to touch and feel it. Such a fact becomes even more interesting when the audience's reaction reaches the extent of influencing attitudes and thoughts after the dramatic performance. This happened to *The Plough and the Stars*, in the first week of its premiere run. Hence, the play is an appropriate example when it comes to the theory of drama as a collective experience not only due to its popularity

and the value of the plot and performance, but also because of the polemical events which occurred during its first run, in the fourth performance, when “some patriots rioted [...] because they regarded it as a calculated denigration of the men who fought in the Easter Rising of 1916.” (ARMSTRONG, 1967, p. 15). By the fourth night of the production’s run, as the curtain rose, the audience members greeted the cast with rounds of enthusiastic applause, but during Act Three, after the actress Ria Mooney appeared on stage as the prostitute, the audience stormed the stage. A young man up in the balcony shouted at the actress telling her to get off the stage and that she was a disgrace to her sex, religion and country. Other members of the audience also attacked the actors and began singing the Irish national anthem. O’Casey’s version of the Rising offended women as well. Besides the prostitute, “the women who opposed *The Plough* and who rioted on the fourth night saw Nora as the enemy, the spokesperson for O’Casey’s anti-republicanism”, because he permitted her to express her anti-patriotic feelings deliberately, but Murray ends saying that it “is her character, not O’Casey’s propaganda.” (2000c, p. 109). The riots which occurred both in the theatre and outside may be explained according to Esslin’s arguments about the audience’s collective reaction after collectively experiencing a particular feeling in a particular moment. *The Plough and the Stars* remained abhorrent to certain audiences, who complained that it vilely caricatured each hero of 1916 as “a coward or a looter, or a drunkard or an adulterer, or a hypocrite or a degenerate”. Afterwards, “for a number of years the Abbey advised playwrights to avoid depicting any of the leaders of the rebellion for fear of causing offence to the rebels’ immediate relatives.” (MORAN, 2005, p. 50). But before O’Casey’s play, one of the Abbey’s directors and fellow playwright, Synge, experienced a similar response to his play *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907).²² In fact, many of the Irish nationalists of that period called for a boycott of the Abbey because they felt that the theatre was not producing plays that reflected the sort of nationalistic politics they were trying to promote.

A possible explanation for the riots caused by *The Plough and the Stars* is that, whenever the Rising was revived, through artistic plays or governmental re-enactment, it evoked different feelings in the Irish audience. After the rebellion, as the years went by, the general feeling about the insurrection was changing; the Irish were gradually

²² In *The Politics of Irish Drama*, Grene (1999) points out Synge’s dialog and the use of the word “shift” in Act Two and Three, referring to women’s underwear, as one of the causes of the assault on the patriotic audience. This suggestive slight on the moral of Irish women represented an insult to the purity of Irish Catholic womanhood and denigrated the traditional familiar imagery promoted by the national politics.

becoming happy and proud of the revolution as if it had been a great achievement. Since the first anniversary of the insurgency in 1917 it began to attract popular support. In 1926, Irish society no longer had an unsympathetic overview of the insurrection anymore; for many Irish, the 1916 insurrection had become something memorable, excluding the real problems involved. This may all be attributed to the providential focus given to the rising by the Irish government. The old rebel leaders were now national heroes. According to Moran, “the dead leaders were widely thought to be martyrs; during the Civil War both sides would jealously claim legitimacy from 1916; and when the Free State finally emerged the Easter rebels occupied a central position in Irish cultural life.” (2005, p. 33-4).

On the other hand, when *The Plough and the Stars* was first performed in the Abbey Theatre, it was clear to O’Casey that the 1916 insurrection was nothing more than a badly organised revolution by men who were unable to see the situation clearly as they were literally too close to it. O’Casey’s non-acceptance of how people were remembering the Easter Rising was quite clear in his polemical play. O’Casey’s disaffection with how Ireland was conducting its national culture was evident even before the performance of his play; the actors themselves were worried about the reaction to the play to such an extent that, when they were rehearsing the text few days before the premiere, they “were wishing to make cuts in the text because of their concern over the reaction it was likely to cause.” (HARRIS, 2004, p. 64). The Abbey directors’ opinion about the play was positive; for Robinson and Yeats, O’Casey had written one of his best plays, and, according to Lady Gregory it was “a fine play, terrible, tragic”.²³ Although in some points the directors agreed with the actors’ point of view, Dr George O’Brien, named as a director of the Abbey by the Irish Government, “proposed a number of cuts in O’Casey’s text in speeches that he believed would offend the audience” and even though Robinson and Yeats had stated the value of the play, they conceded “the necessity of modifying certain phrases in rehearsal.” (HARRIS, 2004, p. 98).

As it is possible to conclude, O’Casey’s anti-heroic depiction of the rising staged before a nationalist audience inflamed by the execution of the martyrs could only result in a negative reaction. This theatrical rejection of the 1916 insurgency did not please the crowd in the theatre, particularly the widows and mothers of the men of 1916 who were

²³ O’Casey, “To Gabriel Fallon,” 26 August 1925, *The Collected Letters of Sean O’Casey*, ed. D. Krause 1 142.

members in the audience that night. Infuriated by what they were experiencing the audience began to riot.

Twenty women rushed from the pit to the stalls. Two of them succeeded in reaching the stage, where a general melee took place. The invading women were thrown bodily back into the orchestra. A young man then tried to reach the stage, but was cut off by the lowering of the curtain. This he grabbed, swinging out on it in a frantic endeavour to pull it down. Women rushed to aid him in this project, but he was suddenly thrown into the stalls by a sharp blow from one of the actors. The pandemonium created a panic among a section of the audience, who dashed for the exits and added to the confusion. (LOWERY, 1984, p. 30).

It was this same evening Yeats addressed the crowd at the Abbey Theatre with the well-known phrase, 'You have disgraced yourselves again'.²⁴

Moran also describes the chaos that happened that night:

Unfortunately for Yeats few people could hear what he was saying at this point because a sizeable part of the audience had gone completely berserk. They had watched the Abbey's actors mocking the leader of the Easter Rising, brandishing the sacrosanct national flag inside a dingy pub, and portraying an Irish girl as a prostitute. Now the audience refused to watch any more. One gang stormed the stage whilst others smashed lamps and tried to burn the stage curtains [...] Another faction was singing interminable nationalist songs and making loud speeches. Others booed and hissed. Meanwhile, a particularly frenzied thug walloped two of the female actors in their faces before being thumped from the stage by one of the company's men. When Yeats reached the front of the auditorium, it was so noisy that he decided to mime most of his speech. In response, somebody lobbed a shoe at his head. (MORAN, 2005, p. 30).

Despite this chaotic situation, the play completed its run that night as well as the other performances planned for that week. Although the riots were not repeated, a few demonstrations still occurred in the days following the fourth-night performance because of the shock the audience had experienced inside the theatre that night. The whole audience in the Abbey Theatre at the same moment acted with a collective awareness. Yet, it is interesting to observe that before the riots on the fourth night, *The*

²⁴ 'Abbey Theatre Scene', *Irish Times*, 12 February 1926, p.7. Variants of this speech also appeared in the *Irish Independent*, *Evening Mail* and *Manchester Guardian*, but the *Irish Times* version is probably the most accurate: Yeats personally dashed a copy to this newspaper, which in 1916 had called for the execution of the Easter rebels.

Plough and the Stars had already run for three nights with no polemical reaction. This may be due to the presence of some of the rebels' female family members in the theatre that night, particularly Patrick Pearse's mother, which made a huge difference to the audience's behaviour. "Margaret Pearse was therefore in the Abbey stalls by Kathleen Clarke, the wife of Tom Clarke; Fiona Plunkett, the sister of Joseph Plunkett; and Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington [..]" (MORAN, 2005, p. 49). These offended women in the house that night in the face of O'Casey's depiction of the sacrificial mothers may have provided the spark for the collective reaction which ended up in riots. Esslin calls this phenomenon a "powerful feed-back: between the individual members of the audience themselves." (1978, p. 25).

The reaction did not simply take the form of illogical protests; the feelings which emerged were a result of the components involved in the play, vocabulary, performance, and context. These theatrical elements were codified in the audience's mind and stimulated them to express their perception of what they were experiencing:

It would be too simplistic to see it as a spontaneous protest against the appearance of a prostitute and the tricolor (the national flag) in a pub, and individual 'offensive' lines, despite Yeats's appearance on stage to tell the audience they had disgraced themselves again. The producer and many of the cast had objected to the language, and criticism was not directed from anti-intellectual quarters, being led by feminist and pacifist Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington. It was a play that dealt with the 1916 Rising in the context of the underbelly of Dublin tenement life, and most importantly: "it did not glorify those who fought for Irish freedom at a time when many of them were hungry for glory". (FERRITER, 2004, p. 348).

Whilst part of Irish society, especially those concerned with the role of the sacrificial woman and her real-life heroes, expected to see a national heroic depiction of the Easter Rising which represented the rebellion's leaders as admirable fighters for Ireland's independence; they were caught off guard by a portrait of Irish society as it really was. The audience experienced a kind of drama showing a national reality that they might be aware of, but were not willing to face.

After all, in the light of cultural studies, the play works as a valuable tool for reflection on questions identity, basically, how national cultural rhetoric impacts on individual human beings, especially women. O'Casey's dramatic text provides an important insight into the condition of women during the Easter Rising of 1916, through which it becomes evident that many of them, under the influence of nationalism, had the

performance of their identity affected by imaginary nationalistic conceptions. While some playwrights revisited the bloody sacrificial insurrection avoiding its implications for the Irish subject, O'Casey placed in his revivalist performance characters such as Nora and Bessie, who exposed their feelings and attitudes against the necessity of a bloodshed for Irish freedom and thus resisted the imposition of an elaborate national identity. O'Casey's characters are represented according to Hall's definition of the post-modern subject, de-centred, unfinished, fragmented identities (2000, p. 613). Although these de-centred subjects were not permitted to raise their voice against the Irish government's discourse, it was evident that a sort of disagreement with the nationalistic standards was developing in patriotic Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century. O'Casey's brilliance was his decision to expose this problematic aspect of Irish nationalism, adopting expressive female characters who subvert the national discourse, confronting or denigrating the principles of nationalism. The female characters of *The Plough and the Stars* reveal how nationalism proved to be a minefield for Irish society.

Considering all these aspects of *The Plough and the Stars*, it is undeniable its connection with Irish socio-political context. O'Casey revived the Easter rebellion brilliantly challenging the (nationalistic) conception of Irishness by showing its real meaning. O'Casey remembered the subjects, mainly women, who were forgotten during the insurrection, ordinary people, who represented the majority of the Irish population. The tenement houses were the place where there was a realistic sense of Irishness and where Irish individuals performed their heterogeneous identities hidden under a false sense of homogenised national community. The Irish national project used a powerful process which transformed an imaginary idealised identity into something very close to human nature, as if this identification was an immutable part of the subject's condition. Subversively, O'Casey staged a reverse process which meant an escape from this identity pattern, destabilising the mutable character of national identity. A different perspective on Irishness arises when the representation of real Irish people's lives exposes what has been removed from the elaborate national narrative. In 1916, O'Casey was already distant from the Irish politics, but he witnessed the Easter Rising and, more importantly, he did not forget the questionable parts and circumstances of this event. *The Plough and the Stars* seems to be an attempt to reproduce the experience of real people, maybe stories the author himself witnessed or heard from someone. Nora, Bessie and Mrs Gogan did not actively take part in the insurrection, but they were there, dangerously surrounded by the dark side of nationalism, and they represent the common

women whose lives were affected by Irish nationalism. In the same way, women who were directly involved in the insurrection should be remembered and reinstated in their original place in the historical and literary narrative. The ordinary women of 1916 must be given the same attention in order to have their reality uncovered from the heavy cloak of nationalism. Although their voice was hushed, these fragmented women who subverted the idealised Irish female's behaviour contributed to support a proposition which points out a rupture in the national identity and allows a more realistic interpretation of what it meant to be an Irish woman in 1916, far from an imaginary conception of Irishness.



Figure 12. Nora and Jack (Kelly Campbell and Barry Ward, *The Plough and the Stars*, Abbey Theatre, 2012) (<http://www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/event/the-plough-and-the-stars/>)



Figure 13. Nora madness (Gabrielle Reidy, Kelly Campbell and Joe Hanley in *The Plough and the Stars*, Abbey Theatre, 2012) (<http://seanocasey.co.uk/>)

3. TOM MURPHY'S *THE PATRIOT GAME*: RETELLING THE RISING

*"There is a rage in me which I think is a natural thing."*²⁵

Tom Murphy

Murphy's restless imagination places him among the most admired Irish playwrights. However, paradoxically, the same imagination which so distinguishes Murphy's drama and places him among the best contemporary Irish playwrights has also represented something negative in his career. There seems to have been a deadlock between the playwright and Irish drama precisely due to the way in which the author understands and imagines Ireland, which is far from the traditional Irish imagination. While Irish theatre continues to be concerned with local themes, Murphy's drama touches on universal concerns, "dealing with the big questions and the grand forces of life." (O'TOOLE, 1994, p. 12-13).

As a result of his particular style, Murphy has managed to deal with many unpleasant topics on the Irish stage. One of these topics is nationalism. Some disillusioning aspects of his early life created in Murphy a skeptical attitude towards any system whose aim is to control people's lives, including, most controversially, Irish national culture.

²⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2010/mar/07/tom-murphy-the-sanctuary-lamp>

3.1 Tom Murphy: A Disillusioned Theatrical Imagination

“The balloons that were given to us—and I was gullible, obviously, maybe more gullible than most, and more pious than most—the balloons lifted me above the ground so that I didn’t have to walk a step anywhere. Until one of them burst. And one beautiful balloon after another burst. Illusions that are fed by the church, fairy tales that you believe, and maybe I was a slow developer...”

Tom Murphy, interviewed by Colm Tóibín

Thomas Murphy, recognised as one of the best and most prolific of living Irish playwrights, was born in Tuam, County Galway on 23 February, 1935. Before becoming a playwright and stage-director he was a metalwork teacher at Mountbellew, near Tuam. His involvement with the theatre world began in 1959 when he worked (acting and writing) with Noel O’Donoghue on a one-act play about class tension, *On the Outside*, which was first produced in Cork in 1961, and later in double-bill with *On the Inside*, in Dublin, in 1974. Around the same time, Murphy wrote his first full-length play, *Whistle in the Dark*, which was completely ignored in Dublin but acclaimed in London when it premiered in September 1961. In 1962, the playwright moved to London, where he wrote plays for television and had some of his plays staged. When Ernest Blythe retired from his post of director of the Abbey Theatre, Murphy had some of his plays accepted at Ireland’s leading theatre. *Famine* was his first play to be performed in Dublin, at the Peacock Theatre (situated under the Abbey foyer and affiliated with Ireland’s National Theatre and the Abbey Theatre), in 1968. It was followed by another work, *The Orphans*, also produced in Dublin in the same year, but this time at the Gate Theatre. *A Crucial Week in the Life of a Grocer’s Assistant* was the first of Murphy’s plays to be performed at the Abbey Theatre, in 1969. In 1970, Murphy returned to Ireland and the Abbey’s audience had the opportunity to see *The Morning After Optimism*, in 1971. The following productions at the Abbey were *The White House* (1972), *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1974), *The Sanctuary Lamp* (1976), a compilation from John Millington Synge, *Epitaph under Ether* (1979), *The Blue Macushla* (1980), *She Stoops to Conquer* (1982), *The Gigli Concert* (1983), *A Thief of a Christmas* (1985), *Too Late for Logic* (1989), *The Patriot Game* (1991), *The Wake* (1998), *The House* (2000) and *Alice Trilogy* (2005). In association with the Druid Theatre in Galway from 1983 to 1985, Murphy had some of his greatest plays,

Conversations on a Homecoming and *Bailegangaire* (both in 1985), and the most recent *Brigit* (2014), performed by that theatrical company.

Tom Murphy is not imprisoned in Irish culture, he is a man of foreign ideas, foreign cultures. Amongst the themes of his universal and timeless work, specific mention can be made of the essence of human existence, family ties, social and religious issues all constantly addressed in his plays in a peculiar and controversial form. Younger Irish playwrights have often dialogued with Murphy's work, which suggests that his dynamism and his capacity for writing plays are not restricted to the context of his times, or to a specific moment of Irish history. "His great dramas may encapsulate the successive eras in which they were created but they also elude them. [...] What makes him so thoroughly a dramatist is that the sense of all his works is the continuous present." (O'TOOLE, 2010, p. xii). For Murphy, time refers to what is happening now, and he has developed an original technique in dealing with time. What he does is to dilate the notion of time, working simultaneously with two or more measures of time in different frames. This particular notion of not linear, but simultaneous time is an essential feature of his work. Furthermore, Murphy's drama is also frequently characterised by his experimental style. Christopher Murray (1987, p. 10) categorises Murphy as a famous experimental playwright: "it is in this area of direct, energetic expression of contemporary experience that Thomas Murphy takes his place among the modern playwrights I've mentioned, from Chekhov to Shepard." Also according to O'Toole, "in confronting Ireland, Murphy has been able to confront an entire universe. It is this which makes him a great playwright." (1994, p. 19). Remembered and acclaimed among his contemporaries, the playwright was even praised by one of the most honourable contemporary names of Irish theatre, Brian Friel (1929-2015), who stressed the peculiarity of Murphy's imagination and defined him as "the most distinctive, the most restless, the most obsessive imagination at work in the Irish theatre today." (MURPHY, 1992). Christopher Murray expressed his opinion on Murphy's imagination by recalling that one of the great romantic poets, Lord Byron, called poetry the lava of the imagination, and said that Murphy's response to experience and to history is Byronic because he does not always manage to mould the lava into significant form (1987, p. 13). Another comparison, made by Richard Kearney, also highlights Murphy's imagination, saying that his theatre has "dramatic approximations of Seamus Heaney's poetic dialectic." (2006, p. 277).

On the other hand, Murphy's life as a dramatist has not been consistently successful, especially and strangely, in Ireland, where he has faced difficult times and, sometimes, non-acceptance of his work. "If Murphy's relationship with the English theatre dwindled into a very simple and straightforward indifference, never recovering from its spectacularly unreal beginning, his place in the Irish theatre has been more complex." (O'TOOLE, 1994, p. 12). This deadlock between the playwright and Irish drama may be connected to the incompatibility of interests between his imagination and the traditional Irish imagination. It suggests that his work has less in common with the native folk concerns of Yeats, than with the existentialist explorations of such dramatists as Ionesco, Sartre or Beckett. Murphy looked for a chance of escaping from the basic naturalistic theatre produced in Ireland. Since the early years of his career his concern about producing a kind of drama which reflected the truth, the real situation of the world, made him read the work of urban playwrights, such as O'Casey, who took a dim view of the traditional peasant society depicted in Ireland. "Murphy's drama departs from the indigenous tradition of the well-made folk-drama and embraces, with Friel and Beckett, the modernist obsession with the crisis of human communication and identity." (KEARNEY, 1988, p. 162). For example, the Revivalist movement was reflected in the work of the Abbey Theatre. The Abbey dramatists, in general, tried to depict typical Irish life often associated with the past and its national provincial traditions, but Murphy's drama subverts the mythical revivalist Irish drama, showing its failures and pointing out the disillusion Irish people faced during the Revival, a period whose main purpose was the shaping of a form of emotion intrinsically associated to the principle of being proud of being Irish. The "deromanticisation" starts when this disillusioned Irishman tries to understand his real position and significance in a modern society of social and existential crisis.

The playwright had his own particular vision of Ireland. When his plays were rejected by the Abbey Theatre, the Irish audience lost an opportunity of experiencing a new form of drama, in particular, the technique of showing several things happening at once. However, as O'Toole points out, it was not simply a question of rejection:

With these standards and practices, it was not merely a matter of not wanting to put on Murphy's plays, though certainly their vision of Ireland was totally counter to the theatre's ideology, but also of the Abbey being simply unable to do so. If Murphy's theatre is anything, it is a theatre of several things happening at once, with the stage full of oppositions and collisions, presenting both a world of actuality and a

world of metaphor, in a way which moves vastly beyond the crude naturalism that was the Abbey's staple fare. It was effectively impossible for him to stay in Ireland. (1994, p. 55, 56).

Murphy confronted Ireland or, rather he faced the unpleasant truths of Ireland and managed to deal with them. Moreover, he stood against Ireland's pastoral kitchen drama of the first part of the twentieth century. "Murphy's Ireland involves a reconception of the country cottage of Synge, Yeats and Gregory to create an Irish drama which tells a different story from the theatre of national politics." (GRENE, 1999, p. 221). For instance, attempting to produce a form of theatre apart from the conventions of the Abbey's domestic, rural drama, he tried to resist the so clichéd Irish cottage kitchen often adopted by Irish playwrights as the setting of the early Abbey plays - with a few exceptions, such as the traditional country kitchen in *Bailegangaire* (1985) and the non-Irish country kitchen in *A Whistle in the Dark* (1961). O'Toole relates Murphy's particular style and courageous authenticity to the social conditions of his times:

[...] because of its peculiarities and because of the truncated nature of the changes which took place in Irish society in the period in which Murphy was writing, it was possible for him to do things which are of enormous significance for the modern theatre as a whole: to write tragedy when many have argued that tragedy can no longer be written; to restore a religious sense to the theatre in a world which has lost a sense of the religious; to move beyond absurdity without denying its claims; and to produce theatrical images of transformation at a time when the world seems all too fixed and inescapable. (O'TOOLE, 1994, p. 19).

Another aspect added to this non-traditional imagination which is significant to this investigation of Murphy's work is the author's attitude towards invented, or even, imaginary emotions and illusions conceived, as part of human nature. At a specific point in Murphy's life he realised that these emotions and illusions were something created and imposed in people's lives; so, pre-defined images of God, Church and politics began to dissolve, preparing the ground for a process of deconstruction. Quite a few of his plays reflect the disillusionment which Murphy brings to his realistic view of life, the loss of faith in several Irish dreams. In *The Morning After Optimism* (1971), James, who is a reflection of Murphy himself, represents a man disillusioned with the world of public power. In a text which begins with the fairy tale opening, "Once upon a time", James talks about the false promises made to him:

[...] the books he read were filled with heroes; people lived happily, ugliness was sure to turn to beauty, and poor boys were better than rich boys because they were noble really... And the Church told him of God, kind God and guardian angels. And how everyone was made just like God – even the little boy himself was. There was a devil but he himself was not alive... And there were things called politicians for doing favours and seeing to things... And there was a king there for – that was not quite clear. But he was there, like in all other stories. Not that anything would go wrong, but he was keeping an eye on things all the same... He was there, probably, to make the boy's life his dream... everyone gave the little boy balloons... already inflated... and they floated above him, nodding and bobbing, and lifting his feet clear of the ground so that he never had to walk a step anywhere. Until, one day, one of them burst, and it was the beautiful blue one. And he was not prepared for this... And one by one the other balloons burst. (MURPHY, 2001, p. 41).

Murphy's personal and professional life seems to be a mix of ups and downs, an intersection of hope and disillusionment. Very early in life, Murphy lost some of his illusions, which he later named false illusions. "I come from a very big family, and eventually there was just my mother and myself left—everyone else had emigrated [...] I remember my eldest brother leaving [...] and so he became a mythic figure in my imagination." (TÓIBÍN, 2013). During his childhood, he saw his family "wiped out" by emigration, living times of expectation and despair in the railway station of Tuam, one of the most important places in Murphy's early life. Without the promise of returning, some of these family members, including his eldest brother, were just a mythic picture in his imagination. The youngest child of the family, Murphy saw his father and eight of his brothers leaving home, emigrating from Ireland to Birmingham, in England:

[...] Murphy's elder brothers, whom he saw only on rare visits home became, and remain, strange and mysterious creatures, connected to him but absent, tied to him by the closest bonds of blood and family but yet only vague figures in his memory. His work is full of brothers and parents who are absent and who yet haunt the imaginations of his protagonists. (O'TOOLE, 1994, p. 26).

The opening scenes of two of his plays, *A Whistle in the Dark* and *A Crucial Week in the Life of A Grocer's Assistant*, reveal a recollection of this experience in the author's early life since both of them have something to do with the arrival and departure of a train.

Another childhood memory reveals a painful particularity about his father who was a carpenter. A dominant memory for Murphy of his father's job is related to the reality and consequences of the Irish nationalistic atmosphere. The playwright remembers his father making coffins, sometimes even on Sundays when it was an emergency. Although Murphy says he understands his father's work of mercy, he confesses he is surprised that he did not emigrate earlier (MURPHY, 1992, p. xiii- xiv). O'Toole refers to Murphy's father:

Tom Murphy's father was a carpenter by trade, a quiet and resourceful man. When he pictures his father from early childhood, before he emigrated to Coventry, the image that comes most easily to mind is of his father in his workshop making coffins. He sometimes had to spend a Sunday making a coffin, sometimes for a child. Death was an ordinary visitor, a commonplace of work, a thing shaped and smoothed by his father's deft hands. He remembers the smell of the pine. He remembers playing with the shavings of pine on the floor, remembers himself as a boy warm in the company of his father, lost in the curlings and arabesques of shaved wood that were the remains of someone else's death. (1994, p. 252).

These dolorous and disillusioned aspects of his early life would soon produce in Murphy a personality aware of the subtle determinants imposed by the Irish national and religious culture.

Tuam, located in County Galway, assumed great importance in religious aspects of Ireland in the twelfth century and it continues, nowadays, to be one of the main Irish religious centres. The city is best known as a place of church affairs, ancient and modern, and has two cathedrals; The Cathedral of the Assumption and the Church of Ireland's St. Mary's Cathedral. The town's patron saint is St. Jarlath.²⁶ By 1940s and 1950s, the town was completely dominated by these religious institutions, not only in education, but also in many aspects of people's lives. With this background, Murphy's early contact with the religious world was daily. As a boy, before attending the technical school, Murphy was educated in a religious school, run by the Christian Brothers, where he entered when he was seven and stayed until he was fifteen: Murphy served Mass and even sang in the choir. Ironically, "it was for him a time of almost unmitigated brutality and unhappiness" due to his fear of the violence of the teachers and the questionable education provided. Sometimes, in a class of forty, "thirty-five would by ten o'clock in the morning be standing at the walls around the room waiting to be beaten"; the children

²⁶ <http://www.tuam-guide.com/>

were beaten with leather thongs, sticks from the garden or they were punched in the face. For Murphy it was “a time which would lead to the association in his plays between religion and violence.” (O’TOOLE, 1994, p. 28). Thus, in his early twenties, Murphy was already aware of the problematics of the constraints of church and political systems. However, later, in the 1970s, Murphy returned to his contact with Catholic Church when he was invited by a group of Bishops of the English-speaking world, the International Commission on the Use of English in the Liturgy, to work on the adaptation and creation of a new language for rites and sacraments of the Catholic Church. In accepting the invitation to work on that commission, Murphy was not returning to his religious childhood. On the contrary, it seemed to him that he was working with something in which he did not himself believe. Moreover, it is undeniable that it would be a great experience for a writer to be involved with such a commission.

Murphy experienced physical, moral and emotional domination and pressure in a town that was extremely dominated by the clergy. Unlike many Irishmen who were satisfied with the life dictated by the system, he was able to look beyond the appearance of Irish society; and expressed his opinion about the people of his time, “We were unnaturally docile and obedient. [...] The powers that ruled over us – the institutions, officers and officers – didn’t want trouble and neither did we. [...] We were a suspicious and secretive people, shameful of the universal conditions that apply to humankind. Everyone had a sense of inferiority. We were smug about Catholicism, the one true Church.” (MURPHY, 1992, p. xii).

In the professional field, some curious facts seem to have contributed to this general feeling of disillusionment. O’Toole sums up the general state of Murphy’s early career as a playwright:

By the age of 30 he was already in something of an artistic wilderness, unable to have his plays produced and with a series of disappointments to look back on and forward to. Since then he has known periods of full-throated acclaim, followed by successive commercial disasters. (1994, p. 8).

One of these disappointments was with the production of his first full-length play, *A Whistle in the Dark* (1960). Although it received positive reviews from the critics, according to O’Toole, it provoked “racist outpourings” and “a complementary sense of shame in some Irish commentators” due to the feral meditation on tribal violence and the depiction of the Irish as a savage people whose only typical feature of human

behaviour was the ability to speak with an Irish accent (1994, p. 12). First, the play was called *The Iron Men* and was drafted by Murphy when he was still a metalwork teacher. The story is set in Coventry, England, and portrays the tribal violence among the Irish families who left the Emerald Isle. It was written when Murphy was twenty-six in the kitchen of his house on Friday and Saturday nights as a form of therapy to deal with the rage resulting from writing about hypocrisy of churchmen and politicians; and at this moment in his life Murphy began to embrace a sort of disillusionment with institutionalised ideas.

When the play was finished, Murphy submitted it to the Charleville Amateur Script competition and won first prize; however it was far from being produced in Ireland. The Abbey Theatre, directed by Ernest Blythe, who was directly involved with politics before his connection with the Abbey, rejected the play with a tense letter stating that, "This was rubbish, and no such characters as these existed." However, according to O'Toole, "In a sense, Blythe was right. Such people did not exist in the Ireland of nationalist ideology to which Blythe mostly fervently belonged. He was himself the living symbol of the relationship between theatre and politics in Ireland." (1994, p. 54). In a second attempt, before leaving Ireland, Murphy had another play, *The Fooleen*, rejected by Blythe. The Abbey was not ready for Murphy's work.

Ironically, the play had a successful production in London in 1961, at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, and the Apollo Theatre in London's West End. At this time the play was already called *A Whistle in the Dark* after having undergone changes. Godfrey Quigley's emigration to London was the point of connection between Murphy's play and the English Theatre. The Irish actor and producer, who was one of the adjudicators in the Charleville Amateur Script Competition, liked the play and wanted to perform it in the Dublin Theatre Festival, but he went to live in London, so he took it with him and very probably shared it with English producers. Finally it was accepted by Joan Littlewood from the Theatre Royal and remained on stage for seven years.

In the 1970s, Murphy's career was shifting again to an unsteady path. For example, another of his productions, *The Sanctuary Lamp* (1976), had a furious reception and was greeted with walkouts when it premiered in Dublin because of its vituperative attack on Catholicism and its anti-clericalism. After *The Sanctuary Lamp*, Murphy continued to undergo ups and downs in his career. His next work, *The J. Arthur Maginnis Story* (1976), was ignored and harshly criticised. Disillusioned, he decided to

retire from Dublin and spent a few years isolated, working as a farmer. His return happened only in 1980 with *The Blue Macushla*, followed by two triumphant works, *The Gigli Concert* (1983) and *Conversations on a Homecoming* (1985).

In fact, the mixture of Murphy's imagination and his disillusionment with false emotions, above all nationalist emotion, is relevant to the reading of his plays which approach national politics. Murphy is not a playwright primarily remembered for his engagement with political theatre, yet he has not completely ignored the topic. Indeed, his opinion is that he cannot possibly sweep politics aside:

I have had to declare on several occasions that I have no politics whatsoever, good, bad, indifferent. A lie, of course. There is no such thing as an apolitical person. But I have had to protect myself from tedious, linear discussion and, hopefully, the plays from abstractionist logicians who would, given the whiff of an ism, reduce a tapestry to a single thread. (MURPHY, 1992, p. ix).

He has the same attitude towards nationalism, and stresses the importance of not completely ignoring the existence of nationalism. Although he believes that nationalism is a dangerous emotion, intrinsic to us all; he arguments that it is more dangerous not to acknowledge it or to pretend otherwise (MURPHY, 1992, p. xviii).

Thus, despite the fact that the author's work does not have an elemental political dialectic, he does not ignore the subject, and when he deals with national politics he intelligently produces a critical drama exposing the imaginative underworld of Irish political traditions and clichés. His theatre demands our attention in a portrayal of the bitter contradictory facts of political ideology, through the revealed thoughts of his characters. Although these plays may not be the most famous part of his work, they have become an interesting instrument for reflection on how the Irish people incorporate national culture due to the imaginative and realistic author's comprehension of Irish politics. Whereas much Irish literature has been focused on maintaining a nationalist emotional state, Murphy reinvents the way people remember some moments and events in Irish history and politics. Robert Welch, in the *Concise Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*, defines Murphy as,

a playwright who explores individual and community identity to reveal the great gulf that lies between the ideals projected by the founders of the Irish State, and by the Catholic Church, and the actual conditions in which people live and their mental and emotional states. (2000, p. 250).

Murphy's opinion about the Irish Revival and one of its subsequent armed conflicts, the Easter Rising and the nationalist emotion provoked by it, is no different to his skeptical attitudes on politics. Once he stated, "There was much drunken talk about guns." (MURPHY, 1992, p. xx). Since it was a political movement based mainly on nationalistic principles, Murphy associated it and the insurrection to a kind of event which produced emotions rooted in the false illusions promoted by institutionalised systems. Thus, one of Murphy's main insights in his political plays is the intimate relation between nationalist belief and illusion. He keeps himself apart from the traditional view of Ireland's national culture which was used in order to create a national emotion, keeping alive myths and images from the past. According to a comment in the national daily newspaper, *The Irish Press*, "Tom Murphy is one of that small group of playwrights who have managed to emerge from the overshadowing influence of this country's literary past; he has been responsible for creating a new and very special voice in Irish theatre." (MURPHY, 1992). This new and very special voice in Irish drama may be related to his peculiar way of dealing with imagination and his belief in the individuality of races and cultures. Its special voice is also a central aspect in his *The Patriot Game*; a play which takes a different route from the mainstream Irish-Literary-Revival-based theatre whose determination was to produce dramas with the aim of romanticising the Easter Rising. Whether or not Murphy, in *The Patriot Game*, revives a baby born from the Revivalist movement, it is his non-traditional imagination and his perception of false illusions which make him raise a point of non-conformity in depicting the event.

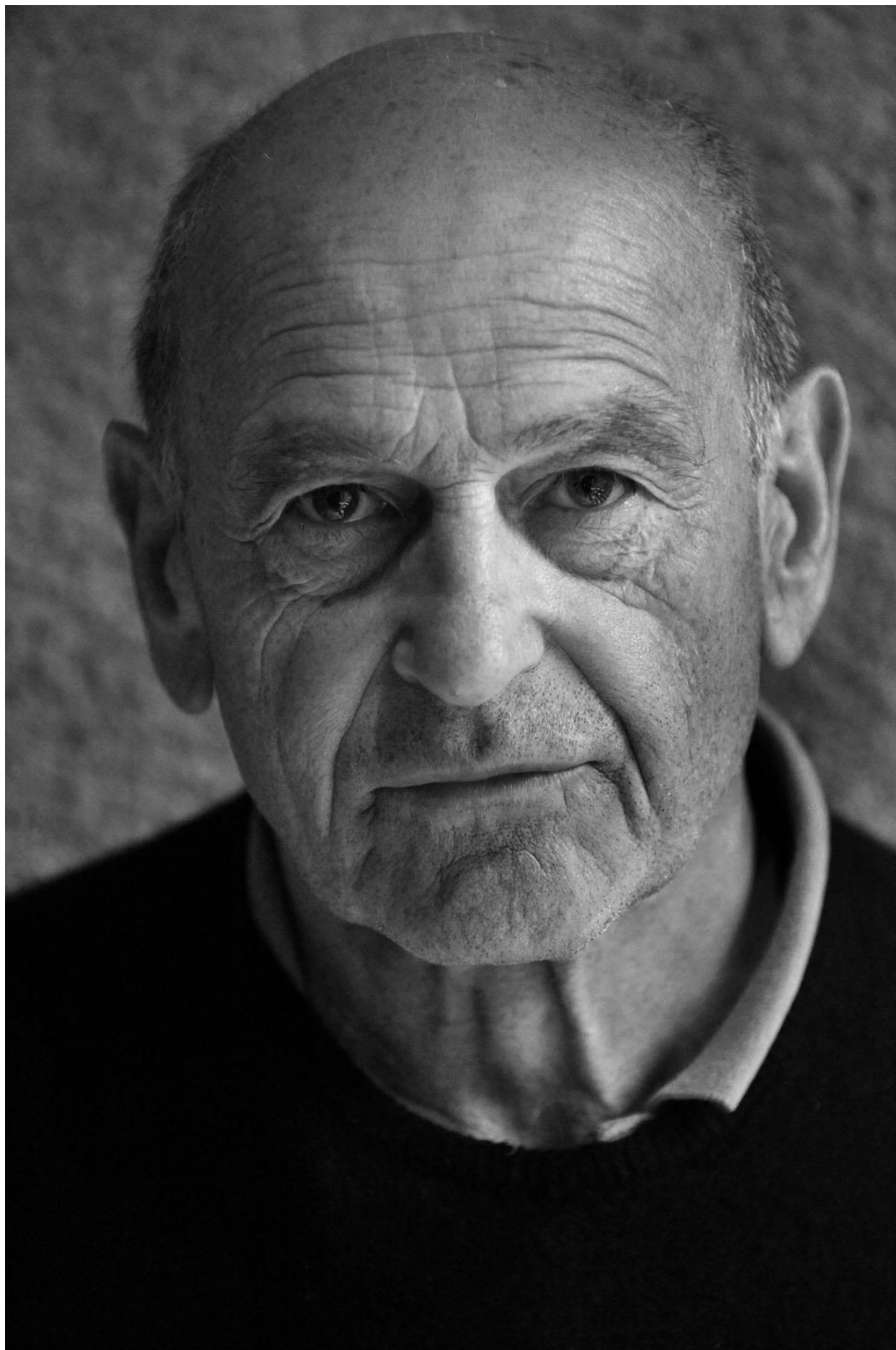


Figure 14. Tom Murphy (<http://www.independent.ie/entertainment/theatre-arts/tom-murphy-a-journey-around-his-father-and-mommo-30590517.html>)

3.2 *The Patriot Game: Reviving and Revising 1916*

Narrator. [...] Here. The Disgraceful Story of 1916[...]
Tom Murphy, *The Patriot Game*

Murphy was born almost twenty years after the Easter Rising. Unlike O'Casey, he did not witness the real battle and its planning, nor did he experience the intense nationalistic wave of that period. In the 1940s, during his childhood, the only surviving rebel of 1916 was the president of Ireland, Eamon de Valera, one of the greatest names in charge of the implementation of the Irish national project. So, if Murphy did not live the Rising itself and its peculiar form of nationalism, he did not escape the idealised atmosphere promoted by the Irish government which sought to portray a truly Gaelic country, emphasising the rural life. Many Irish writers saw themselves and their concerns as being allied to those promoted by public politics, bound up in the higher unity called Ireland. These writers embraced, and were embraced by, this single movement which also included their readers. However, Murphy kept himself apart from this romantic version of the country for, although "the official ideology of Irish politics at this time was that the ideal Ireland was rustic and Gaelic [...] de Valera's famous vision of a bucolic rural paradise was broadcast when Murphy was fifteen, and it held little for the urban working-class of which he was part." Murphy had a different attitude towards this national vision, firstly because he grew up a working-class family which did not occupy any space in the prevailing vision of the period, and secondly, because "he always thought of himself as an urbanite" and, in doing so, "this sense of not being a part of the rural Ireland that was the established ideal was crucial in his consciousness as it would be in his plays." (O'TOOLE, 1994, p. 25).

Murphy's non-traditional attitude to the promotion of nationalistic sentiments made it possible for him to depict a new form of understanding of the Easter Rising. When the author re-envisaged the Easter Rising, the traditional and romanticised version of the insurrection, which had seemed to be so fixed, natural and reasonable, gave place to different perspectives, including a reflection on how Irish women experienced it.

Murphy revisited Ireland's most famous insurrection in 1965 when he wrote *The Patriot Game*. Initially the author was commissioned by the BBC²⁷ to write it for the

²⁷ Murphy worked consistently for the BBC and Thames TV throughout the sixties.

50th anniversary of the Easter Rising as a television docu-drama, but it was never aired. Although it was written in 1965, its first performance on stage occurred only on 15 May 1991 at the Peacock Theatre. The docu-drama is a type of historical and political play which retells the plans and part of the Rising. Divided into twenty-four scenes, the plot is basically the representation of some moments which happened prior to and during the Rising. The characters have the names of real people involved in the insurrection and the whole story is presented by a young woman who narrates the events with a critical eye and expresses her attitude to the nationalism of the period:

Chronicling the months and weeks which precede the Rising, Murphy foregrounds the internal divisions of the national movement, the conflicts and betrayals between rival groups and splinter-groups, and the muddled succession of orders and countermanding orders responsible for the utter confusion in which the Rising took place, implicitly questioning the notion of Ireland as a unified nation. Many scenes involving the leaders of the rebellion have a cartoon quality, and tend to turn the familiar heroic figures into absurd puppets. (POULAIN, 2006, p. 16).

The play was not welcomed in its first and only season at the Abbey Theatre in 1991. The negative reception and the fact the play was only produced almost thirty years after it was written do not mean a lack of quality nor call into question Murphy's reputation as a great contemporary dramatist. Murray (2010, p. 7) recognises the value of this historical work, saying that, by "voicing the consciousness of a necessary violence", the play "can be considered as the flip side" of one of Murphy's masterpieces, *Famine*. Yet, Poulain points to something which may be one possible reason for the resistance to the play's production, "the rather complex structure of the play highlights its self-conscious theatricality, and comments on the difficulty of interpreting and representing history." (2006, p. 15). This complexity in Murphy's theatrical construction is not restricted to *The Patriot Game*; in 1963, the Dublin Festival Theatre had accepted his play *A Crucial Week in the Life of a Grocer's Assistant*, but soon abandoned the idea of producing it "because of the enormity of the set required and its big casting problem". A Londoner producer, Oscar Lewenstein, who considered the possibility of staging it, also failed to do so. Even *Famine*, considered to be one of Murphy's masterpieces and well accepted in Ireland, despite "a number of good productions (including one by Murphy himself at the Project Arts Centre in 1978 and another by the Druid Theatre Company in Galway in 1985)" had problems because

of its epic scale (O'TOOLE, 1994, p. 13). As a result, the amount of money needed to produce a play like this became another obstacle:

The Patriot Game was commissioned for BBC's Wednesday Play slot in 1965, to be broadcast the following year, with Christopher Morahan directing. Because of its scale, however, the cost of the production was reckoned to run to a figure of around £10,000, very much in excess of the £6,600 budget allowed for the Wednesday Play. After various attempts at altering the script in order to scale it down, it was eventually abandoned and the BBC broadcast instead Hugh Leonard's *Insurrection*. In 1966, the play was taken up by Phyllis Ryan's Gemini Productions as a possible stage production for Dublin, but by then it was too late to stage it for the anniversary year, and the idea came to nothing. (O'TOOLE, 1994, p. 146).

Additionally, the Irish theatre context and atmosphere may lead us to another possible answer. In the decade when Murphy wrote *The Patriot Game*, Dublin theatre was facing a crisis and the acceptance of new plays was undermined. Actually the 1950s and 1960s were a difficult time for Irish theatre. The destruction of the Abbey, by fire in 1951 was followed by miserable years. Like other playwrights of the period, Murphy also suffered the consequences of this complicated period for drama as theatre directors tended to neglect any kind of experimental or poetic drama. In 1960, the Abbey Theatre, which was directed by Ernest Blythe, rejected one of Murphy's most famous plays, *A Whistle in the Dark*, which was then produced in London in 1961 at the Theatre Royal Stratford East very successfully. Very probably the state of Irish Theatre in those two decades may be the reason why the Abbey rejected Murphy's productions, since he had some of his most experimental work performed at the Abbey in the following decade. However, Murphy seems not to be worried by the fact that some of his productions were not welcomed, saying that he does not regret any moment of his career: "I never had any choice but to continue writing plays whether they became commercially successful or not. People have asked me why I'm not bitter. I always answer, 'You be bitter for me.'"²⁸ It was in 1971, after Murphy's return to Ireland in 1970, that *Morning After Optimism*, designed by Bronwen Casson, reached the Irish stage, bringing a significant change to the prevailing realism. When this happened *The Patriot Game* had probably been forgotten by the Abbey's directors or even by Murphy himself. *The Patriot Game* can be considered one of the few Murphy plays which approach political questions. According to the playwright, "its theme is nationalism", and it represents

²⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2010/mar/07/tom-murphy-the-sanctuary-lamp>

Ireland's historical event which according to him is "the birth of the Irish nation." (MURPHY, 1992, p. xvii, xviii). The imagery of nationalism is built into the play, which is set in the most patriotic period of Ireland's history. After the appearance of the Patrick Pearse, the audience sees a young woman, the narrator, clearly disillusioned with the nationalistic excitement of the rebels, which is particularly important since because she knows the outcome, she is aware of the tragic consequences of the rising. The play therefore functions as an instrument for reflection about Irish female identity due to the author's idea of putting woman in a relevant position in a play which deals with nationalism. Gerardine Meaney has referred to the interplay between gender and nationalist rhetoric in the case of Ireland: "Sexual identity and national identity are mutually dependent. . . The images of suffering Mother Ireland and the self-sacrificing Irish mother are difficult to separate. Both serve to obliterate the reality of women's lives." (1993, p. 230).

It is Murphy's capacity to entangle themes of nation, gender and identity, as he does in *The Patriot Game*, which makes his plays so thought-provoking about the complexities of these connections. Although Murphy is not considered a playwright primarily concerned with feminist topics, in *The Patriot Game* he expressly approaches feminism by placing a female narrator as a key character in the play. Since this narrator carries a critical perception about the events of the Rising, Murphy suggests that women's involvement in a nationalist state has been complex, and questions the very concept of nationalism. Although nationalist projects require the participation of women, there are imaginary lines restricting their place and role, almost always defining them as a passive group:

Nationalist movements invite women to participate more fully in collective life by interpellating them as 'national' actors: mothers, educators, workers, and even fighters. On the other hand, they reaffirm the boundaries of culturally acceptable feminine conduct and exert pressure on women to articulate their gender interests within the terms of reference set by nationalist discourse. (KANDIYOTI, 1996, p. 312–13).

Given this problematic of the nationalist movements, Murphy challenges this tradition by putting a woman in a central role who decides to focus on the part of the story that interests her. Murphy uses her to point out the perception women had of nationalism.

Both before and after 1916 Irish women lived in a patriarchal community in which they were denied any agency and ended up accepting gendered nationalist ideologies which portrayed them in traditional roles, assimilating this position and behaviour as an accurate enactment of who they were and how they lived. The symbolic roles of women were shaped by a nationalist atmosphere according to political purposes. One of the archetypes promoted by the Irish State, for instance, was the employment of a family iconography which subordinated women to domestic roles, and, women were relegated to a domestic sphere being expected to obey imaginary boundaries. The predominant role was that of the desexualised sacrificial mother, which provides the imagery of “Mother Ireland”. Margaret Pearse is the other female character in *The Patriot Game* who contributes to Murphy’s reflection on the impact of nationalism on Irish women. In real life, Pearse’s mother represented the perfect embodiment of the Irish sacrificial mother for Ireland’s society of the period. Her two sons, Patrick and Willie Pearse, were executed soon after the Rising, a fact which raised her to the status of mother of the nation and transformed her sons into national martyrs.

The Patriot Game is very different in form, style and perspective to *The Plough and the Stars*. While O’Casey’s play attempts to deconstruct the myth which had been created by the rebels themselves, and which was consolidated by nationalist historiography in the course of the ensuing ten years, portraying the lives of ordinary people and their routine during the insurrection, *The Patriot Game* examines the planning and some moments of the Rising itself, and uses the leaders and other historical figures involved in the event, reasserting the importance of the Rising in the Irish collective memory. One of the few characters in Murphy’s play who is not associated directly with the real event is the narrator. While names like Connolly, Pearse and MacDonagh appear throughout the plot, the narrator, a young woman, is the most present character in the play, recounting the story and sometimes interacting with the Irish leaders. “The actors’ play is framed by a story told by a female Narrator, who is extremely critical of the whole venture of the Rising and wary of what Murphy calls the nationalist emotion.” (POULAIN, 2006, p. 15). The theatrical reconstruction of this intense nationalistic period through the critical eye of a female narrator suggests an attempt at reading the real events from a different perspective, particularly concerned with feminine impressions of nationalism; because, more than retelling the story, she comments on the events, expressing her feelings and conceptions about the Irish leaders’ deeds and their concept of nationalism. Furthermore, her view of the events

seems to be focused on the disorganised and despairing aspect of the battle which echoes Michael Collins' real reflection about the rebellion, "These are sharp reflections. On the whole I think the Rising was bungled terribly, costing many a good life. It seemed at first to be well-organised, but afterwards became subjected to panic decisions and a great lack of very essential organization and co-operation." (COOGAN, 2005, p. 126-127).

Murphy wrote the play in a period when the female role in Irish society was very different to what it had been in 1916. It seems that the female narrator reveals Murphy's own opinion about the revolutionary acts and ideas; his political convictions are more closely related to internationalism than nationalism. So, why does Murphy place a woman as his narrator? By choosing a female narrator, in addition to meditating on the role of women in the Rising, Murphy puts women in evidence and also questions the insistence by other playwrights in focusing on male roles. Murphy, along with Sean O'Casey, was one of the few playwrights who gave importance to depicting women in a nontraditional role in the Irish revival. Most plays which retold the revolutionary events did not approach women's participation in the struggle nor the troubles they faced during the revolt:

Dublin's 1935 commemoration reinforced the idea that the Irishwoman belonged at home. The organisers of the spectacle erased the proto-feminism of the 1916 Rising and allowed the sacrificial woman to enjoy a notable pre-eminence. In this way, the complicated ambiguities of the original Easter proclamation were flattened and reduced in an easily-promulgated 'populist' form of theatre favoured by Fianna Fáil. (MORAN, 2005, p. 72).

Women did not play a great part in the insurrection itself; however those who did were almost deleted from the record in the years that followed the Rising. This situation implies the undeniable connection between feminist questions and nationalism. Strategically Irish politics tried to reduce female engagement in war in the years which followed the insurrection, especially when Ireland became an independent country and Éamon de Valera was its president. His government had an apathetic attitude in relation to the participation of women in the Easter Rising since this could act against the new political ideals, and hamper the promotion of the united family in the new State; "so de Valera's government camouflaged the ambiguities of the 1916 rebellion under the homogenised and anti-feminist carapace of Fianna Fáil." (MORAN, 2005, p.69). However, Murphy was fully conscious of the linkage between new State's project and

national policies, he once stated, “Eamon de Valera, an Taoiseach [Prime Minister], in a famous, much-commented on speech, saw us as a happy people, enjoying frugal comforts, with comely maidens dancing at the crossroads. [...] We didn’t complain; we conformed. Nobody wanted ‘to go getting their names up’. ‘Be wise’ could be said to be the slogan of the times.” (1992, p. xii).

In many of his plays, Murphy brings two worlds to the stage, giving the audience a unique and surprising feeling of leaping from one world to another, and this also happens in *The Patriot Game*. The play is the story of an event in the past; on the other hand, the modern-day narrator is clearly from 1991, the year of the play’s premiere at the Abbey. The narrative is constantly interrupted by historical sequences from 1916, which confirms the idea that some of Murphy’s early plays [...] try to embody past, present and future on the stage at the same time. In *The Patriot Game*, past and present are on the stage at the same time in the figure of the narrator and those of the participants in the insurrection. In the narrative of these 1916 memories, the narrator’s voice draws something from the past into the present. Murphy’s relationship to this historical event is, according to O’Toole’s description, similar to the relationship between writer and history, it is not something existing “in isolation; it arises, rather, from his relationship to his own society and his own time”; so, *The Patriot Game* is, presumably, “a way of tilting the present at an angle in order to see it more clearly”, or, at least, it is a way of rethinking the attitudes and feelings emerging from the nationalistic environment of 1916 (O’TOOLE, 1994, p. 112).

In her first appearance on stage, the narrator reveals a discontented attitude as Murphy’s stage directions make clear:

The NARRATOR, a young actress, comes in and watches from a distance. She is wary of PEARSE, both frightened and fascinated by him and, to conceal this, she tries to affect a detached superiority. (Offstage he could be a boyfriend or a brother who gets out of control.) The narration appears to her to belong to another age and in her modern-day image (leather-jacket and white dress) one suspects that she takes liberties with it – ‘yeh?’ She is determined to keep control of herself; she loses her resolve every now and again, as in her very first line; she doesn’t like the emotion of nationalism, ‘it doesn’t exist’. (MURPHY, 1992, p. 93).

The appearance of the individual narrator before the collective action represents the relation between the social mentality and the individual psychological one, also, the connection between historical, political events and the intimate perception of

individuals, recurring themes in Murphy's work. "And what is true of individuals, is true of societies also, that at times of change and crisis the past and the future come into collision and the unspoken traumas of the past demand to be uttered." (O'TOOLE, 1994, p. 79). Therefore, in *The Patriot Game* the collision of past and future takes place through the junction of the narrator and the participants in the insurrection on the stage, and she is in charge of uttering the consequent traumas, her own and those of society concerning the Rising. Through the individual mind it is possible to see what is happening in Irish society's consciousness mind and so Murphy puts into the narrator's mouth what were very probably the unspoken traumas of the whole of society. Reassessing the memory of the events from her own perspective, her voice makes the audience aware that the memories of the past are not exactly or simply what happened, they are also invented. In other words, when we think of past as the foundation for the present and future it is not based solely on facts but also on inventions, even tyrannical and stultifying illusions. She courageously manifests her feelings, her anger about the losses and the bloodshed, something very difficult for the Irish people, afraid of exposing their traumas because they were nourished by the fixed belief in the glorious significance of having an original national identity. They were supposed to accept the battle as something necessary for the achievement of an authentic Irish identity; if they revealed their negative feelings towards the rebellion they believed they would be dismissing the idea of a unified Ireland.

The opening moments of the play present the audience with an immediate contrast between the narrator and the rebels through her modern image. The author differentiates the narrator's time from the period of the event in a device that suggests an immediate sense of anachronism; she is from the contemporary world experiencing an event from a previous time. The men are from 1916, and the narrator is from 1991, or whatever year when the play is performed. That is what Murphy does with time, he dilates it.

Already, in his first full-length play, we have the roots of a notion which is essential to Murphy's theatre as it develops over a quarter of the century, the notion of time as being, not linear, but simultaneous. In Murphy's plays time does not pass in a straight line, with one event following another as cause follows effect. Instead, there is more than one time frame in operation on stage, with things being connected by the fact that they occur simultaneously in different time frames, rather than by the fact that they follow one another logically. [...] this notion is essential to the great leaps into magic of Murphy's later plays, and

to the politics of transformation which informs them. (O'TOOLE, 1994, p. 60).

Contrasting the period of the narrator appearance and that of what she is narrating also has the function of suggesting the modern attitude of Irish people towards the rebellion in 1916. O'Toole comments on this particularity, directing our attention to the fact that *The Patriot Game* is composed by a past story being told by an individual from the modern generation (1994). When the narrator says, in the opening scene, "The Disgraceful Story of 1916, by Tomas Macamadan (Son of the Idiot)", she is distancing herself from the story and showing the audience that the other characters in the story are in a different time. "In 1965, the actors and the anonymous Narrator in *The Patriot Game* would have been the grandchildren of the characters they embodied, fifty years later — or their great-grandchildren in the 1991 stage-play." (POULAIN, 2006, p. 22). Taking into account the fact that the play was written in 1965 and was intended to be performed in 1966, it is worth considering the changes in society that had occurred over those fifty years. When Murphy refers to the modernity of his young female narrator, besides indicating the present attitude of Irish society, he is showing how a revolt of fifty years previously directly impacts on the new generation. The relationship between the story she tells and the audience's real life is not one of the simple storytelling, but one of reflection, to think again about the insurrection in order to decide if people should change the way they feel about it or deal with it.

In his description of her, Murphy defines her attitude towards national culture; he writes: "she doesn't like the emotion of nationalism, 'it doesn't exist'". Although it is easy to see that she is against the English settlement, especially in the form in which it was conducted in Ireland, she is also against the sort of nationalism that was being preached in Ireland at that moment. Her thought expresses the modern questioning about nationalism and one of its extreme consequences: death:

These deaths bring us abruptly face to face with the central problem posed by nationalism: what makes the shrunken imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices? I believe that the beginnings of an answer lie in the cultural roots of nationalism. (ANDERSON, 2006, p. 8).

The Narrator also embodies another of Anderson's conceptions about nationalism. This proposition is based on the fact that nations inspire the kind of love which involves self-sacrifice: "the cultural products of nationalism poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts -

show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles.” (2006, p. 141). Anderson shows how this love is pointedly related to nationalistic cultural artefacts, specifically in the case of Ireland, anthems, songs, speeches and all the forms of literature which helped to promote the national spirit. In different scenes the Narrator mentions the artefacts used by the leaders in order to promote a national feeling and a fraternal atmosphere. For example, in Scene 2, she says, “So all they needed was men, money, arms, a date to start the fight and whip up the national spirit with speeches.” (MURPHY, 1992, p. 100). She seems to be the only person on stage aware of this nationalistic mechanism and, thus, for the most part, she is extremely critical of the insurrection, trying to indicate to the audience the dark side of nationalism. According to Poulain (2006, p. 23), “she provides context and transitions between dramatic sequences and sometimes suspends action to voice her own disparaging comments, always striving to retain a tone of controlled irony [...]”.

When Connolly appears for the first time in the play, although the Narrator says “he was an internationalist”, she reveals in her following line that “the nationalist side of his nature would get him.” (MURPHY, 1992, p. 96). Connolly was committed to wider issues, especially to the workers’ cause; he had spent some years in the USA and had given speeches at international meetings there in favour of the working class. Although the Narrator acknowledges that Connolly had a different sense of nationalism, she says that the power of the national spirit would suppress his internationalism. This proves to be true by the fact that Connolly was persuaded to join the rebels just months before the insurrection. On 17 January 1916 he was stopped by a car while he was walking on the street and was brought to a meeting with the other insurgents who did everything to convince him that his efforts to help the working class would only succeed if they solved Ireland’s question first, and they received Connolly’s agreement. In Scene 4, the Narrator says “and Connolly was goin’ his own road, bent on his own class of international revolution, but losin’ his personal battle to nationalism.” (MURPHY, 1992, p. 103). The Irish atmosphere was full of the national spirit. At this time, Connolly was a popular and influential figure on the Irish scene, so his involvement in the nationalist cause suggests how influential and powerful national culture was in Irish society. National culture produces feelings of fraternity and comradeship, promoting the collective imagination of community, shaping people’s feelings and behaviour. However, the concepts of nation and national identity have been questioned as being created and/or imagined:

Finally, it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. (ANDERSON, 2006, p. 8).

Murphy's Narrator refers ironically to the national ideals of the leaders of the Rising, trying to show the audience the ambiguities of the national culture. Moreover, Murphy does so using a female figure who guides audience attention throughout the play towards an understanding of the way women viewed and felt about the insurrection. In fact, he subverts the traditional male point of view about the Easter Rising and at the same time reminds his audience that women also have an opinion about Irish politics, although frequently blurred by the patriarchal discourse. The Narrator's critical view is tied to the political and socio-cultural changes which occurred throughout the period from the actual Rising to the period when the play was written and first performed in 1991.

If women's behaviour was defined by national culture, 1916 meant the same for Irish identity. The consensus was that every Irishman was predestined to die for the glory of his motherland as well as to be the one to promote an authentic Irish identity, one act would consequently bring about the other. Patrick Pearse, at the forefront of the insurrection, was the embodiment of the Irish hero of the twentieth century caught up in "the desire for a truly Gaelic way of life" and the ideology of a glorious sacrificial destiny. He was one of the first of the 1916 leaders to be executed, on 3 May, when he was just thirty-six years old. In a letter he wrote to his mother on 1 May, when he was in Arbour Hill Barracks, his thoughts were filled with the national ideology of sacrifice:

You must not grieve for all this. We have preserved Ireland's honour and our own. Our deeds of last week are the most splendid in Ireland's history. People will say hard things of us now, but we shall be remembered by posterity and blessed by unborn generations. You too will be blessed because you were my mother. (TOOLIS, 1996, p. 340).

Another evidence of Pearse's blind devotion to Ireland's cause is the account of a diary of a British soldier, Samuel Henry Lomas, who commanded the firing squads that executed Patrick Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh and Tom Clarke. According to the

extracts from his account of Easter 1916, before being executed, Pearse whistled as he came out of his cell:

MAY 3rd. We paraded at the time appointed, marched to Kilmainham Jail. At 3.45 the first rebel MacDonoghue was marched in blindfolded, and the firing party placed 10 paces distant. Death was instantaneous. The second, P.H. Pierce whistled as he came out of the cell (after taking a sad farewell of his wife.) The same applied to him. The third, J.H. Clarke, an old man, was not quite so fortunate, requiring a bullet from the officer to complete the ghastly business (it was sad to think that these three brave men who met their death so bravely should be fighting for a cause which proved so useless and had been the means of so much bloodshed). (O'FARREL, 2014, p. 183).

Furthermore, according to Ferriter, “from an early age he [Pearse] was transfixed with the idea of self-sacrifice and cultivated an exceptionally morbid imagination.” (2004, p. 146). It seems he idealised the relationship with his mother in the relationship of Christ and the Virgin Mary, and even after the Rising this image continued as a powerful symbol, and Pearse’s devotion to his mother became widely celebrated, mainly by hagiographic nationalists. Christian symbolisation was very important to the republican movement, since this comparison attributed a divine characteristic to the national ideal and also fitted with the image of Ireland as a sovereign nation, mixing intrinsically the image of the Mother of God with the image of Mother Ireland. On the other hand, at some moments Pearse demonstrated a confusing and contradictory side. “He was a man who at times lauded, at times derided Germany. He also celebrated the sanctifying properties of bloodshed but was probably incapable of firing a revolver.” (FERRITER, 2004, p. 148). Murphy captures the mother-son relationship as well as Pearse’s contradictions in Scene Eleven, when the Irish leader is talking to his mother just before the first insurrection:

PEARSE. What is this thing called patriotism? I don’t know. Nationalism? I don’t know. Nationalism is not a negotiable thing. Good. Is it selfish? Ask him who adores what is God. Good. Can you eat it? Write it? Smell it – catch it – see it – stop it – find it – lose it – trust it? Can you trust it? (MURPHY, 1992, p. 114).

Subsequently, Pearse’s mother appears in a short subtle participation. Although she speaks only a few lines, her performance is Murphy’s key to a subversion of the Irish nationalist conception of motherhood. According to James Moran (2005, p. 42), “Margaret Pearse herself relished the role of sacrificial woman” since she “was the

Easter Rising's most notorious incarnation of the sacrificial mother, and she owed her national prominence to the public's appetite for casting her in this role." She was an important political figure in Ireland, recognised as the mother of two men who were martyred in the cause of Irish freedom, fitting satisfactorily the nationalist rhetoric and iconography. "In this way ... she later became a senator and a member of Fianna Fáil executive." (MORAN, 2005, p. 42). At the same time that Margaret Pearse was the perfect embodiment of the passive sacrificial mother, encouraging and providing the inspiration for Irish mothers to give their sons willingly for the freedom of poor suffering Ireland, her real-life story suggests that she used this role in order to subvert the passive feminine stereotype embodied in the national ideology.

According to Thapar-Bjorkert and Ryan (2002, p. 310), "Mrs. Pearse served as a useful national symbol by raising her to the level of national emblem of ... motherhood, a motherhood that was stoic and patient and self-sacrificial." These aspects are evident in her first appearance, in Scene Eleven, when she answers Pearse when he asks her if he was a great failure. According to Murphy's stage direction, "MOTHER. (shakes her head. Then, quietly). Don't do anything rash, Pat." (MURPHY, 1992, p. 114). Patiently she advises her son to take care and think carefully before making any decision, as any mother would do. She goes on to ask about her younger son, Willie Pearse; when Pearse is talking about his execution, she asks, "And your brother?" He informs her that he would be shot too,²⁹ and then he starts crying and whispers the first few lines of a poem he wrote for her. In fact, in real life, just before the end Pearse wrote a number of poems and letters for his mother and for his brother. Pearse leaves the stage and his mother continues the poem:

I do not grudge them: Lord, I do not grudge
My two strong sons that I have seen go out
To break their strength and die, they and a few,
In bloody protest for a glorious thing,
They shall be spoken of among their people,
The generations shall remember them,
And call them blessed. (MURPHY, 1992, p. 114-15).

Murphy's use of Pearse's poem, "The Mother" (1916), in Margaret Pearse's speech draws our attention to the problem of the traditional woman's role in the context

²⁹ Pearse had no idea that Willie was to be executed, for, although he took part in the Rising, he had not taken part in its planning and held no position of authority.

of the Rising. She seems to be unaffected by the outcome of her son's plans for Ireland, she functions as the character responsible for saving Irish people from the fixed female sacrificial image of the rising, as if she had tried to awake them from a state of nationalistic sleep to show them the truth which is characteristic of many of Murphy's works. Many of these women were 'forced' to manifest sentiments according to men's views; they were supposed to support the idea of sending their husbands and sons to fight for the sake of the most glorious mother, Ireland, even if this meant the loss of their beloved men. They were not literally asked to behave according to this traditional role model, but they were under pressure from a nationalist spirit which defined and dictated women's role nevertheless. However, Murphy did not remain too faithful to the real-life Margaret Pearse; in fact his fictional character is rather controversial. Furthermore he gives stage directions which allow the director to decide how the actress is going to utter Mrs Pearse's last words:

The poem was written by Pearse for his mother; the sentiments contained in it, therefore, are his – male – and not necessarily the sentiments of a mother. The actor playing MOTHER is free in interpretation to question the sentiments: e.g., 'The generations shall remember them and call them – blessed?' (MURPHY, 1992, p. 115).³⁰

As Murphy stresses, the sentiments in the poem are not necessarily those of a mother; indeed, it seems presumptuous to think a real-life mother would not be sad when permitting her son or husband to enter in a sacrificial bloodshed. Murphy leaves the actor free to express the conflicts of fighting for the national cause and, as O'Toole confirms, the Abbey's performance in 1991 followed Murphy's stage direction:

Nothing in the 1991 version of *The Patriot Game* implies a softening towards nationalist illusions. On the contrary one of its most powerful scenes is a speaking of Pearse's poem, written in the borrowed voice of his mother, by an actor playing that mother. The male heroic voice of romantic sacrifice dissolves in the mouth of a woman, the rhetoric becoming bitter, incredulous and grief-stricken. The words remain the same, but the pitch and rhythm are changed, providing a superbly theatrical moment of the familiar transformed. (1994, p. 153).

It is a small moment in the text, but represents a huge divergence in the form Irish mothers have been depicted in the national context, because, if they suffered

³⁰ Murphy extends this flexibility to the actor playing Margaret Pearse in her last appearance, in Scene Twenty-Three, when she utters another part of the poem, "as before, she may find these sentiments questionable".

during those years, they did so in silence; they did not have the opportunity to express their concerns about the Irish revolution, and Murphy seems to be interested in representing these real feelings. Now, in front of a Dublin audience, Murphy revisits the theme and is courageous enough to expose the contradictions of nationalism through the ambiguous performance of the Easter Rising's most celebrated sacrificial mother reciting her son's nationalistic poem.

In addition to this re-interpretation of the meaning and consequences of the rebels' struggle, there is another feature of this part of the play which contributes to a sense of skepticism about the Irish devotion on behalf of the country. When Pearse's mother finishes her words in Scene Eleven, the Narrator appears again on the stage, "but finds that she has nothing to say." (MURPHY, 1992, p. 115). Through her purposeful, yet silent appearance at the end of the scene, Murphy raises another controversial moment. Her silence, precisely at end of the scene, provides the audience with a moment for their own reflection. Unlike the other scenes, when she is always predicting and commenting on the actors' saying and actions, here the absence of words makes an intriguing silence echo around the stage, giving the audience an opportunity for their own reflections.

In conclusion, an analysis of these two female characters in Murphy's revision of the Easter Rising provides meaningful insights into the dynamics of feminism and nationalism. The topic has not been satisfactorily explored in the Irish canon and authors, in general, seem to avoid the complicated implications of nationalism for women's lives since it is difficult to describe the limits of nationalism and its intersection with gender. Murphy's historical play based on the real events of 1916 surprised audiences by clearly placing women, though depicted in different conditions and backgrounds, as subversive elements in the revision of nationalism. Firstly, in a crucial inversion, the story is not told by a man, nor by any real-life character depicted in the play, is it told by a woman who confronts the national discourse by emphasising the disorder and the dangerous problematics of the movement. She reveals the dark side of nationalism. Secondly, he uses a character based on one of the most prominent women of the real revolution to convey a mixed attitude toward nationalism. Despite the fact that Margaret Pearse was an iconic figure in the Irish nationalist movement in 1916 and helped to promote the symbols of mothering and images to reinforce women's primary role as mothers of national sacrificial martyrs, in Murphy's depiction of her there is a suggestion of discontentment with this traditional role. Murphy's stage

directions about Mrs Pearse's last lines raise a debate about the real feelings of those women whose sons were involved in the 1916 insurrection and were obliged to represent the sacrificial mother image.

The play does not end hopefully; it breaks the bonds of illusion and provokes a profoundly disillusioned feeling in the audience. Portraying images of disillusioned people, in *The Patriot Game*, Murphy makes us reflect about the conditions of women during one of the most polemic periods in Irish history. He proved that this 'breath of politic words',³¹ touching women's reality will be a topic to be discussed for a long time.

³¹ From Yeats's poem, 'The Rose Tree'. It was written in April, 1917, and its theme is the Easter Rising.



Figure 15. The Narrator, *The Patriot Game*, The Peacock, 1991(*The Politics of Magic*, Fintan O'Toole)

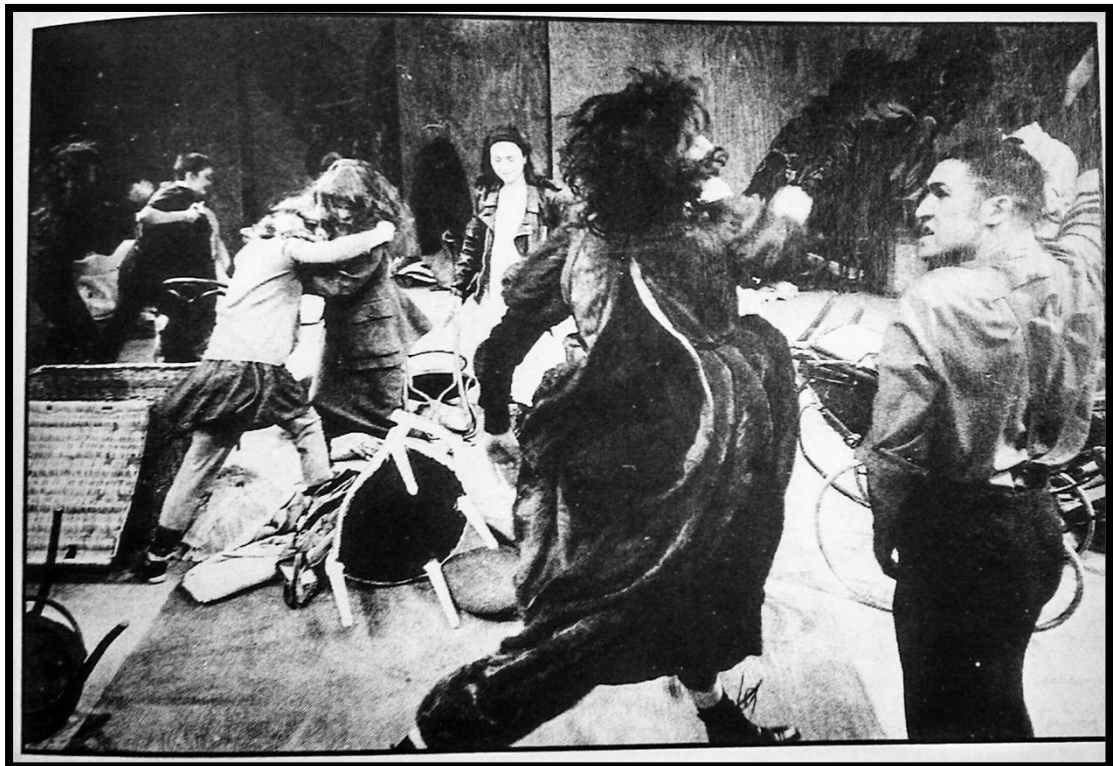


Figure 16. Cast of *The Patriot Game*, The Peacock, 1991(*The Politics of Magic*, Fintan O'Toole)

4. WOMEN IN THE HOUSE: TWO STAGE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE IRISH WOMAN

"I was elected by the women of Ireland, who instead of rocking the cradle, rocked the system".

(MARY ROBINSON, Ireland's first woman president)

Irish literature and arts in general have contributed to support images and behaviour patterns promoted by nationalistic interests. Many of the playwrights of the twentieth century were absorbed by the impetus of nationalism and its distinctive tactics. Even one of the most brilliant poets and playwrights alive during the Irish Revival, William Butler Yeats imbibed the desire of original national identity; especially at the beginning of the century he wrote plays and poems which acclaimed the Irish struggle for independence. On the other hand, the Irish literary world has also had the space to take a more critical look at the national culture and its impact on Irish identity. Yeats himself showed that he was aware of the dubious character of nationalistic ideals when he revealed publicly his outrage at the consequences of the Rising on the turbulent night of the riots during the performance of *The Plough and the Stars*. Amongst the different artistic forms, drama has been one of the most important instruments when it comes to the national sphere, functioning as a key to examine and revise some of Ireland's great historical moments. The interaction of the stage and the state in Ireland has not only cast aside the predominant belief that drama is essentially aesthetic, but has also proved to be able to touch the political world, as for example, promoting and reassessing Irish nationalism and its impact on Irish identity. The fecundity of the Irish stage during the first decades of the twentieth century provided, through its productions within particular historical contexts, the opportunity for evaluating the significance of the Easter Rising, raising questions and reflections about its unresolved issues. For Moran, "When judging cultural and political interaction the ability of a play to generate a shared response, which can be historicised, gives it an advantage over the dissemination and reception of poems, books, or any of the other multitudinous forms in which the Easter Rising has been depicted" (2005, p. 4).

More than influencing the way the insurrection was viewed for the rest of the twentieth century, Ireland's playwrights, who dramatised the Rising in the years following it, helped to popularise behaviour patterns, especially those concerned with

gender. Among a series of inherent unresolved tensions of the original rebellion, the question of female gender has been maintained through up with the present. In recent years, many feminist scholars have analysed the consequences of the insistence of Irish drama on Irish masculinity which erases female involvement in political issues and women's rights. Whether drama is mimetic action, action in imitation or representation of human behaviour (ESSLIN, 1978, p. 14), an examination of the lives of real women may correct some misapprehensions in order to understand the forms in which feminine imagery is depicted on the Irish stage. Examining the reality of Irish women is not a simple task; in fact, the real history of Irish women is one of the controversial issues of the twentieth century. The face of the Irish woman has varied according to some factors, such as for example, the sphere of society in which she is located:

Her public face is that of wife and mother, enshrined in the 1937 Constitution as guardian of public morals and repository of the State's regard for family life. Her private face is that of one who has been awarded no place at the conference tables and who, increasingly, knows she has been hidden from history. Her absence from the centres of political power in the country, and her tangible presence in the business life of the island at once conceal and reveal her strength. (MAC CURTAIN, 1979, preface).

This mixed social standing may be noticed throughout the course of Irish history since early times. In the sixth and early seventh centuries, since early Ireland's legal and political life was governed by men, women obviously did not exercise any legal rights:

When a woman is young, she is under the authority of her father; when married, under the authority of her husband; when she is old (and her husband is dead), she is under the authority of her sons; if she is a spinster or a widow without sons, she is under the authority of the head of her family, usually her brother. And, of course, if she is a nun, she is under the authority of the church. (MAC CURTAIN, 1979, p. 1).

However, curiously, in the course of a short period of time, women's situation was made equal to men's in many aspects, conferring on them a high social status in real life and literature. There is evidence that, in early Irish society, women held an influential position and had a great deal of freedom; they enjoyed advantages which were not shared by women in other cultures.³² This female prominence has been attributed to

³² Margaret Mac Curtain and Donncha Ó Corráin develop this point more thoroughly in *Women in Irish Society* (1979).

Ireland's Celtic heritage which seemed to concede extensive rights to women. For example, there were women who influenced the political activities of their husbands. It is suggested that women had some influence on Irish society up until the end of the middle ages. The Norman invasion, in the medieval period, and English colonisation, in the early seventeenth century, are factors pointed out as the cause of breaking Ireland's continuity with its Gaelic traditions, including its attitudes to women and their position in society.

The weakening of women's role in Ireland was particularly noticeable under English settlement:

The conquest and plantations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries transformed the political, social and economic structure of Irish society. From then until the great famine of the mid-nineteenth century there are only three general statements which can with any confidence be made concerning the role of women in that society. Firstly, they were totally without formal political rights; secondly, their property and inheritance rights both within and outside of marriage were now governed by English common law, and thirdly, theirs was a subject and subsidiary role to the male, and it was performed, for the most part within a domestic context. These three generalizations apart, there was a great variety in the roles actually performed by women in the social and economic life of the period. Though often related to residual cultural differences between planter and Gael, the nature and importance of these varying roles was, above all else, a function of class. (Ó TUATHAIGH, 1979, p. 26).

Despite this weakening of the female image, Ó Tuathaigh indicates a change in this situation after the Famine; although economic circumstances made Ireland increasingly male dominated in this period, the situation of women would change again:

The famine and post-famine emigration was a further catalyst of change in social attitudes towards the role of women in Irish life. Seeds, however, take time to germinate. And it was to take further years, indeed decades, of disappointment and frustration before the subject, subsidiary and restricted role of women as it obtained under the English order came under sustained attack from the daughters of the revolution. (1979, p. 35).

In the nineteenth century, the consciousness of women's rights increased and some advances were made. Particularly, the second half of the century was the period when Irish women were most influential, but still only a few of them took a prominent part in social and political issues. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Ireland's

literary and cultural life was effervescent and women played a significant role, also in the military sphere. Feminist associations at this time joined other organisations, such as Labour movements. In 1911, Jim Larkin's sister, Delia Larkin, and Helena Molony founded the Irish Women Workers Union, with the aim of focusing on the conditions of women workers. Also at this time, Cumann na mBan began to participate more intensely in war issues. Many women were ready to do any sort of work in the Rising, even if they were unaware of when it would start:

There were women on the Cumann na mBan committee who were suffragists; others of different opinions, but so urgent, so important was the work of the Volunteers, that we could not afford to divide. Everything was put aside and we were ready to do what we were told: carry messages, give first aid, make meals, in short any work... we knew that there would be a Rising, what time, where, how? We would know when the time was ripe and we left it to the leaders. When the time came it was, however, without my foreknowledge. (DUFFY, 1967, p. 90).

There were three branches of Cumann participating in the Rising with headquarters in Dublin, and, although they were more involved in rendering support to male fighters, there are examples of women who took a more militaristic part in the national cause, like, Countess Markievicz whose energy, according to Lady Gregory, found a better scope when engaged with the Labour Movement, and then became more violent when participating in the Rising (ROBINSON, 1946, p. 238). It was not only the sentiments of Irish women that were changed by the insurgency of 1916, but these events effectively radicalised their role, transforming them into daughters of the revolution. In many respects it was a victory, but since during the Rising, they played different roles, from fighters to cooks, they were left deeply divided about their ultimate role in the nation's destiny. This range of identities, an intrinsic component of their Celtic inheritance, when intermixed with nationalistic context, contributed to a still more changeable female identity.

As in real life, the world of drama was not limited to a singular dramatisation of female roles. The real history of Irish women required their non-homogenised representation on stage. Controversially, many dramatisations of the Rising discarded the aspects of the insurrection that had been associated with female suffrage, portraying, instead, a wearying familiar post-colonial framework which promotes the idea of a conservative family as an inherent part of being Irish, nationalist and patriotic

(MORAN, 2005, p. 7). However, playwrights who took a more realistic look at the effects of nationalism on female identity did not follow the tradition of placing women in passive and unthreatening roles. But, even among those playwrights who approached the gender question in the Rising, there are variations in the way these subversive female characters were depicted on stage.

4.1 Women in Control

An analysis of *The Plough and the Stars* and *The Patriot Game* reveals that the conflicting reality of Irish women and the controversial aspects of Irish nationalism did not escape the attention of O'Casey and Murphy. O'Toole (1994, p. 37) points out that they were the only two playwrights who in fact produced such revisionist works, and that "Irish theatre before Murphy, with the exception of O'Casey, assumes a single unified society, in line with nationalistic ideology". The playwrights agree on the question of gender for they both emphasise the depiction of powerful women who played controversial roles. In both plays, the female characters are set against the imposition of national culture. But a closer comparative assessment of the two plays suggests that, although the two playwrights address the feminine question in their plays, they do so from different perspectives. O'Casey dramatised the national tragedy as he saw it, focusing on the non-participants in the Rising and their natural relationships, instead of on the mythologised romantic imagery of nationhood. Murphy, in turn, used strategic female characters to express feelings in language which interrogates what is recorded in the historical narrative and which reflects the author's attitudes towards the illusions and imaginary conceptions promoted by cultural systems.

The Plough and the Stars is an attack on the ideology of republicanism, given that O'Casey, through his own fresh vision of the insurrection, worked in accordance with the pressure of his own convictions (MURRAY, 2000a, p. 96). For him, Irishness was the Irish spirit and the Irish characteristics Irish people naturally carry wherever they may go, not an imagined identity constructed according to Irish political interests. One of the main emphases of the play is ordinary women and the difficult life they had in the tenements, a place also reached by Irish nationalism. O'Casey overturns the idealistic masculinity associated with the Rising and the idea that bloodshed was the only brave way to complete the course of national self-definition. To a certain extent, *The Plough and the Stars* opens the possibility for theatregoers to learn more about

women from a different social class, the poor who lived in the tenements, who were largely erased from the traditional, predominantly male-based, historical narrative. O'Casey "was the first English-speaking dramatist to make the poor, the uneducated and the dispossessed the subjects of modern tragicomedy" (MURRAY, 2000a, p. 88). The representation of these female subjects on stage allows a form of revisionism of the condition in which they lived. O'Casey played an important role in Irish drama and history when he depicted these forgotten feminine figures. According to Ó Tuathaigh (1979, p. 29), "The role of women as wives and mothers, their domesticity, indeed the very concept of the family as a sociological unit in the Ireland of these centuries, are matters about which we are relatively ignorant". The records and Irish demographic data about these women are not sufficient to state with certainty anything about their reality. The evidence which exists is largely impressionistic.

But, as the historical narrative confirms, an inherently domestic image has been always associated with Irish women. Such a fact supports the realistic aspect of O'Casey's characters since they were fundamentally wives and mothers, such as the female characters of *The Plough and the Stars*, Nora, Mrs Gogan and Bessie Burgess. But O'Casey's images of them are not passive wives and mothers. Murray (2000a, p. 88) argues that O'Casey was the playwright who most powerfully dramatised the birth of the nation through his great range of vivid and original female and male characters. Every one of his feminine representations appears as a powerful character; much of the action happens due to their mood, temper and behaviour. O'Casey's depiction of the Rising is "gendered in favour of women. Like Shaw, O'Casey represented women in his plays as agents of 'the Life Force'. Women are elected to heroic status while men stand condemned of various forms of folly" (MURRAY, 2000a, p. 96). With the exception of Jack's decision to leave home and fully engage with the nationalistic cause, which provokes considerable changes in Nora's behaviour and subsequently in the other characters, the play mainly develops and is controlled through the action of the feminine figures. In the opening scene, Fluther Good is repairing the lock of a door and Peter Flynn is sitting by the fire, airing a white shirt, both in silence; it is Mrs Gogan who, from outside, utters the first lines of the play, expressing an inflamed curiosity about a parcel which someone is trying to deliver at Nora's room. Fluther Good begins a conversation with her after hearing her comments on Nora's personality and lifestyle. Still in Act One, when Nora is talking to Fluther Good, while she checks the door he has just finished repairing, Bessie Burgess appears and, looking scornfully and viciously at

her, says: “Puttin’ a new lock on her door... afraid her poor neighbours ud break through an’ steal... (*In a loud tone*) Maybe, now, they’re a dam sight more honest than your ladyship... checkin’ th’ children playin’ on th’ stairs... gettin’ on th’ nerves of your ladyship...” (O’CASEY, 2000, p. 167). Her aggressive attitude gives rise to a fight between her and Nora. Act Two starts in a pub with a conversation between the Barman and Rosie, a prostitute who is present on stage throughout the act and controls much of the action. At one moment, when the Covey enters the pub, after attending the meeting which is taking place outside, Rosie approaches him, pretending to the Barman that he offered her a drink. She tries to seduce him and, realising she will not be successful, she invests in the attempt to seduce Fluther Good, which ends up with them leaving the pub drunk and with their arms round each other. In the meantime inside the pub, further action is provoked by a female character, but this time it is between Mrs Gogan and Bessie Burgess. A fracas among a group of people is fueled by the exchange of expletives between them. Everyone is involved when the two women start a fight and one of them, Mrs Gogan, forgets her baby in the pub.

As a wife, Nora is, initially, the most influential and powerful female figure, since she controls her house and the people around her, until she is defeated by Irish nationalism. Ó Tuathaigh says that, in the period when English laws prevailed in Ireland, “Whatever the law or the norm might be, there were in the Ireland of these years, as in other countries and at other times, women who by temperament and force of character assumed the dominant role within the household” (1979, p. 29). It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that Nora was a fictional example of the real-life women who assumed the control in the group of people in which they lived. Her first appearance in the play indicates her dominance as a kind of guardian of the family’s order. Her first lines and action are an attempt to end an argument between Uncle Peter and the Covey: “[...] (running in and pushing Peter away from the door) Oh, can I not turn me back but th’ two o’ yours are at it like a pair o’ fightin’ cocks! Uncle Peter... Uncle Peter... UNCLE PETER!” In this scene, Nora worries about the respectability of her house and asks them if she is going to have to nurse them all the time (O’CASEY, 2000, p. 164-165). At another moment, Nora plays the role of family caretaker and again has to take her relatives to task. Jack is present, but he says nothing:

Nora (*calling*) Uncle Peter, now, Uncle Peter; tea’s ready.
[...]

The Covey (*provokingly*) Another cut o' bread, Uncle Peter?

Peter maintains a dignified silence.

Clitheroe It's sure to be a great meetin' tonight. We ought to go, Nora.

Nora (*decisively*) I won't go, Jack; you can go if you wish.

A pause.

The Covey D'ye want th' sugar, Uncle Peter?

Peter (*explosively*) Now, are you goin' to start your thryin' an' your twartin' again?

Nora Now, Uncle Peter, you mustn't be so touchy; Willie has only assed you if you wanted th' sugar.

Peter He doesn't care a dam whether I want th' sugar or no. He's only thryin' to thwart me!

Nora (*angrily, to the Covey*) Can't you let him alone, Willie? If he wants the sugar, let him stretch his hand out an' get it himself. (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 169).

In real life, Irish women also assumed prominence in the family realm because, since nationalism resulted in death of many family leaders, they were caught up in the responsibility of taking care of the family and earning a livelihood. However, Nora does not stand out from the rest because she is a good mother, a good housewife or because she assumes Jack's role as the provider in the family; she attracts the attention of everyone because of her feminine attributes, beauty, vanity, pride and determination, or, as O'Casey writes: "When the firmness fails her, she persuades with her feminine charm" (2000, p. 164). Nora has no heroic aspirations or involvement in the political sphere like her husband, but she represents, at least initially, a strong influence on Jack's life and even manages things to prevent him from knowing that he had been appointed Commandant. Mac Curtain argues that, on the political level,

[...] women never inherited political power as such and never governed as independent sovereigns or rulers, though, of course, strong-minded women had a powerful influence on the political activities of their husband. Indeed, Medb, in the saga, Táin Bó Cúailgne is the archetypal strong woman – determined, domineering and wanton – and we need not doubt that there were many like her in real life. (1979, p. 10).

Of course, Nora does not contribute to Jack's political activities, but she is determined, domineering and wanton, in the way her role, mainly in Act One, is literally a battle against Irish nationalism, which, sadly, she loses at the end, losing her mind and her unborn baby. By contrast, the characterisation of her husband undermines his image. "Jack Clitheroe is nominally the hero of *The Plough and the Stars*. But as he has only six lines in Act II, twenty-six in Act III, and none at all in Act IV, one is entitled to regard him as somewhat less important dramatically than" the main three female characters (MURRAY, 2000a, p. 96). His unheroic end in Act IV happens miserably and meaninglessly. A brave and heroic death was one of the only honours nationalism was supposed to confer on wives who lost their husbands to the cause of freedom, as Capt. Brennan states when he is telling Bessie about Jack's death in an idealised nationalistic version:

Capt. Brennan I took me chance as well as him... He took it like a man. His last whisper was to 'Tell Nora to be brave; that I'm ready to meet my God, an' that I'm proud to die for Ireland.' An' when our General heard it he said that 'Commandant Clitheroe's end was a gleam of glory'. Mrs Clitheroe's grief will be a joy when she realizes that she has a hero for a husband. (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 230-1).

Even here, Nora's role is subversive, because when Jack dies she is already out of her mind and in no rational condition to express any sentiments about his death. She loses her personal battle against nationalism, but there is not any moment in the play in which her attitudes confirm the nationalistic rhetoric. In this sense, although Nora loses control of the overall situation throughout the story, she remains with a certain level of power for she carries an antagonistic image towards national culture until the very end of the play.

In this regard, *The Patriot Game* also depicts a powerful female figure who plays a fundamental role, the Narrator. As Moran states, "this time the central witness is a woman" (2005, p. 121), and she has a certain level of control of the play, since she is the one who retells the story of the Rising. Richards comments on the importance of Murphy's narrator saying that, "Crucially, he uses a Narrator who is a physical presence not simply a voice-over [...] Murphy provides audiences with a narrative voice which is embodied, drawing audiences into a relationship with the Narrator's experience [...]" (2015, p. 42-3). Although there is not much information about her personality and

behaviour, already at the beginning, we are informed that “she tries to affect a detached superiority” (MURPHY, 1992, p. 93). While O’Casey created feminine figures full of characterisation, very probably similar to the women he knew from his experience of daily life in the tenements, Murphy, who had no contact with the actual Rising, created less realistic female characters. But, though the audience is not informed of her name, her educational background nor her social status, she still represents a powerful image because she reveals her disdainful attitude towards the national aspirations as she tells the story. Clearly, choosing a woman to be the Narrator was not a random decision. Murphy was free to choose the narrator’s gender, but, while the narrative of the insurrection has been retold mainly from a masculine perspective, focusing on male roles and blurring female participation, Murphy’s choice reveals a critical look at the male-centred versions of the Rising.

Unlike O’Casey’s characters, the Narrator of *The Patriot Game* does not have any close bonds with the other characters and, at least initially, she tries to keep herself distant from them. However, Murphy indicates her feelings about Pearse, which may be a form of bringing them close, saying that “She is wary of PEARSE, both frightened and fascinated by him”, and adds that, offstage, Pearse could be her boyfriend or brother (MURPHY, 1992, p. 93). In the first scenes, although she clearly demonstrates her feelings on nationalism, she plays mainly the formal role of telling the story; she does not interact with the other characters. She controls the narrative in the way she conducts the story and also provides the background of the leaders of the insurrection as well as other historical facts. It is she who opens and closes the scenes, generally, inserting a negative tone in her talk.

Although “she is determined to keep control of herself; she loses her resolve every now and again” (MURPHY, 1992, p. 93). Thus, as the play unfolds, the Narrator cannot maintain herself completely indifferent to the other characters, she gets involved with the story and interacts with them. In Scene Eighteen, she asks them: “So what’ll ye do, lads?” When Clarke answers that they will fight because England had no right to be in Ireland, she says indignantly: “With your few numbers? – For Jesus’ sake!” and adds that “It’s suicide!” (MURPHY, 1992, p. 128). At a certain moment the rebels even ignore her as she interferes in their talk. At the end of the same scene, Clarke speaks directly to her and at this moment she realises she is losing the control she had at the beginning:

CLARKE Tell any of them ye're unsure of, it's manoeuvres. (Directly to NARRATOR.) England should not be here. (And leaves following the others.)

NARRATOR I hate nationalism! (*To herself.*) England has no right to be here. I hate the English. No. I am honest and in control. I hate nationalism. It doesn't exist. I love life. Heigh-ho! And I'm not getting involved. (*Coming out of reverie.*) What? – Yes – Howandever. What the English were doing that Easter Sunday morning. (MURPHY, 1992, p. 129).

Similarly to Nora in *The Plough and the Stars*, the Narrator also fights a personal battle against Irish nationalistic ideology. It is confirmed not only because she openly states she hates nationalism, but also through her attitudes towards Pearse, as he is the figure who most thoroughly embodies the national culture. If she is “both frightened and fascinated by him”, she tries not to let this appear in any way; on the contrary, she demonstrates a certain disdain for this character, suggesting a judgement on the historical importance attributed to him. In Scene One, as he is leaving the stage after having danced wildly to a distorted version of ‘*God Save the King*’, she watches everything and says: “Stupid!” and, in a dismissive tone, starts telling the story and names it “The Disgraceful Story of 1916” (MURPHY, 1992, p. 93). Throughout the play, she continues referring to him sarcastically, discrediting his reputation:

PEARSE I care not if my life have only the span of a day and a night if my deeds be spoken of by the men of Ireland.

NARRATOR Oh yes, and he swore on bended knees at the age of twelve – or was it six? – or was it three? With his little brother Willie that he'd give his life to free Ireland [...] Oh and some said he could easily be a saint – Oh but they said too he'd never make a fist of anything because – though, yes, a poet sure – he was a lawyer too that didn't practice because he was an idealist – a schoolmaster too, but wasn't the school he founded up to its eyes in debt? – wasn't the girl he was to marry drowned? – and sometimes, to look at him, you wouldn't think he was of this world at all. [...]. (MURPHY, 1992, p. 98).

Her attempt at superiority is also evident here. It seems she is in a dispute with Pearse throughout the play. At the end of Scene Twenty-Three, she celebrates and “does a little dance in celebration of their defeat, her victory” (MURPHY, 1992, p. 146). In the next scene Pearse appears with a white handkerchief of surrender. The Rebel's defeat is Narrator's victory. According to O'Toole, the dissolution of an ideology, which seems

to explain and unify the world. forms a sort of subtext for Murphy's greatest plays and it is surprising how he seeks truth through the outsiders, through those who are most firmly excluded from that public language of ideas and values (1994, p. 182). In *The Patriot Game*, the Narrator, the only character excluded from the original Easter Rising, plays the outsider as she represents the contemporary history of Ireland and provokes a breakdown of language, shared beliefs and values.

On the other hand, the end of the play suggests a paradox. After the execution of the seven leaders, there is an interesting interchange between the Narrator and Pearse:

NARRATOR UP THE REPUBLIC!

PEARSE ... And you were only playing the narrator.

The REBELS move off. PEARSE waits by the exit for the NARRATOR.

[...]

PEARSE Come on. Come on home. (MURPHY, 1992, p. 149).

Scholars who have compared *The Patriot Game* with *The Plough and the Stars* agree that the plays deal differently with Irish national culture. There is the common opinion that, although both plays reassess the Easter Rising and its consequences, O'Casey's criticism appears to be sharper than Murphy's. Murphy had contact with O'Casey's work at the beginning of his career as dramatist. When he was still a metalwork teacher he joined the Theatre Guild and acted in plays written by O'Casey. For Moran, "Like so many dramatists, Murphy took his cue from Sean O'Casey but avoided any slavish adherence to the political message of *The Plough and the Stars*" (2005, p. 122). Alexandra Poulain (2006), arguing that *The Patriot Game* is a response to *The Plough and the Stars*, suggests that Murphy cancels the irony of O'Casey's anti-nationalistic finale through a healing end. Shaun Richards (2015), based on a comparison between the television and stage versions of *The Patriot Game*, suggests that Pearse's final words prove the Narrator's redemption. But, while Poulain suggests a more balanced comparison between the two plays, Richards points out that,

The difference between Hynes's Pearse and Murphy's could not be more striking; the one a demagogue who ignores the plight of the poor, the other a sympathetic voice who welcomes the Narrator 'home' to the version of history which the Hynes production sets out the critique. (2015, p.49).

Richards' point of view indicates that *The Patriot Game* approaches national culture positively, arguing that, although the Narrator retains her uninvolved emotionless cynicism until the end, this initial detachment is diminished by her defiant 'UP THE REPUBLIC' and also by her reaction when invited by Pearse to come home, which according to Richards, is an attitude of acceptance as is made clear in the 1991 revised version of the play. However, it is interesting to see that, just before shouting these words and accepting Pearse's invitation, the Narrator's lines draw the audience's attention to the consequences of the Rising:

NARRATOR (speaking over the above). No, no, we are in control. We do – not *hate* anyone – We *hate* nationalism! Look at the destruction, the damage was caused – Look at the windows, the burnt buildings! – Five-hundred people *dead*, two-thousand five-hundred people maimed – hurt – wounded – three-hundred civilians dead![...]. (MURPHY, 1992, p. 148-149).

This passage seems to assist with the interpretation of this final scene. The italicised words suggest the crucial aspect the Narrator is trying to point out about Irish nationalism. The object of hatred is not the people involved in the cause of Ireland's freedom, nor Ireland, her 'home', but she hates nationalism in the sense that it causes destruction, damage and, above all, death. She says, "we do not *hate* anyone"; she does not even hate Pearse, or any other rebel, in fact, as was indicated, she accepts his invitation to go 'home'. It is interesting that she states that she does not bear bitterness towards people precisely when the rebel leaders are being executed, which suggests disapproval of the English reaction. While O'Casey's work does not make any clear mention of the leaders, nor of their execution, and looks with dismay at the idea of death for a glorious cause, *The Patriot Game* is a traditional review of 1916 since it remembers the executions and supports the traditional view that the insurgents did not deserve such a cruel treatment by the English. Moran points out another aspect which indicates that Murphy followed the traditional view of the leaders' martyrdom.

Whereas in O'Casey's play Pádraic Pearse the orator was a peripheral figure, in *The Patriot Game* he delivers his speeches from the middle of the stage. If O'Casey had allowed Pearse to speak only from the gory ending of the panegyric to O'Donovan Rossa, then, by contrast, Murphy was intent on presenting a version of Pearse who speaks extensively from this graveside oration. Murphy felt *The Plough and the Stars* gave undue attention to Pearse's bloodlust, and wanted to show that this formed only a part of a more reasoned political philosophy. (MORAN, 2005, p. 122).

The way Murphy approaches the Irishmen involved in the Easter Rising disconnects from O'Casey's denigration of them. Nevertheless, the central figure in *The Patriot Game* does not permit us to forget the tragic consequences of the insurrection; her role throughout the play is unquestionable evidence that the play does not support the form in which nationalism was being conducted in Ireland in 1916. In this aspect, therefore, the play follows *The Plough and the Stars* and assumes the important function of reassessing the nationalistic discourse.

4.2 Maternal Image

Alongside the imagery of dominant wife/woman, is the imagery of motherhood. Maternal duties have been associated with Irish women for a long time, "[...] from the seventeenth century onwards women's property rights were governed by English Common Law, and that their primary role was as wives and mothers", even though some of them were no good about the house (Ó TUATHAIGH, 1979, p. 29). O'Casey and Murphy both depicted mothers in their plays. Both playwrights are critical, but from different perspectives. Their plays provide contexts which permit us to analyse the maternal imagery and through the depiction of these maternal roles, both dramatists produced subversive female images which seek to dethrone the imagined behaviour of the mothers who lived through the Easter Rising, especially "showing that the Irish mother does not necessarily and unreservedly push her sons to die for Ireland" (MORAN, 2005, p. 122). Mrs Gogan and Bessie Burgess, from *The Plough and the Stars*, and Margaret Pearse, from *The Patriot Game*, will be the three mother figures analysed here in order to compare how each playwright addressed the conception of motherhood in their works.

Both of O'Casey's characters deny the traditional maternal role imposed by the nation builders of 1916. Whereas the national discourse projected the mother's stereotype as being calm, passive, dedicated, submissive, responsible for the care of her children, destined to domesticity and indoor activities, Mrs Gogan, a Catholic busybody, and Bessie Burgess, a Protestant drunk, play roles whose behaviour does not match these characteristics. Although they are a fictional representation, they were represented as real women, and not mythical ones, since much of what they lived on stage could be found among the women who lived in the tenements. Through the image

of these characters it becomes evident that the national project for Irish women was not consistent with the reality in which they lived. The mothers of *The Plough and the Stars* are fierce and vivid characters; they fight with each other, go to pubs and drink with men.

With regard to their awe of the national spirit, Bessie and Gogan are divergent. Mrs Gogan is visibly caught up in the nationalistic ideals, especially the green uniform of the Irish Foresters, and her womanly comments return to the sacrificial death for Ireland and Cathleen ní Houlihan (THOMPSON, 1982, p. 215). But her patriotic fervour is undercut by futile comments. Leaving the meeting and entering the pub, she says: "The Foresters' is a gorgeous dhress! I don't think I've seen nicer, mind you, in a pantomime.... Th' loveliest part of th' dhress, I think, is th' osth richness plume" (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 188). She adheres to the cause of Irish nationalism frivolously. It seems that everything Mrs Gogan thinks and comments on the cause of Ireland's freedom, she learnt from someone or just heard someone saying; she herself does not seem to hold realistic convictions. For example, while the insurgents themselves were aware of the risks associated with fighting for Ireland's independence and, some of them were even afraid to fight; Mrs Gogan denies this realistic aspect of the Rising and thinks the men are all brave to die for Ireland. Additionally to fantasise about the insurrection, when the maternal role is concerned, Mrs Gogan's representation of mother challenges the idealised maternal stereotype promoted by the nationalistic rhetoric. She is visibly not a typical mother who stays at home and takes care of her children, the maternal image supported by the Irish new state politics. In fact, Mollser, the oldest one, is almost dying and the other, still a baby, is forgotten in a pub. Mrs Gogan dedicates most of the time she should spend with her children being curious about everything which has nothing to do with her. Mrs Gogan is caught up in the feelings nationalism created, but her real attitudes as mother do not correspond to them.

Bessie Burgess, in turn, is O'Casey's maternal figure who openly speaks against the nationalistic ideology; however, her boorish behaviour also subverts the image of Irish traditional mother. She denies the traditional female stereotype already on her first appearance, portraying characteristics nearer to masculinity than to femininity, "her face is a dogged one, hardened by toil, and a little coarsened by drink"; she also screams at Nora and acts with strong physical force, "Nora tries to shut the door, but Bessie violently shoves it in, and, gripping Nora by the shoulders, shakes her" (O'CASEY,

2000, p. 167). But, ironically, it is Bessie that questions Mrs Gogan's behaviour. In Act Two, when they are in the pub, referring to Mrs Gogan, she says:

To look at some o' th' women that's knockin' about, now, is a thing to make a body sigh.... A woman on her own, dhrinkin' with a bevy o' men, is hardly an example to her sex....A woman dhrinkin' with a woman is one thing, an' a woman dhrinkin' with herself is still a woman – flappers may be put in another category altogether – but a middle-aged married woman makin' herself th' centre of a circle of men is as a woman that is loud an' stubborn, whose feet abideth not in her own house. (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 190).

Bessie contrasts the image of an exemplary woman with Mrs Gogan's imprudence in going to a pub and drinking in a circle of men, and one thing Bessie does not mention but the audience knows is that Mrs Gogan has her baby with her. Here, her unreasonable behaviour as a woman is also transferred to her role as mother.

Bessie's son has enlisted in the English army and is fighting in the trenches. However, she does not fantasise with the idea she has a brave son who is ready to die for his country; on the contrary, this fact deeply angers her:

There's a storm of anger tossin' in me heart, thinkin' of all th' poor Tommies, an' with them me own son, dhrenched in water an' soaked in blood, gropin' their way to a shatterin' death, in a shower o' shells! Young men with th' sunny lust o' life beamin' in them, layin' down with their bodies, shredded into a torn an' bloody pieces, on th' althar that God Himself has built for th' sacrifice of heroes! (O'CASEY, 2000, p. 189-90).

In this aspect, her image subverts Irish nationalist rhetoric more profoundly than Mrs Gogan. Her non-traditional rude behaviour is not the only thing which speaks against the national discourse: Bessie does not hold patriotic aspirations and expresses substantive arguments about that. She is the representation of real women who confronted the mythical idealism of Ireland's freedom, caring more for the lives of people. Like Nora, she is another of O'Casey's characters who fights a personal battle against nationalism; which becomes more evident from Act Two when she speaks of her own son. In the following acts, she becomes Nora's protector, the only person who cares about her condition. Particularly, at the end of Act Three an inversion occurs in Bessie's role, she clearly assumes the image of a heroine when she goes out to find a doctor in the midst of the shooting. For Thompson, this inversion in her character, from a kind of villain into a heroine, at a time of suffering, is a revelation of humanity and

compassion, and it is this human attitude which becomes the central value of the play (1982, p. 220). Although she is killed in the end, which means she is a failure against the consequences of nationalism, it is not the fight which makes her a heroine, she wins through her compassion and, in this sense, her death takes on a heroic perspective. She cares more about Nora than Jack does; in doing so, she portrays the true image of a hero, she is brave like a soldier must be, but her heart holds humanity. Bessie's death at the end of the play may be seen from the perspective that O'Casey praises suffering humanity, and among its representatives are Juno, in *Juno and The Peacock*, his own mother, in the *Autobiographies*, and Bessie, in *The Plough and the Stars*. The suffering women he presents in his plays fight and even die for compassion. O'Casey shows himself to be more concerned with these women who cared for the civilians who suffered because of dreams of transcendental glory than with the soldiers who went out to fight for an illusion (THOMPSON, 1982, p. 223).

With regard to motherhood, a female character of *The Patriot Game* deserves particular attention because she is the representation of an important historical woman, Margaret Pearse. For Moran, "*The Patriot Game* does follow *The Plough and the Stars* in abjuring sycophantic praise for Pádraic Pearse's mother" (2005, p. 122). Moreover, the explicit depiction of a recognised historical figure seems to be more powerful at reassessing imageries. While O'Casey uses an obscure figure intended to indicate Pearse's presence, in order to challenge the traditional nationalistic concept of sacrifice, Murphy openly uses the representation of mother and son talking about their feelings with regard to this. Such a re-enactment provides the audience with an immediate comparison between the real people they know through the historical records and the characters they see on stage. In the case of *The Patriot Game*, the comparison reveals a contradiction between the attitudes of the fictional characters and what they know about the real Patrick Pearse and his mother.

According to historical records, the real-life Margaret Pearse was the most important emblem of motherhood and she herself relished in the role of sacrificial woman, thus becoming the Easter Rising's most celebrated incarnation of the sacrificial mother (MORAN, 2005, p. 42). Pearse's mother proudly evoked her son's love for Ireland, associating it with his love for her. After Pearse's death, she went even further by interfering in the way he was being depicted in theatre, "she wanted her son to be depicted with a vivid face, and was horrified to find the Abbey's portrayal of him as a grey and gloomy figure" (MORAN, 2005, p. 48). In 1932, when she died, aged 75,

newspapers devoted pages to her funeral, also to her life and her sons, reiterating the nationalist rhetoric and her iconography as a role model for all Irish mothers. Fitting de Valera's dream and the national ideal of Irish womanhood, "Mrs. Pearse served as a useful national symbol by raising her to the level of national emblem of motherhood, national mother or Mother Ireland, de Valera emphasised the national importance of motherhood, a motherhood that was stoic and patient and self-sacrificial" (THAPAR-BJORKERT; RYAN, 2002, p. 308).

Murphy's version of Margaret Pearse refutes the national symbols of mothering, primarily as mother of the nation and, then, as a sacrificial mother who encourages her son to die for nationalism, since it does not envisage the image of the real Pearse's mother; on the contrary, she is Murphy's antagonist towards the image Margaret Pearse herself enjoyed. Whilst Murphy's portrait of a mother seems to be a weaker one in comparison with O'Casey's mothers, due to her short appearance on stage and her lack of characterisation, this feminine figure becomes powerful for it reproduces and, at the same time, challenges a historical female image and tries to subvert the way this woman has been remembered throughout Irish history.

Another point in common between Murphy and O'Casey concerning maternal imagery is that his Margaret Pearse shares the same humanity portrayed in Bessie Burgess. In *The Patriot Game*, Mrs. Pearse's concern is with the security and emotional state of her sons, when she says clearly that she is afraid, sad and dubious about her son's destiny. This capacity for deep human feelings attributed to her image confers on the character the suffering humanity praised by O'Casey in his heroines. This human Margaret Pearse has nothing to do with the dehumanised and political imagery of the real one. In this sense, Murphy leads the audience to possibly question whether the real Pearse's mother could have controlled her nature as a mother so ruthlessly and not suffered with the death of her sons.

When we compare *The Patriot Game* and *The Plough and the Stars*, despite the very different contexts and perspectives, it is possible to see some similar patterns of female behaviour. In both works the feminine figures, as wives or mothers, play controversial roles when compared to the traditional female stereotype raised in the nationalistic context of 1916. Through these characters, who perform key roles, O'Casey and Murphy do not only address the problematic impact of the national culture on Irish identity in general, but they also juxtapose gender questions and the idealism of nationalist Ireland. They approach feminism in their not only because they are amongst

the few playwrights who portrayed female images in their version of the Easter Rising, but also because they went even further by constructing them as powerful individuals, according to their experience and view of the Rising. The playwrights do not necessarily agree on every aspect of Irish nationalism, but the most important contribution they leave to Irish drama and society is the opportunity to see and understand the different shapes of Irish female identity.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

*And the battle's just begun
There's many lost
But tell me who has won?
The trenches dug within our hearts
And mothers, children, brothers, sisters torn apart
[...]
How long?
How long must we sing this song?*

David Howell Evans, *Sunday Bloody Sunday*

People experience national culture in different ways, according to where they live, their position in society, their religion and gender. The connection between nationalistic movements and female imagery exists since nationalist symbolism and rhetoric configure and incorporate women, and it was no different for Irish nationalism and its well elaborated discourse. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Irish national culture created forms of fostering the nationalistic spirit among people through the spread of national symbols. The idea of Irishness was widely promoted, a kind of identity which men and women should perform in order to express their love and support for Ireland. Particularly for women, assuming their Irishness mostly represented a conflicting condition, largely silent and unquestioning. A few of them, however, challenged this repressive role, which was seen even by the radical thinkers as “an attempt by wives and daughters to break free of the constricting images of the female devised by men, and devised as often by men of national resistance movements as by men of the occupying power” (KIBERD, 1996, p. 395). On the other hand, these women could not completely avoid their involvement with the national question, since it seemed illogical to fight for women’s freedom in an enslaved country.

Whether or not the Irish Republic was an imminent reality, the 1916 Easter Rising was the pivotal armed conflict which, despite its supposedly irrational character, produced the first visible glimpses of Ireland’s freedom. As one of the most intrinsic characteristics of Irish people is the necessity to reassess their past in order to map the future, the dialectical questions of the Rising have often been revisited and, in many cases, this has been done on Irish stages. In fact, the insurrection has made itself an issue for the theatrical world since it occurred. Amongst the unresolved questions the Rising posed for Irish history, the gender question seems to be one of the most obscure yet. The predominance of masculine imagery almost occurs in tandem with the Rising

and has been a staple of Irish history, mysteriously erasing narratives about women in the era of revolution. Some playwrights have seen the Rising in a male-heroic iconic approach, others have sought to elevate the leaders to saint-like positions to justify their politics, depicting women only as individuals of secondary importance, and still others have completely excluded the participation of women. Despite the prevailing male-centred versions of the events, women were part directly and indirectly of it, assuming the most varied roles. It can be said that during the Rising, Irish women equally distorted and confirmed national ideology.

However, a careful analysis of the twentieth-century dramatic versions reveals that Irish women have been represented through an immutable imagery when, in fact, their real identities held different shapes. The traditional dramatic versions of the Rising have mostly envisaged Irish women according to the dangerous rhetoric of nationalism, which simply portrays women in a subordinate capacity. But, as Margaret Mitchell stated, “The usual masculine disillusionment is discovering that a woman has a brain”. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to note that Sean O’Casey and Tom Murphy made a significant contribution in re-evaluating the traditional image of women in the nationalistic context of the Rising. Although during the Rising women’s involvement seems to challenge the historical narrative with a powerful female image, on account of their physical participation in the battlefield, the feminine representations in *The Plough and the Stars* and *The Patriot Game* are concerned with the ideological aspect of the insurrection. These characters challenge the roles Irish politics created for Irish women not by taking part in the Rising, but by questioning the immutable conceptions of the event.

A look at O’Casey’s personal and professional life indicated that the combination of his experiences between politics and the theatrical world influenced his conception and attitudes towards the nationalistic wave which had spread in Ireland, and likely affected the way he depicted Irish society on stage. When he perceived that Irish political efforts in establishing a free state would really benefit very few people, not solving the troubles and difficulties faced by the majority of the poor population, O’Casey dissociated himself from politics and dedicated himself to theatre full-time. From then on, O’Casey used the stage to depict this version of Ireland and the Irish people he knew, a group of people which politicians seemed to have forgotten. The analysis of *The Plough and the Stars* reveals much of O’Casey’s own experience in the tenements. The play’s portrayal of the daily life of Dublin slum families some months

before and during the Easter Rising provides a framework conducive to the inspection of the ordinary subject's behaviour inserted in the Irish nationalistic context; their experience of the imposed national identity, specially, the feminine identity. Through the characters Nora, Mrs Gogan and Bessie Burgess, O'Casey recalls the amorphous aspect of national culture and exposes some forms through which Irish nationalism affected Irish women. In addition, *The Plough and the Stars* is an appropriate example of Martin Esslin's description of *drama as collective experience* due to the turbulent reception in the play's first week. The audience's reaction in the theatre on the fourth night of performance proved that live drama may evoke strong emotions and, since the audience codifies in their minds what they are seeing, a collective experience is produced and, in the case of *The Plough and the Stars*, the collective reaction ended up in riots.

The focus on Murphy's life was, particularly, the relationship between his career as a playwright and some aspects of his early years in order to understand the process which led him to produce an experimental form of drama, aware of the illusions created and promoted by different forms of culture. Such an enquiry about the playwright's life provided the basis for the analysis of *The Patriot Game* as one of his few historical and political plays and showed why his own vision of Ireland enabled him to address the Rising differently, retelling it through a female character. When audiences see the play it is evident that a polemical event of Ireland's history is being addressed in a non-traditional way. Murphy's version of Pearse's mother emerges as one of the most revisionist moments of the play. Even though Margaret Pearse's character has a short participation, through her text, Murphy still manages to make her presence very significant. Through his female characters Murphy contributed to a reassessment of the insurrection in Irish collective memory for he did not forget to include female feelings, challenging the way people have associated womanhood with this historical event. Bearing all this in mind, it is evident that, although Murphy follows some traditional points in his review of the Rising, he exposes the disillusionment Irish nationalism caused for the Irish people due to its paradoxical aspect and its tragic consequences.

Through the comparison of these two dramatic texts it was possible to go beyond nationalist behavioural patterns, promulgated by its well-elaborated rhetoric, and to assess the ways in which women experienced the nationalist campaign of 1916. Moreover, comparing the two plays made it possible to see similarities and contradictions in patterns of gendered behaviour. In this sense, the Easter Rising and its

link with the gender question seems to be far from being resolved and it opens an ample range for research into the topic. For example, as with Irish women, men were also under pressure to assume traditional roles, which meant adhering to or refusing to fight for Ireland's freedom. Although the historical and literary records of Ireland's independence process insist on a single imagery, of brave and heroic men, a careful research into the real daily life of these men reveals deep contradictions. Contributing to the promotion of this fixed national male stereotype, Irish drama has equally corresponded to nationalistic purposes by mostly depicting men as national heroes and as those principally responsible for saving Ireland from cruel English domination, as an overview of Irish drama of the first half of the twentieth-century may indicate. But, it is interesting to consider that, like female identity, male identity can assume different shapes, and it is hardly likely to insist in a single male version whose behaviour was transformed into a heroic one by the Irish programme of cultural nationalism. As happened to the female imagery, the powerful influence of Irish theatre might have contributed to promote a false idea of superior manhood.

Another aspect which seems to require further examination is that of female imagery and its connection with Irish New State politics, but with a focus on the women who represented powerful images, not only ideologically, but also physically and with regard to social status. The Irish revolutionary period transformed social and familial reality, producing alternative roles and different models of human organisation. Particularly in the realm of the family it represented a free zone where people could be themselves, and many of the women in such families assumed equality with men as a natural right (KIBERD, 1996, p. 395). In fact, with regard to the structure of the family, throughout history, Irish women have been recognised as fundamental subjects for bringing order and even providing sustenance. For Peter O'Toole, "Irish women are always carrying water on their heads, and always carrying their husbands home from pubs. Such things are the greatest posture-builders in the world". Moreover, these women participated directly in the revolution, assuming important political positions, taking arms, helping men under risk of life. Such unexpected female experience challenges the nationalistic rhetoric, because it seems that these women reappropriated the symbols of nationalism, such as the powerful symbol of the mother, as a basis for their public role. It does not mean that they simply accepted traditional gender roles, but rather that they negotiated them in ways that the male nationalist leaders had not foreseen. Although these women may have constituted a minority of all Irish women,

that is not to underestimate their importance since their experience complicates the usual assumptions about women's roles within nationalism.

The present research also went further in identifying and applying theoretical aspects addressed by Martin Esslin in *An Anatomy of Drama* not only in the theatrical productions but also in the actual Rising, indicating that a certain level of theatricality can be attributed to this historical event, which provides the possibility of analysing the interaction of dramatic theory with events of real life. Firstly, the close relationship between drama and Irish society was observed. Ireland is a country whose course of history is integrally linked to literary movements and revivals. Especially from the late nineteenth century onwards much political and social change had some involvement with the arts, especially poetry and drama. Still more interesting is the conclusion that this interaction between drama and society is a two-way road. Aware of that interdependence between the two strands we could then identify two theoretical aspects of drama in the real revolutionary event portrayed as background by O'Casey and Murphy. The attempted revolution for independence in 1916, the Easter Rising, had something theatrical in it. Irish citizens themselves were confused when the battle started on 24 April, as they could not understand what was happening, and some of them thought they were watching a kind of Easter enactment. Faced with this particularity of the Easter revolt we argued that is clearly possible to apply what Esslin calls the *nature of drama* as a theoretical aspect since it is based on the argument that there is always something of drama in real life.

A second dramatic aspect identified in the actual Rising is the concomitance of illusion and reality present in that revolutionary atmosphere. The background of those directly involved in the arrangement of the insurrection had, at least, some connection with the literary world, as we saw most specifically in the case of Thomas MacDonagh and Patrick Pearse. The leaders of the Rising were influenced by what they had written or had read in their daily contact with literature. There is strong evidence that their previous involvement with drama must have served as a rehearsal for the rebellion. The illusion they had was sufficiently real for them to put into practice the revolution existing in their minds.

Presumably, Ireland will never again experience the occurrences and events of 1916 and all their artistic, cultural, political and economic fruits. This particular context and environment, the result of an interaction of several factors, including the intense Irish political life, a distinct cultural life, prolific literary production, personal interests

and private relationships, provided a unique framework in Irish history. The way every single thing happened resulted in these unforgettable events for the history of Ireland. The great expectation for the Easter Rising's centenary commemorations, which started with a ceremony in Dublin Castle on 1 January 2016, is a proof of the importance of the Rising for Irish community. The centenary has become an extensive programme of almost 2,000 events, and even some early critics of the plans are inclined to see the events in a more positive perspective, though divisive opinions are still evident. For instance, in his list of fifty things Ireland needs in 2016, published recently in *The Irish Times*, Diarmaid Ferriter did not forget to mention the Rising, placing, ironically, as an item of the list "A full month free of 1916 commemorations". While some understand this commemorative period as a form of celebrating and embracing Irishness, others say that the question of national identity remains unresolved since there is a tendency of superficial involvement, preferring Irishness as a stereotype rather than a substance. Additionally, although there is a tendency to increase women's participation in the ceremonial programme, the gender question is another problematic point which emerges when we look carefully at the national project's promises of unity and equality of one hundred years ago and compare them with Ireland's current politics which is still divided into Irish men and Irish women, rather than Irish people.

Finally, continuing with his list, Ferriter suggests that Ireland needs "A narrative of 1916 that is honest, evidence-based and complicated"; in fact, it requires a serious effort to escape from the decorative version of an insurrection which combined fact and fiction, aims and dreams. Such a version portrays Ireland according to the dream of a few people, an Ireland that never existed. Equally, the conception of Irishness is closer to imagined aspects rather than the true essence of Irish identity. The aim of the present study has been to provide an analysis of *The Plough and the Stars* and *The Patriot Game* in a honest and lucid sense, not only of the Rising itself, but especially of the Irishwomen who lived through it. Thus, through the study of these dramatic texts and their female representations it has been possible to reassess the image of real Irish women and determine that, although these women were also called upon to strike for Ireland's freedom, which included adhering to an imaginative sense of Irishness, not all of them were ready to sacrifice themselves for an imaginary common good: saving Mother Ireland.

POBLACHT NA H EIREANN, THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THE IRISH REPUBLIC TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND.

IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and, supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.

We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God, Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms, and we pray that no one who serves that cause will dishonour it by cowardice, inhumanity, or rapine. In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

Signed on Behalf of the Provisional Government,

THOMAS J. CLARKE,

SEAN Mac DIARMADA,

THOMAS MacDONAGH,

P. H. PEARSE,

EAMONN CEANNT,

JAMES CONNOLLY.

JOSEPH PLUNKETT.

Figure 17. The Easter Proclamation of 1916

(<http://the1916proclamation.ie/shop/the-1916-proclamation-of-the-irish-republic/>)

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