



University  
of Glasgow

Scott, Tania (2011) *Locating Ireland in the fantastic fiction of Lord Dunsany*. PhD thesis.

<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/2630/>

Copyright and moral rights for this thesis are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

# **Locating Ireland in the Fantastic Fiction of Lord Dunsany**

**Tania Scott**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

**Department of English Literature**

**College of Arts**

**University of Glasgow**

## Abstract

This thesis will locate the fantastic fiction of Lord Dunsany in a tradition of Irish writing, while simultaneously examining representations of Ireland within the texts themselves. Dunsany has been regarded – until now – as a marginal figure in Irish literature, but this study will show that he deserves a place in the canon. My research will demonstrate that, from his early involvement in the Abbey Theatre through to his late introspective novels set in Ireland, Dunsany throughout his life engages with Irish literary and cultural traditions.

The first chapter will focus on Lord Dunsany's theatrical writings which have been rarely staged since his death and have attracted little attention from scholars. By examining performances of the plays in Ireland and beyond, the links between the playwright and the national theatre will become clear. Building on this work on the plays, Chapter Two moves on to an analysis of Dunsany's novels – including *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, his best known work – and places them within a historical context of conflict both at home in Ireland and throughout Europe. The next chapter looks at Dunsany's later novels set in Ireland and questions why it is at this point in the 1930s, after decades of writing fantastic fiction, that the author chooses to locate his works in his own land. The same themes and ideas found in the novels are also prominent in Dunsany's short stories which form the focus of chapters four and five. Chapter Four examines the stories set in Pegāna, the first tales he wrote and those which made Dunsany's reputation as a writer of high fantasy, and locates their other-worldliness within the real world of twentieth-century Ireland. The last chapter deals with the later short stories, and brings Dunsany's work up to date by using recent work on Irish postcolonialism and theories of Empire to analyse these narratives. The conclusion will consider Dunsany's work overall, by way of close readings of texts from the beginning and end of his career which will allow us to trace the development of Ireland as a concept and as a literary influence throughout his writings.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis would not exist if not for the kindness and support of family, friends and academic colleagues alike, far too few of whom are named below. Firstly, many thanks are due to my supervisor, Rob Maslen, whose enthusiasm for Dunsany himself and my humble thoughts on him never wavered over the last four years. Paddy Lyons has always been an inspiration, and without his guidance my thoughts would never have turned westward in the first place. My external and internal examiners, Alison O'Malley-Younger and Andrew Radford, made the viva itself an almost pleasant experience, and their comments and criticisms will shape my engagement with Dunsany for many years to come. A special word of thanks also goes to Hazel Mackenzie, John Miller and Ruth Hawthorn for proof reading individual chapters. The English Literature Department at the University of Glasgow has been a wonderful spiritual home, and the kindness and generosity of the administrative and academic staff has been unfailing. Thanks also go to the Faculty of Arts for funding my research trip to Dunsany Castle early on in the project.

The present Lord and Lady Dunsany cannot be thanked enough for the kindness of letting me examine the archive at the castle, which is, after all, still a much-loved home. Thanks are also due to their archivist, Joe Doyle, without whose help this thesis would be missing its most interesting sources.

My friends have been the patches of sunlight in the last four years so a quick thank you to: Hazel, Lauren and Valerie for the laughter and loyalty of sisterhood; the other two witches; Douglas, a fellow fan; Team Library; and the Work in Progress team. My family's support extends well beyond the bounds of the Phd. Thanks to my dad, still the kindest man I have ever met, for being there through good and bad; to Kath, my only real link to Ireland, for her generosity of spirit; and to my mad band of brothers and sisters, whether step or blood. To my wonderful crazy mother, for giving me a love of books even if our tastes do differ a little, and to her loving partner Rob. To clan Olivant, for making me family, just as they are to me.

And finally, for the support, kindness and love of the man who begun the thesis as my boyfriend and ended it as my husband. Chris, this thesis is for you, as it should be.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	2
Acknowledgements .....	3
Introduction.....	6
Section 1: Introducing an Irish fantasy writer.....	6
Section 2: Dunsany and his works .....	8
Section 3: Thesis structure .....	10
Chapter 1: The Plays .....	14
Introduction .....	14
Section 1: <i>The Glittering Gate</i> at the Abbey Theatre .....	17
Section 2: <i>King Argimēnēs</i> and Irish Heroism.....	24
Section 3: East meets West in <i>If</i> .....	34
Section 4: <i>The Gods of the Mountain</i> and an International Irish Drama ...	45
Conclusion .....	53
Chapter 2: The Early Novels .....	60
Introduction to the early novels .....	60
Section 1: <i>Don Rodriguez: Chronicles of Shadow Valley</i> and <i>The Charwoman's Shadow</i> : Shades and Shadows in two early novels. ....	64
Section 2: <i>The King of Elfland's Daughter</i> as Dunsany's fairy tale .....	75
Section 3: <i>The Blessing of Pan</i> .....	86
Conclusion .....	93
Chapter 3: The Later Novels .....	96
Introduction .....	96
Section 1: <i>The Curse of the Wise Woman</i> .....	100
Section 2: <i>Up in the Hills</i> and <i>Rory and Bran</i> .....	110
Section 3: <i>The Story of Mona Sheehy</i> .....	120
Conclusion .....	127
Chapter 4: The Early Short Stories.....	131
Introduction: Publishing an Irish Short Story .....	131
Section 1: Fighting Celts and Ancient Heroes.....	134
Section 2: The Power of the Gods.....	143
Section 3: Narrators, storytellers and dreamers .....	150

Section 4: Glimpses of Ireland .....	154
Conclusion .....	160
<b>Chapter 5: The Late Short Stories .....</b>	<b>164</b>
Introduction .....	164
Section 1: <i>The Man who Ate the Phoenix</i> and other Irish tall tales .....	167
Section 2: Postcolonialism, Empire and Joseph Jorkens .....	175
Section 3: Dunsany and Irish Orientalism .....	182
Conclusion .....	189
<b>Conclusion: Lord Dunsany and His Fellow Irishmen.....</b>	<b>194</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>203</b>

# Introduction

## Section 1: Introducing an Irish fantasy writer

While an Irishman lives to defend them no phoenix will die, no leprochaun, no fairy.<sup>1</sup>

The Irish literary canon is a crowded place. With five Nobel Prize winners and texts such as *Ulysses* and *Waiting for Godot* being central to the English let alone the Irish canon, Irish imaginative writing is internationally recognized as being amongst the finest in the world. This study will aim to stake out a small patch of this literary ground for Lord Dunsany, a writer who is unmistakably Irish and whose work concerns Irish affairs, but who has nevertheless received little attention from the Irish critical establishment. Each chapter will examine different texts and show how Dunsany's fantasies are in fact analogous to the canonical works of Irish literature. Through close analysis of his texts, and by contrasting and comparing them with canonical Irish works of the twentieth century, this study will locate Dunsany's work firmly in his native Ireland, while simultaneously examining the version, or vision, of Ireland that emerges from the texts themselves.

In April 1919, Lord Dunsany stepped onto American soil for a lecture tour, and found himself the centre of press attention. The reporters who questioned him were eager to know about his connections with the writers of the Irish literary Revival and in particular the involvement of these authors in nationalist politics. Irish literary culture was highly politicized in this period by the debate over home rule, particularly with the onset of the war of independence which had begun just a few months earlier. Pressed to comment on this Irish literary movement, Dunsany gave the following statement:

Perhaps I should say that I am no part at all of the Irish movement in art. No poet should be a part of any movement. [...] I am not interested in depicting Irish condition; what matters with me is the condition of man, not in his relation to governments, as they are, or should be, but solely in relation to Destiny.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Lord Dunsany, *My Ireland* (London: Jarrolds, 1937), p. 268.

<sup>2</sup> Interview in the *New York Times*, October 12<sup>th</sup> 1919, qtd. in S. T. Joshi, *Lord Dunsany: Master of the Anglo-Irish Imagination* (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), p. 184.

Lord Dunsany's statement to the reporter is cagey and defensive, as might be expected of an Irish aristocrat with well-known Unionist sympathies just a few months into the war of independence. Yet the need for Dunsany to make such a statement shows the intimate relationship between art and politics in Ireland, a theme which would reverberate in Irish society throughout his lifetime. This thesis will contradict Dunsany's own affirmation and prove that the writer is very much part of the Irish movement in art. He may not often be regarded as part of the Irish literary canon, but his work belongs there nonetheless. Along with Dunsany's relationship to his literary compatriots, his work provides us with fascinating ideas about Ireland itself, as a physical and imaginative space. This thesis thus aims to locate Ireland within Dunsany's writings as both a physical presence and a central thematic concern.

Lord Dunsany was born in 1878 and died in 1957, and his life spanned one of the most tumultuous periods in modern Irish history. Not only did he experience two World Wars; in Ireland he lived through the Land Acts, the fight for Home Rule and the subsequent Civil War. His position as a member of the aristocracy informs his writings in a number of ways, not least in that the political events of his lifetime changed the position of the landed class beyond recognition.

Although Dunsany was brought up in the Anglican faith, his family had been Catholic until the twelfth Baron Dunsany converted in the mid-eighteenth century in order to retain his lands. Despite the tendency to position Dunsany on the Protestant side of the sectarian divide, Dunsany was much closer to Anglo-Catholicism, and a seventeenth century ancestor of his was even canonized during Dunsany's lifetime (on hearing the news Dunsany ironically threatened to add a halo to his signature). The geographical location of the Dunsany family's seat is as significant as its historical and religious background. Dunsany Castle is situated in Meath, not far from the ancient seat of the Kings of Ireland at Tara, and the past glory of the hill struck a chord for the author: 'Fortunately the spot from which one can see most of Ireland is a field that stands in the centre of Irish history, and is but a few hundred yards from the edge of my own land. It is Tara. So there I will go.'<sup>3</sup> Tara is an eternal, fixed reminder of Ireland's heroic past, but its permanence stands in stark contrast to the changing nature of twentieth century Ireland. Tara is the figurative centre of ancient Ireland, and is juxtaposed with Dublin as the centre of the modern, twentieth century country. The situation of ancient Irish power in a rural setting

---

<sup>3</sup> Lord Dunsany, *My Ireland* (London: Jarrolds, 1937), p. 11.



legitimizes Dunsany's praise of the rural over the urban; as we shall see Dublin figures little in his works, while Meath is centrally important to many of them. Sitting writing at his desk in the family castle (depending on which decade he was writing in) he could be looking out on to the United Kingdom, the Irish Republic, the Irish Free State or the partitioned Ireland/Eire. If the nature of Ireland as a nation was in constant flux during Dunsany's lifetime, it is hardly surprising that locating the Lord's own Irish identity is fraught with contradictions. Quite apart from the debate about his relevance to Irish writing among literary critics, there are Dunsany's own contradictory views on his status as an Irish writer and the nature of Irish identity itself, and these will form the central concern of this thesis.

What is so compelling about Lord Dunsany then is not that he stands apart from other writers in Ireland, but that the same questions of Irish identity, politics and art, and the concern with the position of the Irish writer may be found in his work as in those of the canonical figures of the twentieth century. Along with close analysis of specific texts, this thesis will employ a comparative approach, utilizing readings of other Irish writers to trace the connection between Dunsany and his contemporaries. In the process it will become clear that it is not just Dunsany's relationship with the canonical figures in Irish writing that should be reassessed: our preconceptions about Irish literary history itself will be placed under scrutiny. Throughout this study an untold story will be revealed of writers like Dunsany who are presumed extracanonial but who are actually as firmly rooted in Irish tradition, through the forms and themes of their fictions, as their more celebrated contemporaries.

## Section 2: Dunsany and his works

Let us go forth, the tellers of tales, and seize whatever prey the heart long [sic] for, and have no fear. Everything exists, everything is true, and the earth is only a little dust under our feet.<sup>4</sup>

In W.B. Yeats's *Celtic Twilight* he calls the tellers of tales to arms, to narrate their stories without fear. Yeats, a major influence on Lord Dunsany's writing, draws attention in this passage to the central importance of both tales and teller in Irish life. While the historical

---

<sup>4</sup> W.B. Yeats *Celtic Twilight* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1893), p. 7

and biographical contexts of Dunsany's Irish background will inform this work, its primary focus will always be on the texts themselves, the tales and the means of telling them. The aim of locating Ireland within Dunsany's writings has necessarily informed the selection of texts considered, and although the well-known novels and stories are examined, they will be placed alongside his more obscure writings to gain a critical understanding of the entire corpus.

As well as influencing my choice of texts, the aim of locating Ireland in this study has been the guiding principle of my theoretical approach. Rather than slavishly follow one particular theory, my aim has been to contextualize Dunsany's fantastic fiction within the framework of Irish literary and cultural studies. That is not to say that recent theoretical developments do not inform the thesis, and due care has been taken to engage with Irish literary and fantasy criticism of recent years.

The sheer breadth and variety of Dunsany's fiction means that different critical concepts have relevance for different sections of his oeuvre. For example, the last chapter will look at Dunsany's relationship with British imperialism and acknowledge how recent work in Irish postcolonial studies can enhance our understanding of his late stories. In contrast, the section on the short stories will use work on storytelling and narrative to examine the importance of narrators and dreamers in Dunsany's fiction. This approach, rather than undermining the theoretical underpinning of the thesis, actually allows the texts to define their own terms of discussion.

In saying this, two strands of criticism unite the thesis as a whole; those of recent criticism in the relatively newly established field of fantasy literature scholarship, and the better established – but perhaps more contentious – field of Irish literary criticism. Again, the policy has been to find the most relevant sections of criticism for examining Lord Dunsany's fiction in relation to Irish studies rather than to follow one particular school of thought.

One of the reasons for the use of different strands of theory in this study has been the length of time that Dunsany's works span. It is relevant to use criticism on the Irish Revival for his texts written before World War I but it is also important to acknowledge the problems raised by continuing this approach for his works of the 1950s. Not only is Dunsany prolific, with dozens of novels and plays and hundreds of short stories in his portfolio, he covers a wide range of forms and genres of fiction, not all of which can be

easily classified as fantasies. Rather than attempting to categorize these different forms of writing, this thesis will focus on analysing each text on its own merits, and tracing common themes and ideologies across the separate works.

### Section 3: Thesis structure

Who but a book-poet would dishonour the God-big Finn for the sake of a gap-worded story.<sup>5</sup>

The structure of the thesis reflects the variety of literary styles and forms found throughout Lord Dunsany's works. The first chapter will examine Dunsany's plays, which, along with the poems, form the least familiar section of his writings. The plays, and his involvement with various theatres – the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in particular – provide a succinct introduction to Dunsany's relationship with the Irish literary establishment in general. This section also mounts a direct challenge to Dunsany's claim to be 'no part of the Irish movement in art', not merely with the fact that of all genres of writing drama is necessarily most concerned with a particular place and audience, but also by looking at Dunsany's input into the most important debates surrounding the national theatre. Through close readings of some of Dunsany's most interesting plays, this chapter will examine his place in Irish theatre history.

This chapter will re-examine, too, the neglect of Dunsany's works by latter day Irish literary criticism; despite his having five plays performed at the Abbey Theatre, the comprehensive *History of Irish Theatre: 1601-2000* (2002) omits Dunsany entirely, and while this may simply be a matter of space, the more specialized *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (2001) by Lionel Pilkington also fails to give Dunsany even a single mention. The omission of Dunsany from important studies of Irish literature will prove a point of contention in this study, culminating in his conspicuous absence from the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1990). By relating Dunsany's plays to the trends of drama at the Abbey theatre up to the First World War it becomes apparent that his plays are located firmly within the themes and forms of the canonical Abbey playwrights. The final section of the chapter will widen the frame of reference for Dunsany's plays by

---

<sup>5</sup> Flann O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (London: Penguin, 1967) First published 1939, p. 9

examining the performance of *The Gods of the Mountain* (1910) in Italy directed by Luigi Pirandello.

The first chapter, then, will outline some of the major themes of Dunsany's fiction such as the parody of the heroic mode and the questioning of religion, and the second chapter will trace how these themes reappear in the early novels. This first section of Chapter Two will open with Dunsany's first forays into novel writing and will examine the chivalric-romance mode of *The Chronicles of Rodriguez* (1922) and *The Charwoman's Shadow* (1926). These novels, though set in the Golden Age of Spain, occupy an important position in a study of Dunsany's relationship with Ireland, because of the depiction of religion and magic in the texts. The author's ironic portrayal of priests and sorcerers is enhanced by the examination of heroism in the novels, a theme which is further developed in his most well-known novel *The King of Elfland's Daughter* (1924). In this novel the position of Princess Lirazel, trapped between two worlds and persecuted by the forces of religious intolerance, becomes a metaphor for the Irish experience. The shifting borderlands and the relationship between the Christian and the pagan locate this novel firmly within Irish concerns. The chapter concludes with an analysis of *The Blessing of Pan* (1927) where Dunsany presents his most detailed examination of paganism, and of the crisis of faith and belief in modern society.

Chapter Three focuses on the later novels, concentrating on four works set in Ireland. The presence of paganism central to *The Blessing of Pan* will again be found in Dunsany's *The Curse of the Wise Woman* (1933), but this time with a knowing, ironic Irish context. This novel, the most autobiographical of all Dunsany's fiction, sees the author making the landscape of Ireland his central concern, a theme which links him to a variety of Irish writers. The second section of the chapter will look at two little known novels – *Up in the Hills* (1935) and *Rory and Bran* (1936) – and examine the problematic depictions of Ireland and Irish affairs in both texts. The final close reading is of *Mona Sheehy* (1939) a canny novel which presents the nature of belief in Ireland in a not altogether flattering light. The chapter as a whole will examine why Dunsany felt that after three decades of writing he needed to deal with Ireland directly as a subject in his novels.

The importance of belief is a theme which is also found throughout Dunsany's short fiction. Apart from *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, it is Lord Dunsany's short stories that are most read today. They are also the most varied, and number many hundreds, challenging the critic into making broad generalizations about themes and styles. By

locating the stories within a tradition of Irish short story writing, rather than making sweeping statements about this varied body of work, we may perceive that certain aspects of these texts, such as narrative techniques and the treatment of heroic characters, can be better understood within an Irish tradition of writing. Chapter Four will examine the stories written before the First World War in relation to Irish writing, particularly through the authority of the narrative voice. These stories, set in the distant East or in imagined lands, are rooted to Ireland through Dunsany's interaction with the works of his contemporaries.

The second chapter on the short stories, Chapter Five, will focus on the collections written after the First World War, and examine the contention that Dunsany moves further and further away from the fantastic mode with every story. These late tales see Dunsany engaging with new forms and styles, and returning to Ireland as a setting in new and troubling ways. In the short story collection *The Man who Ate the Phoenix* (1949) Dunsany satirizes the Irish anthropologists, while opening himself up to accusations of stereotyping his countrymen. The chapter will conclude with an examination of the Jorkens stories which are tales of colonial adventurers, looking at how we may view the stories from the perspective of recent work on colonialism and orientalism in current Irish studies.

The conclusion to the thesis will consider Dunsany's works as a whole, combining ideas discussed individually in each chapter. In order to assess the changes and developments in the Irish elements in Dunsany's writings over half a century, the conclusion will begin with the Cuala Press edition of his work from 1912, and then discuss the late novel *His Fellow Men* (1952). We will then see which major themes and concerns can be found throughout Dunsany's work as a whole, what changes take place, and how these things relate to Dunsany's own antagonized and antagonistic position in relation to Ireland and the Irish canon.

This thesis, then, will locate Ireland in a selection of significant texts from Dunsany's oeuvre. This locating is not merely a matter of listing the physical appearances of Ireland in his work but also of detecting the presence of Ireland – and the Irish literati – as a concept in and an influence on Dunsany's fiction. Ireland, and the idea of an Irish identity, haunts his texts, and he spends half a century trying to position it within his writings. As Zygmunt Bauman states in his work on identity theory: 'Identity [...] is a 'hotly contested concept'. Whenever you hear that word, you can be sure that there is a battle going on. A

battlefield is identity's natural home.'<sup>6</sup> In Dunsany's lifetime Ireland was often a literal battlefield, and this study will show that his texts become equally contested sites, where the author struggles to locate Ireland and Irish identity, and his own status in relation to these concepts.

---

<sup>6</sup> Zygmunt Bauman and Benedetto Vecchi, *Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p. 77.

# Chapter 1: The Plays

## Introduction

Theatre is a community activity<sup>7</sup>

To locate Lord Dunsany's Ireland, this study will begin with an analysis of his plays, many of which were produced in his native land. A dramatist, perhaps more than a short story writer or a novelist, must be concerned with how his work relates to the community, how it is to be staged, and how it will be received by an audience. In the preface to his second collection of plays, Dunsany states that it is important for these works to face 'the judgement of an audience, to see if they were entitled to be called plays at all'.<sup>8</sup> This phrase states not only the importance of the audience for performance, but also Dunsany's underlying insecurity about his own involvement with the theatre. The fraught relationship with his Irish audience, in particular, is a major concern for Dunsany during this period. His plays thus provide us with the perfect starting point from which to locate his relationship with Ireland and the Irish literary establishment. On an Irish stage, in front of an Irish audience, Dunsany's plays are immediately contextualized in a way unique to the dramatic form.

When Lord Dunsany's first play was produced at the Abbey Theatre in 1909, he was drawn into a theatrical community in Dublin unrivalled for its influence on contemporary culture – in the political as well as artistic sphere – and for the originality of its texts and productions. Although his plays were also produced in London, and across the world, it is the history of his productions at the Abbey Theatre that serves as the most useful introduction to Dunsany's relationship with Ireland and Irish culture.

At the close of the nineteenth century W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn launched the Irish Literary Theatre with help from George Moore.<sup>9</sup> Although the story of

---

<sup>7</sup> Mary Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Plays of Near and Far* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1923), p. i.

<sup>9</sup> George Moore was a significant figure in Irish literature at the time. After reading one of Dunsany's early short stories in the *Irish Review* he wrote a letter to the Lord criticising his use of his title as an authorial *nom de plume*, noting dryly: 'the title is clearly wrong now that we have begun to feel that your writings are not passing incursions into the Republic of Letters.' This seems to imply a slight at Dunsany's early writings which began as 'passing incursions' but may now be considered to be of a higher standard, an indication of why Dunsany was often anxious about the reception of his work by his Irish audience. George Moore, Uncollected letter to Lord Dunsany, March 3rd 1911 (Dunsany Archive).

how this theatre became a national theatre is overlong for this study, a few points are relevant when considering the particular brand of politics that Dunsany would encounter at the Abbey.<sup>10</sup> The Irish Literary Theatre only existed for three seasons from 1899 to 1902, but in that time a precedent had been set for a theatre set up by the landowning classes; a theatre run by the elite that would nevertheless attempt to represent an entire nation. In simple class terms, it is surprising that Dunsany was not more connected with this elite management of the theatre – as an aristocrat he was part of the class to which Gregory belonged and Yeats aspired – although E.A. Boyd<sup>11</sup> explains Dunsany's absence in purely practical terms:

It was about 1899 that W.B. Yeats and Edward Martyn inaugurated the Irish Literary Theater in Dublin. At this time Lord Dunsany was in the Transvaal with his regiment, for the Boer war had just started. That is doubtless one reason why we do not hear of him until the Irish literary movement had been under way for some years.<sup>12</sup>

As we shall see, it was more than a physical barrier that Dunsany's army service caused between him and the Revivalists; his commitment to Britain and to British affairs would leave him as a peripheral figure, moving further from the ideals of the Irish literary establishment as the twentieth century continued.

Martyn and Moore soon left the theatre, leaving Gregory and Yeats to set up the Irish National Theatre Society (which became known as the Abbey Theatre) in Dublin with the Fay brothers, a group of Irish actors. By the time Lord Dunsany wrote his first play, the Abbey Theatre had already become a national institution, producing plays by Yeats, Gregory, J.M. Synge, Padraic Colum and many others.

The theatre at this time was not just an established national institution; it was also a *nationalist* institution. With Yeats and his colleagues in control the theatre became a stage on which to act and enact the political ideologies of turn of the century Irish cultural nationalism, known as the Irish Revival. For Yeats the establishment of a national theatre

---

<sup>10</sup> See D.E.S. Maxwell, 'Irish Drama 1899-1929' in Seamus Deane ed., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* Vol. 2. (Derry, NI: Field Day Publications, 1991), p. 562. for a succinct account of the establishment of the Irish National Theatre. Robert Hogan's series on Irish theatre is particularly useful for a more detailed view.

<sup>11</sup> Ernest A. Boyd was a critic and journalist who was one of the few writers to connect Dunsany's works with those of the Revivalists. He also wrote *The Glittering Fake*, a pastiche of Dunsany's *The Glittering Gate* – see the conclusion to this section.

<sup>12</sup> Edward Bierstadt, *Dunsany the Dramatist* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1917), p. 3



was one element of his attempt to rebuild and renew Irish arts and culture, and so solidify Ireland's claim to be a civilisation worthy of independence.

Yet alongside such avowedly nationalist plays as Yeats and Gregory's *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902) were a variety of other, often discordant versions of Irish drama. Even within the works of the directors there was great variation, for example between the mythic lyric plays of Yeats and the light comedies of Lady Gregory. Far from a unified sense of drama, the Abbey created a dialogue of forms and concepts and competing representations of Ireland, a dialogue in which Dunsany would struggle to stage his own aesthetic ideology.

The first two sections of this chapter will examine how Lord Dunsany's plays fit into the narrative of the early years of the Abbey Theatre, and how his plays negotiate the different forms and ideologies being staged. We will see how the texts challenge a narrow reading of a nationalist canon of Irish plays. Through comparing Dunsany's work with canonical texts of the Revival, new links will emerge between Dunsany and his theatrical contemporaries.

The second half of the chapter will take on board Dunsany's position within the Abbey canon and expand the focus outwards. It will move on from the Abbey Theatre to look at Dunsany's plays beyond an Irish setting, both metaphorically and literally. Section three will show how Dunsany remains concerned with the politics of place in the East meets West drama *If* (1919). *If* introduces one of the most fascinating concepts regarding the locating of Ireland in Dunsany's work, which is his use of an East/West dichotomy that cleverly challenges Manichean absolutes where occidental and oriental become more than an either/or identity. The last section will look at the reception of Irish drama in Europe, taking for its case study the fascinating, and virtually unknown, fact that Dunsany's *The Gods of the Mountain* was produced in 1925 by Luigi Pirandello in Rome. This section will complicate notions of place by examining an Irish play in an international setting.

Brian Attebery in his work on fantasy literature comments that: 'Because fantasy has generally been excluded from the canon of great literature – and continues to be excluded despite the demonstrable merits of many of its examples – it can provide a place to stand to judge the canon itself'.<sup>13</sup> Lord Dunsany's extracanonial status in regard to Irish literature is in fact what makes an analysis of his plays particularly relevant for the narrative of the

---

<sup>13</sup> Brian Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. ix.

theatre and makes his plays a vital starting point from which to analyse his own position with regard to the Irish canon.

## Section 1: *The Glittering Gate* at the Abbey Theatre

Bill. Why, Jim, 'ow long 'ave you been 'ere?

Jim. I *am* 'ere always.<sup>14</sup>

This dialogue from Lord Dunsany's first play, *The Glittering Gate* (1909), shows that it is set in an endless present: a location outside time, in an imaginary space in front of the gates of heaven. *The Glittering Gate* is deliberately set out with familiar contexts, yet by placing the play on stage in Ireland we may bring it down to earth, pinning down Dunsany's ethereal drama.

It was not until he had published several collections of short stories that Lord Dunsany turned his interest to the stage, so his reputation was already assured when he was approached to turn his skills to the drama. Dunsany's initial impulse to write plays came from a meeting with W.B. Yeats which situates his first theatrical venture in the heart of Irish literary society at the time. On a social evening in 1909 at Dunsany Castle, Yeats had come across a painting by Lord Dunsany of two burglars standing outside the gate of heaven. Yeats suggested that the picture would make a good premise for a play, but Dunsany protested that he was not a playwright. When Yeats then proposed he would suggest the idea for the play to someone else, Dunsany duly wrote *The Glittering Gate* that afternoon.<sup>15</sup> At least this is the account given in Mark Amory's biography of Lord Dunsany; Yeats puts it a little differently in his memoirs. Yeats recounts a conversation with a friend and writes: 'Spoke of Dunsany. Was fool enough to tell how I had taken two of Dunsany's ideas and made a scenario for his play'.<sup>16</sup> Yeats chastises himself for his need to brag about his influence over others, yet it was clearly a role that came naturally to him as the *primum movens* of Irish drama. In Yeats's account he devises the play's scenario, not Dunsany, claiming a kind of dual authorship with the Lord. In the space between these two narratives the text itself becomes a focus for the conflict of ideas

<sup>14</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Five Plays* (London: Grant Richards, 1918), p. 84.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany* (London: Collins, 1972), p. 61.

<sup>16</sup> Denis Donoghue ed. W.B. Yeats, *Memoirs* (London: MacMillan, 1972), April 5<sup>th</sup> 1909, p. 210.

between Yeats and Dunsany. For Yeats, encouraging the production of Irish plays was part of his wish to create a great national culture. Yeats would enable Dunsany to be part of this tradition, but Dunsany's relationship with Irish culture was fraught from the beginning.

Although it was Yeats who encouraged Lord Dunsany to turn to the theatre, Dunsany was concerned from the beginning about how suitable his play would be for the Abbey directors. In a letter to his wife he recounts that, 'After dinner I descended on the poet and read him the play and when all the good passages have been deleted by him and Lady Gregory it is going to be acted at the Abbey Theatre' (p. 61). Although at this point Dunsany has not in fact received any feedback from the Abbey directors, he has already assumed a defensive posture towards his play. This remarkable admission of concern for the play shows Dunsany seeking validation from Yeats while simultaneously expecting his censorship. The entire episode – from Yeats goading Dunsany into writing the play, to Dunsany's anxiety about the play's reception – reflects Dunsany's status as both a part of, yet still in some respects outside of, Irish literary society. As has been mentioned, during this period the Abbey Theatre is a nationalist as well as a national theatre and as a well-known Unionist Dunsany was immediately a political outsider, as is implied by his constant claims that art should be a-political.

In the Donnellan Lectures given at Trinity College Dublin in the 1940s Dunsany stresses the need for the drama to eschew politics: 'The more immediate the effect of a dramatist upon his generation, the more closely will he be identified with its passing day, and the more likely he is to drift away with its dust'.<sup>17</sup> This statement is a reaction to the politics of Irish drama during Dunsany's lifetime, when the theatre in particular was intricately bound up with the fight for Irish independence. The continuing popularity of writers such as Yeats and O'Casey in the present day, however, suggests that Dunsany's view may have been proved wrong – it is in part the political edge to these works that gives them their continued interest and perhaps the perceived absence of such politics in Dunsany's work that has led to his obscurity.

Based on the painting of two burglars outside the gates of heaven that had attracted Yeats's attention, *The Glittering Gate* was a short sketch for two actors and it debuted at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin in April 1909. The two characters are Jim and Bill, cockney burglars

---

<sup>17</sup> Lord Dunsany, *The Donnellan Lectures* (London: Heinemann, 1945), p. 65.

who after their deaths find themselves trapped outside the gates of heaven for all eternity. Although short, the play echoes many of the concerns of Dunsany's early fiction, notably the role of the gods and the significance of time.<sup>18</sup> These concerns are also central to the drama of Yeats, Synge and the other Abbey playwrights.

Jim and Bill have been left outside heaven with nothing to do but to try to drink bottles of beer, which always turn out to be empty, and gaze out on nothingness. The absence of time is what makes their afterlife so hellish: 'You see there isn't any hope here. And when there isn't any hope there isn't any future. And when there isn't any future there isn't any past. It's just the present here. I tell you we're stuck. There aren't no years here. Nor, no nothing' (p. 85). Past, present and future are all meaningless without the passing of time, and the true horror of eternal (after) life is apparent in the play. As this passage shows, despite being a slight play, the comic elements are undercut with a dark, brooding fatalism. No matter how much the burglars regret their past, their exile from heaven is inevitable; it has already been decided. To underline this fatalism there is a strong contrast in the play between the claustrophobia of Jim and Bill's entrapment in a never-ending present of opening empty bottles, and the vast openness of the stars beyond.

During the play Bill realizes that he still has his lock-picks in the afterlife and decides to pick the lock on the gates of heaven. Jim warns him that he may not unlock what he is looking for, reminding Bill of a time when they picked the lock on a safe and found nothing but coal inside. Bill replies:

This isn't a safe, Jim, this is heaven. There'll be the old saints with their haloes shining and flickering, like windows o' wintry nights. (*Creak, creak, creak*) And angels thick as swallows along a cottage roof the day before they go. (*Creak, creak, creak*) And orchards full of apples as far as you can see, and the rivers of Tigris and Euphrates, so the Bible says, and a city of gold, for those that care for cities, all full of precious stones; but I'm a bit tired of cities and precious stones. (*Creak, creak, creak*) I'll go out into the fields where the orchards are, by the Tigris and the Euphrates. (pp. 89-90)

The doors to heaven creak under the strain of the burglar's attack, but when they eventually open they can see nothing but empty stars beyond. Bill's vision of heaven in this passage is a strange mix of East and West, recalling golden cities and precious stones and the Garden of Eden bordered by the 'Tigris and Euphrates' alongside orchards of apples, anticipating Dunsany's juxtaposition of East and West found in his later play *If*.

---

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Four for discussion of these themes in the early short stories.

All the imaginary heavens are shown to be as false as each other when the gates open and the burglars realise that, for them at least, there is no heaven. There is a strong sense of fatalism, then, in this play: the burglars cannot alter their status as outsiders to heaven no matter what they do. Fatalism, interestingly enough, is a trait particularly associated with the stereotypical Irishman. For example, one mid nineteenth century essay mentions:

the fatalism of the lower orders of Irish. An Englishman is accustomed to think and to act for himself. Put, therefore, opportunities of exertion before him, and he moves spontaneously. But an Irishman has a strange Oriental disposition [...] to allow every thing to be done for him. Hence his indolence, patience, disregard to improvement.<sup>19</sup>

The fatalism that is described here as a negative aspect of the Irish peasant, is embraced and examined by Lord Dunsany in this play, but instead of lower class Irishmen, the fatalistic attitude is transferred to two Cockneys. As in many of his early works, Dunsany uses foreign settings to consider Irish concerns with a distance that shields him from criticism by his contemporaries. Through this transference Dunsany suggests that character traits are more associated with class than nationality, and moreover demonstrates that a play with English characters is relevant for an Irish stage. In fact, the theme of fatalism found in *The Glittering Gate* was not an uncommon sight on the Abbey stage, above all in the plays of the theatre's most celebrated playwright, John Millington Synge.

*The Glittering Gate* premiered at the Abbey in 1909 when those involved in the theatre were mourning the death of J.M. Synge just a few weeks earlier (*The Glittering Gate* was performed on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April and Synge had died on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March). The relationship with Synge's plays provides an illuminating context for Dunsany's first foray onto the stage. Along with the appearance of his plays on the stage of the Irish National Theatre and in contemporary Irish periodicals, one important way in which Dunsany would interact with the works of other Irish Revival writers was through his extensive library of plays by his contemporaries.

One of the works on the shelves of the library at the Dunsany estate is Synge's play *Riders to the Sea* (1904). Synge was particularly interested in a drama that could be inspired by the oral culture and beliefs of the Irish peasants, an idea that inspired all his plays. His

---

<sup>19</sup> Anonymous 'Sketches of the Irish Peasantry' *The Quarterly Review* (1841), p. 335. For comment on the Irish as Oriental see Chapter Five.

early death just before the first production of *The Glittering Gate* left a space at the Abbey that Yeats wished Dunsany to fill, although this plan was never likely to come to fruition.

Synge's *Riders to the Sea* is a one act tragedy set in a small fishing community in the West of Ireland. The play centres on the main character, Maurya, a mother who has lost her husband and all but one son to the sea. Over the course of the play her last son falls off his horse into the water and drowns in the sea like the rest of the men in his family. In Lord Dunsany's personal copy of the play he has underlined in pencil two speeches where Maurya talks about the role of fate in her life and the lives of her children. Maurya's lament for her sons in particular clearly resonated with Dunsany, and an examination of these speeches may illuminate Dunsany's common ground with Synge, as well as the other Abbey dramatists.

On the loss of her last son, Maurya's attitude in *Riders to the Sea* is more fatalistic than regretful:

It isn't that I haven't prayed for you, Bartley, to the Almighty God. It isn't that I haven't said prayers in the dark night till you wouldn't know what I'd [sic] be saying; but it's a great rest I'll have now, and it's time surely. It's a great rest I'll have now, and great sleeping in the long nights after Samhain.<sup>20</sup>

The death of Bartley, her last son, is indeed tragic, but there is an acceptance that at least now she has nothing left to lose. Maurya can rest when she realises that she is now, and has always been, powerless to alter the fate of her sons. This passage, neatly underlined by Dunsany, seems to haunt the fatalism of his own one act play. In *The Glittering Gate* Jim, the first of the burglars to arrive in Dunsany's version of Limbo, accepts that he can do nothing to alter his fate: 'Nothing's any use' (p. 86). Unlike Maurya however, acceptance of their fate brings little comfort for the burglars. Maurya can at least look forward to meeting her sons in the afterlife; the burglars know that they are trapped for eternity. Both plays are thus linked through the theme of Fate.

Dunsany and Synge have another interesting connection that has less to do with the themes of their plays. By the time *The Glittering Gate* was produced at the Abbey, the theatre had begun to face severe criticism from some of Dublin's nationalist community. The theatre, which had started out to express national ideals, was increasingly viewed as being out of

---

<sup>20</sup> J.M. Synge, *Riders to the Sea* in *The Shadow of the Glen, and Riders to the Sea* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1905), p. 61. Dunsany estate copy.

touch with Irish affairs. This conflict reached a peak with the Playboy riots of 1907, after which the theatre's relationship with the nationalist press remained fractured at best.<sup>21</sup> The riots centred on the first few performances of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1907 which, with its story of Irish peasants willing to idolise a supposed murderer, and its feisty depictions of women, incensed the more conservative nationalists in Dublin. Synge's play was a combination of farce and fantasy but it was the depiction of the peasantry – who were idealized by the nationalists as representing a true, untainted Ireland – that caused outrage among members of the audience. The riots escalated, due in part to heavy-handed mismanagement by the Abbey directors, and caused a furious war of words between Yeats and the nationalist press.

In 1910 the nationalist paper *Sinn Féin* published a satire of the plays of the Abbey theatre, venting its spleen mainly at Synge, but many other Abbey dramatists were mocked, including Dunsany. The skit, called 'A Cross Image' is a retelling of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* which, three years after the riot at the Abbey, had become for the nationalists emblematic of the theatre's distance from its public. Written by an anonymous nationalist, 'The Cross Image' begins with stage Irish types speaking in dialect; one common complaint made against the theatre by the press was the poor attempts at accents by the Abbey actors. The comic stage Irish of 'tap o' the morning to yez, bedad'<sup>22</sup> changes over the course of the skit and ends up with a mocking imitation of Dunsany's cockney burglars from *The Glittering Gate*. In Dunsany's original text, the ending of the play where the burglars stare out at empty stars is as follows:

*(The gates swing heavily open, revealing empty night and stars)*

Bill. *(staggering and gazing into the revealed Nothing in which far stars go wandering)* Stars. Blooming great stars. There ain't no heaven, Jim.

*(Ever since the revelation a cruel and violent laugh has arisen off. It increases in volume and grows louder and louder)*

Jim. That's like them. That's very like them. Yes, they'd do that.

*(The Curtain falls and the laughter still howls on)* (p. 91)

What connects Dunsany to Synge is a sense of the tragic in the lives of ordinary people, whether it is that of Irish fishermen or cockney burglars. The ending of *The Glittering Gate* recalls the definition of tragedy:

<sup>21</sup> For an analysis of the riots see Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 183.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Hogan, *The Rise of the Realists, 1910-1915* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979), p. 16.

tragedy portrays an action of universal import involving a hero of some considerable stature who is flawed, who comes to grief on account of this deficiency, so that the play ends badly, and in doing so shows something of the power of the gods or destiny, while revealing human suffering to be part of a meaningful pattern.<sup>23</sup>

Both *The Glittering Gate* and *The Playboy of the Western World* are concerned with the pattern of human suffering and the power of the gods, yet both bring the tragic mode up to date by refusing to incorporate a traditional heroic character and leaving the moral questions of the plays much more ambivalent. Tragic and striking as *The Glittering Gate*'s final scene is, it is held up for ridicule in 'The Cross Image':

*(By this time everybody is speaking with a London accent. Enter two distinctly Cockney burglars, one emphatically named Jim, and the other, therefore, named Bill. They both look very mystical.)*

Bill. Sai, Jim, wot'll yew dew wen yer gits ter ther glitterin' bloomin' gite?

Jim. *(With acute mysticism)* THEY.

Bill. Jim. I sai, Jim, 'ere's a bloomin' pagint.

*(They scrutinise the concourse of Irish types.)*

Jim. Taint a pagint. It's the Irish National Drama. They've got a prospectus in the 'Doily Mile'.<sup>24</sup>

The anonymous satire concludes with everyone speaking in inaccurate English accents, paving the way for Dunsany's distinctly Cockney burglars. The 'pagint' of Irish types on the stage – made up of characters from the plays of the Revivalists, and of Synge in particular – have shown their true colours with the loss of their cod Irish speech. The Abbey Theatre is shown by the nationalists to be not really national at all; in fact it is something foreign to truly Irish people. *The Glittering Gate* is, for these nationalists, representative of the Abbey's failure to create a coherent National Drama. Yet what is significant is that Lord Dunsany is criticised here not as an Abbey outsider but as an integral part of a theatrical community alongside Synge and the other writers at the theatre.

Dunsany's play is regarded by the nationalist press in this exchange as representative of the failure of the Abbey theatre to accurately represent the nation of Ireland. His plays follow many of the trends of the canon of Abbey theatre plays at the beginning of the twentieth century. *The Glittering Gate* echoes Synge's fatalism, but all of Dunsany's plays borrow

<sup>23</sup> Dorothea Krook paraphrased by Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: the Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Hogan, *The Rise of the Realists, 1910-1915* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979), p. 16.



and subvert themes and ideas from many of the Irish dramatists. It is not just the library of Synge's works at Dunsany castle that hints that Dunsany may be closer to the other writers at the Abbey than one might think; the plays themselves show Dunsany's debt to J.M. Synge and the other Irish Revival playwrights.

## Section 2: *King Argimēnēs* and Irish Heroism

O but it has a good blade this old green sword.<sup>25</sup>

King Argimēnēs, the eponymous hero of Lord Dunsany's second play, brandishes an old green sword, providing a striking visual image of the heroic with powerful associations of Ireland. The importance of 'green' in this play is noted in a letter to Dunsany from Stuart Walker who staged a series of Dunsany's plays in the United States:

Before closing my letter I want to tell you that the costume plates for "The Golden Doom" [another one of Dunsany's plays] are very promising. Mr. Frank Zimmerer, the artist, is a most capable young man and he uses Lord Dunsany's green with great effectiveness. I call it the Dunsany Green. How else could I designate it? – the Green gods, Klesh, the green sword in "King Argimenes", the green lantern outside Skarui's door!<sup>26</sup>

Dunsany's green imagery is provocative; it recalls both the green of the Emerald Isle and the green jade emblematic of the East which features in so many of his plays. In the first sense of this colour coding *King Argimēnēs and the Unknown Warrior* (1910) can be considered a green play, in that it plays an important part in locating Ireland in Dunsany's early work. In a letter to the *New Yorker* in 1916, Dunsany writes that, 'Argimenes was the first play I ever wrote about my own country. The Glittering Gate I had already written chiefly to please Yeats, but that play never interested me. Argimenes was the first play in the native land of my spirit and or [sic] course it has a first plays imperfections'.<sup>27</sup>

Dunsany thus describes *King Argimēnēs* as being about his own country, i.e. his

---

<sup>25</sup> Lord Dunsany *King Argimēnēs* in *Five Plays* (London: Grant Richards, 1918), p. 65.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Stuart Walker to Lady Dunsany June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1916 in Edward Bierstadt, *Dunsany the Dramatist* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1917) pp. 136-137. This letter is addressed to Lady Dunsany as Dunsany himself was at the time recovering from his wound sustained in the Easter Uprising.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany* (London: Collins, 1972), p. 136

imaginative world, but this play is also about his own country in its allegorical relationship to Ireland.

*King Argimēnēs*'s connection with Ireland began with its debut at the Abbey Theatre in 1911. The play is set 'A long time ago' (p. 58) in an undisclosed location, somewhere in Dunsany's limitless East. The first act opens in the slave fields where the deposed King Argimēnēs has been forced to work as a slave by Darniak, Argimēnēs's successor. Argimēnēs struggles to accept his lot as he remembers a higher form of living: 'It is very terrible to have been a king' (p. 59). This, then, is a play about kingship, what it is to be a king, to have been a king, and to desire to be a king. The focus on the right to rule, and the desire to rule, was particularly pressing for Dunsany at the time of the play's production. In 1911 the ruling powers in Ireland were being challenged on every front; not only this, but the old orders throughout Europe were in jeopardy at this point in the twentieth century – orders of which the aristocratic Dunsany was necessarily a part.

Andrew E. Malone, a critic contemporaneous with Dunsany, when explaining the play's somewhat disappointing reception at the Abbey, points to the fluctuating state of the aristocracy as a reason for its unsettling effect on Dublin playgoers: 'its theme is too sharp for any Irish audience which is itself essentially snobbily aristocratic, and with its quota of the impoverished and enslaved descendants of kings'.<sup>28</sup> Malone points to the tendency for the native Irish of any class to view themselves as the descendants of kings and aristocrats. For the aristocrats, or pseudo-aristocrats, the theme may cut too close to the bone, making the play a telling self-satire for Lord Dunsany, not only of his own aristocratic class, but of the mythic aspirations of the Irish populace.

In the first act of *King Argimēnēs* the deposed king finds an old green sword buried in the earth. The audience has already been led to expect such a discovery by Argimēnēs's conversations with Zarb, another slave, who states: 'We would all follow you if you had a sword' (p. 62). The emphasis on the weapon arises not merely from the practical concern of overpowering the guards; its importance is more metaphysical than that. Zarb explains to Argimēnēs that the other slaves would only join him against King Darniak if he had the appearance of a king, not just the history of being one. Zarb explains the significance of appearances: 'you look like a slave. They will never follow a slave, because they are slaves themselves, and know how mean a creature is a slave. If you looked like a king they

---

<sup>28</sup> Andrew E. Malone, *The Irish Drama* (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1965), pp. 250-251.

would follow you.’ (p. 67). When Argimēnēs finds the sword it becomes an embodiment of kingship, giving him the charisma to lead the slaves and defeat Darniak. The impact of the weapon is borne out by the reaction of Zarb when Argimēnēs tells him he has found the sword:

King Argimēnēs. *I have found such a sword. (A pause)*

Zarb. Why – then you will wear a purple cloak again, and sit on a great throne, and ride a prancing horse, and we shall call you majesty. (p. 68)

From the possession of the sword the stereotypes of royalty necessarily follow. In this play the right to rule can be contained within an object, and kingship is a matter of cloaks, thrones and prancing horses; this mocking tone is all the more amusing due to the author’s aristocratic heritage. The sword has always been an important symbol for the heroic character, particularly when one thinks of literary heroes such as Arthur with Excalibur or Charlemagne and his sword Joyeuse. There are also Irish equivalents for the blades of European heroes, Cuchulain’s Cruadan or Fergus’s Caladbolg.<sup>29</sup> By finding a heroic sword, Argimēnēs may finally become a true hero.

Far from asserting the right of good kings to rule their people, as one might expect from such an author, the play suggests that one king may well be much the same as another. Written in an Ireland which was struggling to gain self-governance this takes on a deeply satirical tone. Dunsany may be warning the Irish audience that their new government will do little to improve life for the ordinary subject. Yet whichever ruling powers are criticised in this play, no viable alternative is presented. When Argimēnēs defeats Darniak in Act II there is no indication that he will be a better king than his predecessor. In fact, Argimēnēs has less wisdom than his fellow slaves, as is shown by his lack of battle acumen:

King Argimēnēs. Are there other guards in sight of these six guards?

Zarb. No.

King Argimēnēs. How do you know?

Zarb. Because whenever their officer leaves them they sit upon the ground and play with dice.

King Argimēnēs. How does that show that there are not another six in sight of them?

---

<sup>29</sup> Dean E. Miller, *The Epic Hero* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 207.

Zarb. How witless you are, Argimēnēs. Of course it shows there are not. Because if there were, another officer would see them, and their thumbs would be cut off.

King Argimēnēs. Ah. (p. 66)

Argimēnēs, described as ‘witless’ by a fellow slave, hardly seems a promising candidate to rule a kingdom. Dunsany in this play sees kingship as arbitrary, based on the appearances and accoutrements of kingship, and Argimēnēs’s revolution is in fact merely the replacement of like by like. Proof of this lies in the respective gods or idols of Argimēnēs and Darniak. At the beginning of the play Argimēnēs states that Darniak defeated him by breaking his god or idol into three pieces; in return, Argimēnēs breaks Darniak’s idol into seven pieces, gaining the wonder of the slaves: ‘Zarb (*with some awe*). Immortal Illuriel is dead at last.’ (p. 76). The immortal god’s paradoxical death lends an air of farce to the whole notion of replacing one god with another, one king with another. Just as a god’s death negates his immortality, the arbitrary replacement of one king with another throws doubt on the validity of good government itself. The Irish wish for Home Rule is shown as a foolish quest, because there is no guarantee that one government will be better than another. The passage cited may have religious significance as well: independent Ireland would replace the power of the Church of Ireland with that of the Catholic Church, again with the prospect of little improvement for ordinary subjects.

Alongside the problematic elevation of Argimēnēs to the throne, we have the concurrent issue of Argimēnēs as the play’s hero. It is through Dunsany’s portrayal of Argimēnēs as hero that we may best evaluate this play as interacting with the Abbey dramatic canon. One of the seminal texts of the Irish Revival, Yeats and Lady Gregory’s *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* may illuminate the nationalist heroic tradition that would have been in Dunsany’s mind when writing his own play. *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* was written and first performed in 1902 and reflects a specifically nationalist ideology. It is set in and around a small cottage in a rural area and sees a family encountering the title character who is a personification of Ireland. Cathleen calls to the young men of the family to join the cause to regain her ‘four green fields’<sup>30</sup> which have been lost to the English. This is a ritualistic play that verges on the blood-cult, encouraging men to die for their country:

Old Woman. It is a hard service they take that help me. Many that are red-cheeked now will be pale-cheeked; many that have been free to walk the hills and the bogs and the rushes, will be sent to walk hard streets in far countries;

<sup>30</sup> W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory, *The Unicorn from the Stars and other Plays* (London: MacMillan, 1908), p. 153. The four green fields represent the four provinces of Ireland.

many a good plan will be broken; many that have gathered money will not stay to spend it; many a child will be born and there will be no father at its christening to give it a name. They that had red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake; and for all that, they will think they are well paid. (p. 163)

The stirring leadership of Cathleen Ni Houlihan is absent in the character of Argimēnēs who is much more passive and lethargic. Death or exile in the earlier play is little enough to suffer in exchange for being a hero in the nationalist cause. This call to martyrdom is challenged in Dunsany's play. Ben Levitas in *The Theatre of Nation* sees *King Argimēnēs* as 'a manifest allegory complete with vanquished King and soothsayers prophesying impeding [sic] calamity to spoilt courtiers. The King-made-slave Argimenes finds an 'old green sword' – symbol of unearthed culture and tradition restored, and despite Dunsany's exoticism, doubtless an accessory to Yeats's *Green Helmet*.'<sup>31</sup> Yeats's green helmet in the play of the same name is a prize awarded to the man who may unite Ireland, Cuchulain in this legend. Dunsany's green sword is a far more unstable symbol, and its unifying powers seem rather transitory. As has already been mentioned, Dunsany Green found in this case in Argimēnēs's sword, is particularly interesting because it is simultaneously both a symbol of Dunsany's exoticism and a link to Irish culture and tradition, just as Yeats's green helmet is symbolic of Irish heroism. Ben Levitas's reading of *King Argimēnēs* as a play about restoration of an unearthed culture is however hard to reconcile with the sense of circularity within the play where gods replace gods, kings replace kings with few apparent changes. At the start of the play Argimēnēs and his fellow slaves were looking forward to the possibility of eating the bones of the King Darniak's dying dog. The final scene of the play, after Argimēnēs's victory, sees a messenger arrive with the news that the dog has finally died:

Man. The king's dog is dead.

King Argimēnēs and his men (*savagely and hungrily*) Bones!

King Argimēnēs (*remembering suddenly what has happened and where he is*)

Let him be buried with the late king.

Zarb. (*in voice of protest*) Majesty. (p. 79)

By refusing the slaves their bones Argimēnēs may be showing that he has learnt nothing from his time as a slave, and will himself be vulnerable to revolutions. The meaning is ambiguous however, and the new king may be merely trying to preserve the new-found prosperity of the slaves by refusing to let them regress to their previous state. Again, this

---

<sup>31</sup> Ben Levitas, *The Theatre of Nation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 191.

points to the vulnerability of the illusion of power, as the boundary between slave and courtier, subject and king, is always liable to slippage.

Ben Levitas rightly points out that by the ending of the play we find, ‘Nationalism resurrected [...] but with a palimpsest of complications’.<sup>32</sup> One of these complications occurs with the image of the green sword – which Levitas claims as a nationalist symbol – as it challenges a simplistic notion of the heroic, a challenge summed up in Argimēnēs’s prayer to its previous owner:

O warrior spirit, wherever thou wandered, whoever be thy gods, whether they punish thee, or whether they bless thee, O kingly spirit, that once laid here this sword, behold, I pray to thee, having no gods to pray to, for the god of my nation was broken in three by night. [...] Aye, though thou wert a robber that took men’s lives unrighteously, yet shall rare spices smoulder in thy temple and little maidens sing and new-plucked flowers deck the solemn aisles; and priests shall go about it ringing bells that thy soul shall find repose. O but it has a good blade this old green sword; thou wouldst not like to see it miss its mark, if the dead see at all as wise men teach, thou wouldst not like to see it go thirsting into the air; so huge a sword should find its marrowy bone. (*Extends his right hand upward*) Come into my right arm, O ancient spirit, O unknown warrior’s soul. And if thou hast the ear of any gods, speak there against Illurial, god of King Darniak. (pp. 64-65)

In this speech Argimēnēs is happy to worship, or at least take advantage of the power of, an unknown warrior who has robbed and taken lives ‘unrighteously’. For the twentieth century audience the old warrior code sits uneasily with present day morality, a hint to the theatre-goers at the Abbey not to take the nationalist rhetoric of plays such as *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* at face value. In addition, the violence in *King Argimēnēs*, rather than forming a heroic centre to the play, takes place offstage, when Argimēnēs kills the guards and storms the palace. It is the breaking of the idol that wins Argimēnēs the throne rather than the killing of his rivals by the sword. His relationship with the old weapon, then, differs from that of Arthur or Charlemagne with their legendary blades. Rather than being empowered by a magical sword which grants chivalric values, Argimēnēs is overtaken by the sword and the older, bloodier power systems that it represents.

The sword discovered by Argimēnēs is in fact deeply fetishized: it is representative of the masculine cult of violence in the Irish mythological series. The character of the mythological hero Cuchulain in particular was characterized by spasmodic violence:

---

<sup>32</sup> Ben Levitas, *The Theatre of Nation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 191.

As the warp-spasm strikes Cú Chulainn, violence flows like a ripple through him, turning him inside out, bringing his organs up through his mouth, turning his limbs back to front, and causing blood and fire to burst from his head. The warp-spasm is the literalized spectacle of unchecked violence, operating beyond society, beyond restriction, and beyond the norms of the body.<sup>33</sup>

Argimēnēs, with his tactical ineptitude and off-stage violence could not be further from this frenzied figure of Irish masculinity.

Criticism of heroic violence occurs several times in Dunsany's fiction and there is a clear parallel for *King Argimēnēs* in the short story 'The Sword of Welleran' (1908). In this story a young man called Rold is visited in his sleep by the ghosts of ancient heroes and made to fight against the enemy attacking his town. When he sees what he has done, rather than rejoicing at his victory in battle, he is stricken with remorse, crying:

"O sword, sword! How horrible thou art! Thou art a terrible thing to have come among men. How many eyes will look upon gardens no more because of thee!"

"And the tears of Rold fell down upon the proud sword but could not wash it clean."<sup>34</sup>

The concept of the warrior himself rejecting the cult of violence, as Rold does in this story, challenges the literal interpretation of Irish heroic myths that was being undertaken by Padraig Pearse and other nationalists in Dunsany's era. It was common for nationalists at the beginning of the twentieth century to identify, overtly or covertly, with mythological heroes and the figure of Cuchulain in particular. Murray Pittock notes that 'not only Pearse, but Cathal Brugha and Michael Collins were to be identified with the hero: Cuchulain loomed over the typology of the period'.<sup>35</sup> Part of the reason why Dunsany does not introduce Irish figures in these early plays is that they could not be used without evoking the nationalist cause; something Dunsany was understandably loath to do given his unionism.

Lord Dunsany is not the only one of the Irish playwrights to focus on ideologies of heroism. In the previous section we examined how the *Sinn Féin* theatrical pastiche 'A Cross Image' connected Dunsany's work with that of the other Irish playwrights, Synge in

---

<sup>33</sup> Jeremy Lowe, 'Contagious Violence and the Spectacle of Death in *Tain Bo Cuailnge*', Maria Tymoczko and Colin Ireland. *Language and Tradition in Ireland* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003) p. 95.

<sup>34</sup> Lord Dunsany, *The Sword of Welleran* (London: George Allen and Sons, 1908), p. 102.

<sup>35</sup> Murray Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester: MUP, 1999), p. 81.

particular. The main focus of this skit is Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. In 'A Cross Image' Molleen, a satirical version of Pegeen Mike from the *Playboy* says to 'Twisty' (representing Christy, the hero of the play): 'You're the playboy of the western world, and a true type of young manhood in your generation in this land, surely. I'll marry you. Here, come inside, an' I'll see to your feet and make a bed'.<sup>36</sup> The *Playboy*, whose opening night had caused rioting at the Abbey in 1907, was thus still seen by the nationalist press in 1910 as indicative of the Abbey's distance from true Irish types and a threat to 'young manhood'. In the *Playboy* the young man, Christy, who is the hero of the play, claims to have killed his father, which leads the villagers to believe he must be a great, strong man. When Christy's father arrives, alive and kicking, the story unravels and Christy loses his heroic status. In an attempt to recover his position in the false narrative, Christy tries to kill his father, but this time the community is horrified by witnessing the actual deed. The play ends with Christy and his father (who has survived this new attempt at parricide) leaving the town, which is now bereft of its heroic story. Lionel Pilkington has noted the nationalists' objections to what they saw as 'a disgraceful slur on Irish womanhood'<sup>37</sup> (referring to audience's objection to the word 'shift' and the sexually outspoken character of Pegeen) yet the depictions of Irish masculinity were just as unnerving for the audience, particularly Synge's exposure of the Irish hero.

The mythic ideal of Irish masculinity as a fighting Cuchulain type is exactly what Pegeen wishes for at the beginning of the *Playboy*: 'Where now will you meet the like of Daneen Sullivan knocked the eye from a peeler, or Marcus Quin, God rest him, got six months for maiming ewes... Where will you find the like of them'.<sup>38</sup> So when Christy arrives Pegeen neatly slots him in to the concept of the mythic hero that has already been formed in her imagination through cultural memory. This passage also notes the juxtaposition of the heroic ideal with modern reality where heroes may just be petty criminals assaulting policemen. Noting this element of the play, Seamus Deane sees the *Playboy* as an ode to a lost heroic identity:

For what we face in *The Playboy* is, after all, the spectacle of a dying community, reinvigorated by the arrival of an ostensibly criminal outsider, that reverts in the end to a mob and thereby indicates its historical doom while the

---

<sup>36</sup> Robert Hogan, *The Rise of the Realists, 1910-1915* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979), p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and the State in twentieth-century Ireland* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 59.

<sup>38</sup> J. M. Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World* in *The Works of John M. Synge* Vol. 2. (Boston: John W. Luce 1912), p. 12.



outsider moves off into a legendary world of heroic identity, a place that is not a place but a condition, the condition of having become legendary.<sup>39</sup>

Synge's play is both heroic and anti-heroic, both nostalgic and rebellious towards the heroic tradition. Due to centuries of tales of myth and legend passed down through oral culture the Mayo locals in the *Playboy* have no difficulty in assimilating myth into reality and vice versa, just as the slaves slot Argimēnēs into a stereotype of kingship. Storytelling is a major theme of Synge's play as it is of Dunsany's, enabling ancient mythic ideas to mix with modern moral codes. Christy's final speech shows the knowing use of heroic terminology in the play: 'Ten thousand blessings upon all that's here, for you've turned me a likely gaffer in the end of all, the way I'll go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgment day.'<sup>40</sup> Christy's parting words are a reaffirmation of the heroic, seeing him 'romancing' through history, and this concept will be taken up in Dunsany's Spanish novels discussed in the following chapter. The humour of the *Playboy* comes from the paradox of the exposure of Christy's fantasy and the fact that to the village he did indeed embody their need for a heroic figure. The problem for the audience is that Synge has exposed the very process of mythmaking, a feature important not just to historical, but to contemporary Ireland.

Just as the country people of Synge's plays focus on oral culture and favour storytelling over mundane reality, in one of Dunsany's late novels set in Ireland, *The Story of Mona Sheehy*, a tall tale has a major impact on a small community.<sup>41</sup> In *The Story of Mona Sheehy* the title character is brought up to believe that she has a fairy mother, although the reader is aware from the start that the girl is mortal. The story of her supernatural conception affects her entire life, just as Christy's fictional parricide does in the *Playboy*, and this mythologizing of the real and confusion of fact and fiction is seen as inherent in the people of rural Ireland. The narrator states of Mona that, 'like many an Irish mind, hers was stored with legends of kings at the head of the table in the long hall at Tara, which with her were as good as memories'.<sup>42</sup> The legends of the kings of Tara are alive and well in both Dunsany's and Synge's imagined Irelands, and it is the Irish peasantry that remains linked to this heroic past.

---

<sup>39</sup> Seamus Deane, *Strange Country* (Oxford: OUP Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 140.

<sup>40</sup> J. M. Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World* in *The Works of John M. Synge* Vol. 2. (Boston: John W. Luce 1912), p. 111.

<sup>41</sup> For a full discussion of this novel see Chapter Three.

<sup>42</sup> Lord Dunsany, *My Ireland* (Plymouth: Mayflower Press Ltd., 1937), p. 235.

During the *Playboy* controversy Yeats and Lady Gregory stressed the element of fantasy in Synge's play, partly presumably to counter criticisms of Synge's depictions of Irish peasant life: 'They [the rioters], not being used to works of imagination and wild fantasy, thought the play a libel on the Irish countryman.'<sup>43</sup> Yet this fantasy element is an important part of the art of storytelling, a link back to the days of the Irish bards. Dunsany's own reading of the *Playboy* riots in one of his volumes of autobiography is straight to the point:

As for the satire, when first a Dublin audience saw Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, instead of regarding satire as one of the spices in a work of art, they concentrated their attention on it and booed the play. It was rather as though you offered a plate of roast beef, with all necessary vegetables and condiments, to someone not quite familiar with them, and as though he started his meal on the mustard, and were sick. But in course of time Irish audiences got over the bitter taste and came to enjoy the play.<sup>44</sup>

Dunsany may be unique in comparing the most Irish of theatre disputes with the most English food of roast beef and mustard, but his emphasis on the *Playboy* as satire is particularly telling. Rather than viewing the play as Lady Gregory does as 'Synge's fantasy',<sup>45</sup> Dunsany sees the *Playboy* as being 'spiced' by satire, thus showing the capacity of fantasy to mirror and indeed mock real life, something that he exploits in his own works. In many of his plays, Dunsany takes up Synge's satirical aims, and this is particularly evident in *King Argimēnēs and the Unknown Warrior*.

As noted previously, Dunsany describes *King Argimēnēs* as being about his own country, i.e. his imaginative world, but also his own country in its allegorical relationship to Ireland. Edward Bierstadt<sup>46</sup> notes of *King Argimēnēs* that: 'When the play was first given at the Abbey Theatre one of the old songs of famine time was used for the chant of the low born, and most effectively.'<sup>47</sup> It is unknown whether Lord Dunsany himself endorsed the use of an Irish song for the section of the play where the slaves are singing, or whether those in charge at the Abbey decided unilaterally to insert an explicitly Irish element into the play. What is clear however is that with the addition of the Irish song the play acquires a fluidity of setting, and this combined with its concern with the right to rule places it within the Ireland of Dunsany's era.

---

<sup>43</sup> Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre* (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 1972), p. 69.

<sup>44</sup> Lord Dunsany, *My Ireland* (Plymouth: Mayflower Press Ltd., 1937), p. 261.

<sup>45</sup> Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre* (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 1972), p. 70.

<sup>46</sup> Edward Bierstadt was an American critic contemporaneous with Dunsany who wrote *Dunsany the Dramatist*, the only book length study of Dunsany's drama.

<sup>47</sup> Edward Bierstadt, *Dunsany the Dramatist* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1917), p. 38.

*King Argimēnēs* is perhaps the most clearly allegorical of the early plays and it is useful to note the capacity for satire in Dunsany's fantasies. Its allegorical nature may help to explain why the play was never revived at the Abbey, but it may also explain the popularity of the play overseas. John Harrington notes of Dunsany's success in the United States:

Unlike the one-act plays performed by the Irish Players, Dunsany's short dramas, all allegorical vignettes, were so extreme in their fables about heaven's gates, Egyptian queens, and oriental gods that they offered no opportunity for debate over whether they were realist or romanticist, much less whether they maligned the Irish people.<sup>48</sup>

The *Playboy* which had caused controversy in Dublin was perhaps even more troubling to Irish Americans who, like many exiled communities, were unwilling to see aspects of their identity challenged. Therefore when Dunsany's texts were performed in America they were embraced with a sense of relief as it appeared that there was no danger of his exotic plays maligning the Irish people. Yet one must feel that the audiences were too quick to dismiss any critical or satirical images of Ireland in these plays, as the exotic setting was precisely what made Dunsany's satire of Irish heroism possible.

### Section 3: East meets West in *If*

East is East, and there's an end of it.<sup>49</sup>

Lord Dunsany's critique of Irish themes portrayed in an Eastern setting in *King Argimēnēs* recurs in his most successful post-War play, *If*. Written in 1919 and performed in 1921, *If* is one of the most interesting and innovative examples of Dunsany's fantastic drama. It premiered in London and was an immediate success: 'It was his single greatest triumph in terms of the number of performances and money made, nothing short of a smash hit which ran for hundreds of nights.'<sup>50</sup> It was never performed at the Abbey, however, partly due to

---

<sup>48</sup> John P. Harrington, *The Irish Play on the New York Stage* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), p. 78.

<sup>49</sup> Lord Dunsany, *If* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1922), p. 15.

<sup>50</sup> Darrell Schweitzer, *Pathways to Elfland: The Writings of Lord Dunsany* (Philadelphia: Owlswick Press, 1989), p. 64.

the fact that by this time Dunsany had fallen out with the theatre's directors. Dunsany had accused Lady Gregory of plagiarism (see the conclusion to this chapter for full details of the spat) when she produced *The Deliverer* (1911), which shared the Eastern setting and even some of the plot of Dunsany's own *King Argimēnēs*. Whether or not this play was plagiarized, its very existence along with texts like Padraic Colum's *Mogu the Wanderer* (1917), which is also set in the desert, shows that plays with exotic or Eastern settings were part of the Irish theatrical tradition of this period. Thus although *If* did not appear at the Abbey, it is very much part of an Irish stage tradition.

Between writing his first plays, which had been in general well received, and the successful production of *If*, Dunsany had written many others including some underwhelming drawing room comedies and more fantasies set in Eastern locales in the vein of *The Gods of the Mountain* (1910). With *If*, for the first time, Dunsany combines his experiences of social comedies with his usual fantasy tropes to create a play both of grand spectacle and social commentary. It is a play that challenges boundaries, whether through the contrast of Eastern and Western settings or through the mix of theatrical genres which Dunsany employs to comic and spectacular effect.

William Beebe's introduction to the American edition of the play (1922) notes Dunsany's ability to contrast and blur genres and themes:

And so perhaps my sheer, uncritical joy in a play such as the "If" of the present volume, is due to the relief of leavening the dull main street of life with flowers of Carcassonne, or as in this case, with the crystal of Ali; a relief from the eternal straight line or triangle drama, which can develop or end only happily or unhappily, to a play which begins in a spirit of comedy, develops mysteriously, and ends satisfactorily.<sup>51</sup>

Not only does this play refuse to end 'happily or unhappily', its oscillation between different modes challenges boundaries both in real life and on the stage. The play's main character, John Beal, through the magical intervention of the exotic Ali, manages to flee his banal, suburban existence for a life of adventure and danger in the East. During the play he raises himself to the status of an Eastern king, and even has aspirations to Godhead, only to fall low once more and to return to where he started from. This play not only utilizes the Eastern setting found in many of the early plays and other fiction from Dunsany's writings before the First World War; it examines and challenges the relationship of West to East and provides an insight into the place that the East occupies in

---

<sup>51</sup> William Beebe's 'Foreword' to Lord Dunsany, *If* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1922), p. x.

Dunsany's imagination. Just as the two settings of the play mirror each other, the Western status of Ireland is aligned with the East in many writings of this period, as will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Five of the thesis, which will focus on how this trend in Dunsany's writing reflects a tradition of Irish Orientalism during the Revival period. Like many other Irish authors of this period, Dunsany's texts challenges boundaries of West and East, and tend to align Ireland with Eastern, rather than Western culture. In this play he has not yet turned to Ireland directly, but the connections between the Englishman and the Eastern natives examined in *If* anticipates Dunsany's later concerns with locating the Irish between occidental and oriental poles.

Dunsany's experience of writing social comedies makes itself felt in the early scenes of *If*. The opening scene sees John Beal trying to catch a train to a job interview, only to miss it through the incompetence of some station porters. The next scene begins ten years later in the suburban home of John and his wife Mary who are having a seemingly banal conversation about acacia trees. It is not until later in the play that the significance of the train station scene becomes clear, when John is sent back in time to this event in order to change its outcome. Alerted to the disruption of the conventions of a conventional drama by the change in time between the early scenes, the audience is prepared for the complex undertones of the seemingly trivial conversation between the marital couple.

This scene opens with what is apparently a run of the mill discussion between husband and wife. John comments on the fact that despite being called 'The Acacias' their home has no such plants in the garden. He suggests that they buy one, then goes on to say: 'Somehow I wish sometimes, I almost wish I could have gone abroad for a week or so to places like where acacias grow naturally' (p. 10). Acacias, for John, have the lure of the exotic, and represent possibilities of freedom from his everyday existence. He explains to his wife that he would have liked to travel to the East: 'I've often heard people speak of it, and somehow it seemed so...' (p. 10). John finds it impossible to articulate his longing for the East which seems exotic, alluring and intangible.

In contrast, Mary sees the East – and her husband's interest in this region – as a threat: 'The East, John? Not the East. I don't think the East somehow is quite respectable.' (p. 10). There is more at play here than a satire of middle class manners and casual racism towards the uncivilized East. The East is troubling for Mary not as a knowable, definable danger, but something related to John's inability to articulate his sense of longing. The unknown, unstable nature of the East is what makes it so dangerous: 'But the East doesn't

seem quite to count, somehow, as the proper sort of place to come from, does it, dear?’ (p. 16). To Mary, and by extension Dunsany’s middle-class audience, the East is a non-place, somewhere that ‘doesn’t seem quite to count’. As a non-place, a blank space, it can be filled with whatever imperial assumptions Western society wishes to endow it with.

John and Mary’s discussion of the East prepares the audience for the arrival of the mysterious Ali at the Beals’ home. The stranger from the East entering a domestic setting recalls W.B. Yeats’s first play *The Countess Cathleen* (1892). In this play two demons appear in the guise of Eastern merchants and seek to corrupt the souls of some Irish villagers. The play valorises the Irish aristocratic class, with the Countess Cathleen nobly giving up her soul to save her subjects from damnation. Ali in *If* is also a merchant, but his motives are more ambiguous than Yeats’s orientals, although like the earlier characters he is a powerful supernatural force, whether for good or evil. Early in the play we learn that Ali has made a great deal of money for John’s firm but is now broke. John’s partners have given him some money and he arrives at the house with a gift for John. This gift is a crystal ‘offering’ (p. 18) that allows the user to travel back in time and change the course of their life. Ali’s presence in the Beal household is seen by Mary as an invasion: ‘I don’t like letting people in that you don’t know where they come from.’ (p. 16). Yet, at least in the imagination of her husband, the East had already been a palpable presence in their home.

John is initially reluctant to use Ali’s gift, but he realises that he could go back and change the one regret he had in his life; the time that he missed the train: ‘O, Mary, I have so longed to catch that infernal train. Just think of it, annoyed on and off for ten years by the eight-fifteen’ (p. 35). He decides to use the crystal and travel back in time, but not before promising his wife that he will not make any changes that could prevent their marriage. The next scene is a repeat of the first, with John trying to catch the train he missed ten years earlier. This time he makes it, and meets Miralda Clement, a beautiful and formidable young lady, a meeting that changes the course of his life. Miralda persuades John to travel to the East where she employs him to get some money which she believes she is owed by a local businessman. The chance meeting confirms Mary’s worst fears: ‘I couldn’t bear to tamper with the past. You don’t know what it is, it’s what’s gone. But if it really isn’t gone at all, if it can be dug up like that, why you don’t know what mightn’t happen.’ (p. 29). John Beal does something denied to normal human experience; he manages to change his past.

The past in *If* is shown to be something unreliable, liable to slippage and change. This obsession with the past and its ability to affect the present is a theme common to many works of Irish literature, where Ireland is shown to be a country haunted by history. In his writings on the legacy of the nineteenth century Famine in Ireland, Stuart John McLean notes that the disruptions from the literary haunting of the present by the past causes: ‘the unforeseen resurfacing of the archaic past within the present [...] past, present, and future are loosed from their assigned subservience to one another’.<sup>52</sup> Writing in an awareness of the past in Ireland, a past that is always threatening to leak through into the contemporary moment, Dunsany creates a play where the past is never in the past, and the present is just as unstable. John Beal manages to alter his own history for ten years, but the play’s final moments see his real past returning. As a character later in the play remarks: ‘Not to interfere with the old ways is wisest.’ (p. 166). The past, whether as a literal moment in a temporal chronology, or in the sense of tradition, is something that cannot be tampered with without serious consequences. Through meeting Miralda, John side-steps his own past, replacing it with one that is in the East rather than the West and full of the exotic rather than the ordinary. Just as in Ireland where the past is liable to break into the present, for John the past is not a fixed or settled.

In avoiding suburban life, John Beal temporarily avoids his fate, and fate plays an important role in Dunsany’s theatrical writings as we have seen from the beginning of his playwriting career with *The Glittering Gate*. In *The Glittering Gate* the burglars have little choice but to submit to their fate, even if this fate seems to be an absence of any sort of narrative closure. In *If*, before he uses Ali’s magic crystal, John tells Mary not to worry that he might change the past so that they never meet, explaining, ‘It was our fate; we couldn’t have missed it!’ (p. 35). In fact, he does change it, and lives an entirely different life, even if it is only for ten years.

At the request of Miralda, John visits a country in the East, called Al Shaldomir, located in the play on the ‘other side of Persia’ (p. 50). Miralda’s father once loaned some money to a man named Ben Hussein, who used the loan to buy control of the only pass into or out of the country. After Miralda’s father died, Hussein refused to pay her the debt, and she persuades John to go to Hussein’s land and to try to regain what she is owed. Act II opens with John in Al Shaldomir talking to a Daoud, his servant, about the natives’ use of idols. John divides the sacred figures into piles, one pile for holy and one for unholy idols. John

---

<sup>52</sup> Stuart John Maclean, *The Event and its Terrors* (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 160.

calls the idols to which the people sacrifice berries and rats holy, and the idols that require a human blood sacrifice unholy. At this point in the play he is appalled by the natives, and exhibits a standard imperial attitude: 'I feel sort of responsible for all these silly people. Somebody's got to look after them.' (p. 63). This reflects the infantilizing of the native other which is found in many orientalist tracts.<sup>53</sup> John tells Daoud that he must throw away the unholy idols, but his servant is reluctant to relinquish the gods even though he recognizes John's reasoning: 'They are our history, master, they are our old times. Though they be bad times they are *our* times, master; and now they go. I am sad, master, when the old gods go.' (p. 65). Daoud is a patriot, a parody of the Irish nationalist willing to cling to his country's past even though it was 'bad times', and willing to excuse the bloodthirsty gods because they are his gods. John Beal plays his part as representative of the English imperial power, trying desperately to improve the uncivilized Irish natives. As the play continues however, the narrative challenges this unsubtle parody.

The relationship between John Beal and Daoud at the beginning of the play is one of imperial master and native servant, as seen in John's petulant reaction to Daoud calling him master: 'I know better than you what you ought to do, because I am English. But that's all. I am not your master.' (p. 55). This paradoxical statement shows not only the irony that the more he protests the more he shows his mastery, but it also shows the infirm ground on which John's power is based. John's role as the Western outsider begins to change as the play continues, as does his attitude to religion. This change is signalled in the first scene in Act II when John argues with Hussein, the debtor, over Miralda's right to the loan. Hussein says that as Miralda's father is dead he will pay his debt to the gods rather than her, to which John replies firmly, 'I am English. And we are greater than the gods.' (p. 79). This is not merely a statement of imperial dominance; it is a suggestion of the hubris which will be John's ultimate downfall. It is also a link between men and the gods, showing how man creates gods for his own ends, a theme brought to its extreme conclusion in *The Gods of the Mountain* examined in the next section.

There is another gap in time before Act III, which is set six years after Act II, and finds John and Miralda living together in Al Shaldomir. John has killed Hussein at Miralda's request and taken over his position of power within the country. It is not just John's position that has changed; his personality has undergone the transformation hinted at in the

---

<sup>53</sup> An analysis of this infantilization is a feature of many texts on cultural relations; see for example Gabriele Schwab, *The Mirror and the Killer Queen: Otherness in Literary Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 3.



previous act. At the beginning of this scene John and Miralda are arguing as Miralda wishes for them to be married and John disagrees, explaining that he never intends to get married, due to some dim memory that he should marry Mary. When Miralda accuses him of being crazy he replies, 'I will have what fancies I please, crazy or sane. Am I not Shereef of Shaldomir? Who dare stop me if I would be mad as Herod?' (p. 120). The intervening years have turned John into a despot, but it is this domestic disagreement with his lover that will make him lose everything. Angered at not being his official queen, Miralda plots against John with her lover Hafiz and arranges for him to be attacked. Daoud tries to warn his master that he is in trouble, but John finds it difficult to understand the rebellion:

John. [...] the people would never rebel against me. Do I not govern them well?

Daoud. Even so, master.

John. Why should they rebel, then?

Daoud. They think of the old times, master. (pp. 135-6)

By overthrowing tradition, even traditions that the people themselves admit were bad or outdated, John has made an enemy of his people. Dunsany in this passage suggests that actions such as the Easter Rebellion and the fight for Irish independence are a longing for a past, some 'old times' to be reclaimed rather than being rooted in the needs of modern twentieth century Ireland. Yet, in this play, the sympathy lies with the rebellion rather than the despotic John Beal who is willing to murder on the request of a beautiful woman. In the next scene John realises that his rule is in jeopardy, and he warns his people not to cross him:

My gods are gods of brass; none have escaped them. They cannot be overthrown. Of all men they favour my people. Their hands reach out to the uttermost ends of the earth. Take heed, for my gods are terrible. I am the Shereef; if any dare withstand me I will call on my gods and they shall crush him utterly. They shall grind him into the earth and trample him under, as though he had not been. The uttermost parts have feared the gods of the English. (pp. 163-4)

John's transformation is complete: he has gone from Western outsider to more *savage* than the natives with whom he was so disgusted when he first arrived in the East. Despite throwing away the natives' bad idols, he has merely replaced them with idols of brass, the gods of the English. John has become part of the East, an example of the coloniser who has become more native than the natives, and Western society itself is shown to have

elements of the East with brass gods that can show favour or reach out and destroy just as capriciously as the foreign idols. The attitude of Empire is pregnant in the English gods which must be obeyed and John's laws that 'you shall keep; there shall be no other laws' (p. 164).

There is a discernible link in this section between the Westerner who becomes an extreme version of everything he despises in the natives, and the sense of the colonisers of Ireland becoming more Irish than the Irish themselves.<sup>54</sup> This is a theme found throughout twentieth century Irish literature when Irish identity was facing new challenges with the severing of ties with England. One example can be found in Frank O'Connor's brilliant and unsettling short story 'The Guests of the Nation', first published a decade after *If* in 1931. This story is narrated by a young Irishman whose job it is to guard two English soldiers, and quickly comes to find similarities rather than differences with the enemy:

I couldn't at the time seen [sic] the point of me and Noble guarding Belcher and Hawkins at all, for it was my belief that you could have planted that pair down anywhere from this to Claregalway and they'd have taken root there like a native weed. I never in my short experience seen two men to take to this country as they did.<sup>55</sup>

The soldiers become friendly with the Irish, particularly the old woman who owns the house in which they are imprisoned, to the point that they become almost indistinguishable from the natives. The inevitable, yet still chilling, climax where the Irishmen are commanded to execute their English companions is an indication that the danger of colonial relations is not in the differences between individuals, but in the threat to national identity that occurs when these distinctions disappear. In O'Connor's story it is not the English soldiers that threaten Irish society; it is those who become indistinguishable from the natives and thus challenge the notion of an Irish identity. This recalls the position of Dunsany as a member of the Irish aristocracy, both belonging to the England where he was educated, and the Ireland where he was brought up and lived for most of his life. It is not the foreignness of the English that makes them a threat to a racially pure Irish identity, it is their ability to assimilate and become indistinguishable from the natives. Similarly, in *If* John Beal loses his power because he acts like a local, not a foreigner.

---

<sup>54</sup> In fact this trend has been a source of anxiety for commentators as early as the late sixteenth century in Edmund Spenser's writings on Ireland. See the introduction to Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley, *Edmund Spenser: A View of the State of Ireland* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. xi-xxiv.

<sup>55</sup> Frank O'Connor, 'Guests of the Nation' in *Classic Irish Short Stories* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), p. 173.

In assuming the identity of the locals in *If*, John Beal loses his own identity, yet the play is not simply critical of the position of the coloniser. Beal does become a tyrant in Al Shaldomir, but is this worse than a drab middle class existence in the suburbs? Neither the romantic nor the realist path is given clear support in this play.

Following the rebellion by the natives, John is forced to flee, but not without a final plea for imperial dominance: 'I have been Shereef hitherto, but now I will be king. Al Shaldomir is less than I desire. I have ruled too long over a little country. I will be the equal of Persia. I will be king; I proclaim it.' (p. 164). Unfortunately for John, his people have had enough of his aspirations of power and he must leave for England or be killed. The final act of the play finds him back in England, broke and broken, wandering the street in front of The Acacias. He rings the doorbell to beg for money and meets the housemaid. The maid's announcement of his arrival mirrors that of Ali in the second Act, with John now inhabiting the role of outsider. The original arrival of Ali is announced in the following way:

Liza. There's a gentleman to see you, sir, which isn't, properly speaking, a gentleman at all. Not what I should call one, that is, like.

Mary. Not a gentleman! Good gracious, Liza! Whatever do you mean?

Liza. He's black. (p. 14)

This earlier exchange between Mary and the housemaid comes across as little more than racism, and an othering of the exotic Ali. Yet by repeating the scene, just as he did with the episode in the train station, Dunsany gives a further layer to the earlier exchange. John has to beg Liza to introduce him to Mary:

Liza. There's a gentleman to see you, mum, which is, properly speaking, not a gentleman at all, but 'e would come in, mum.

Mary. Not a gentleman! Good gracious, Liza, whatever do you mean?

Liza. 'E would come in, mum.

Mary. What does he want?

Liza. [*over shoulder*] What does you want?

John. [*entering*] I am a beggar. (p. 175)

Here the question of whether or not one is considered a 'gentleman' is shown to be more concerned with class rather than race. Dunsany cleverly has John act out the part of Ali, to show that even though he is now in the West, the differences between Western and Eastern characters are still unstable. This instability is similar to the liminal boundaries of identity

in O'Connor's story and also anticipates the concern with place and edges that will be found throughout Dunsany's oeuvre. Society's insiders and outsiders are become one in the character of John Beal, whose actions in the East are representative of the role of the non-native classes in Ireland, from which Dunsany's family originated.

John's story is brought to a close by the housemaid Liza who, deciding it is responsible for John's bad luck, breaks the crystal, so ending Ali's spell and erasing the alternate reality. John loses all memory of his Eastern life and the play closes with a return to normality:

John. Mary.

Mary. Yes, John.

John. I – I thought I'd caught that train.

*Curtain* (p. 185)

Lord Dunsany explains the importance of the ending of *If* in his introduction to *Plays of Gods and Men*:

The play called "If" is set in motion by John Beal's belief that "a little thing like that can't alter the future," a point that his logic demonstrates. But Fate turns out to be stronger than John Beal's logic.

An axiom of this play is, as Ali states several times, that at the end of the ten years, whatever he be, wherever he has been living, the crystal must bring John Beal to The Acacias. The other axiom is that what those ten years have made him is irrevocable, and he must go straight on from the point, whatever it be, at which those years have left him. But even as John Beal forgot the power of Fate, so the god of jade, whose terrible power was in the crystal, overlooked the destructive potentiality of the housemaid.<sup>56</sup>

Just as John, a middle-class everyman, may go to the East and take over a country, a lowly housemaid may best all the magic of Ali's god of jade. This anticipates Dunsany's later fiction such as the Jorkens tales where the magical is often to be found in everyday life. In *If*, East and West are placed in opposition precisely to challenge the conventional belief that they are opposites. It is interesting that a contemporary reviewer described *If* as a 'dream-play'<sup>57</sup> as it is in dreams that the boundaries between real and unreal, the imagination and the rational may break down. The power of dreams is central to all Dunsany's works, particularly the early short stories which will be examined in Chapter

---

<sup>56</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Plays of Near and Far* (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1923), pp. iii-iv.

<sup>57</sup> Anonymous, 'Lord Dunsany's New Play' *Saturday Review* (June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1921), p. 456.

Four. In this context the dream is one of Ireland as it is in this country where opposites are exposed to be often interrelated such as nationalist/unionist, Protestant/Catholic.

A second reviewer commented that the play is ‘another *Arabian Nights*’<sup>58</sup> and another contemporary review even suggested that the play could be described as realistic in its depiction of colonial power:

[Beal] becomes an adventurer, as true a buccaneer as Drake, the slayer of a brigand, the viceroy of a country, with the possibility of kingship glimmering beyond. It hardly needed the touch of Ali’s crystal to bring the change and realise the splendid paradox; for, as Mr. Kipling has shown, transformations as wonderful have happened in India.<sup>59</sup>

Lawrence notes the influence of Kipling’s work such as ‘The Man who would be King’ (1899) on Dunsany’s text, demonstrating that the play lies within a tradition of British imperial writing. Dunsany’s play is written a full two decades after Kipling’s tale, however, and comes at a point in history when the British Empire was beginning to fragment, with Ireland being one of the first countries to fight for independence. Kipling’s ‘The Man who would be King’ is a short story, and the dialogue is between the former king of Kafiristan and the narrator, with no voice given in the tale to the natives. In contrast, the dramatic form of *If* allows Dunsany to not only give the natives a voice, but also to show visually the despotic nature of John Beal’s rule, and this marks his work as coming from an Irish rather than an English point of view. Dravot, the aspirational man who would be King in Kipling’s story, praises how his new found subjects have adapted to his civilising influence stating: ‘These men aren’t niggers: they’re English!’<sup>60</sup> The would-be-King recreates his subjects in his own image, and is killed when this colonisation of individual identities proves futile. Dunsany’s play reverses this concept; instead of turning the natives English, John Beal styles himself as one of the natives, yet just as the subjects rebel in ‘The Man who would be King’, Beal’s rule also ends in rebellion. Dunsany’s play however is more subtle than previous narratives of Empire such as Kipling’s; John’s return to England which sees him adopt the persona of Ali, along with the elisions between East and West throughout the play show the author moving beyond stereotypical colonial tropes. This play demonstrates Dunsany’s understanding of the relationship between different races in Ireland where colonizer and colonized cannot be easily differentiated.

<sup>58</sup> S.O. Review of *If*, *English Review* (September, 1921), p.216.

<sup>59</sup> C.E. Lawrence, Review of *If*, *The Bookman* (December 1921), p. 170.

<sup>60</sup> Rudyard Kipling, ‘The Man who would be King’, *The Phantom Rickshaw* (New York: Lovell, 1899), p. 131.

English and Irish, like East and West, slide into one another; locations and identities are always unstable in Lord Dunsany's fiction.

## Section 4: *The Gods of the Mountain* and an International Irish Drama

And up from the valley fluttered the prayers of men and here and there the gods did answer a prayer, but oftentimes They mocked them, and all the while the gods were smiling, and all the while men died.<sup>61</sup>

The above quotation from 'For the Honour of the Gods' (1906) is just one example of many in Dunsany's short stories where man may find no comfort in the gods he worships. Like the gods of this story and Ali's jade idol in *If*, the gods in Dunsany's third play, *The Gods of the Mountain* (1910) are cunning and untrustworthy. Authority never goes unchallenged in Dunsany's writings, and the political impact of these views is illuminated by a consideration of the importance of the location of the individual performances of the plays.

When locating Dunsany within the canon of Irish playwrights, it is important to note that Irish plays of the period were performed not only in Ireland but across Europe and in the United States. Present day criticism of Irish drama rarely looks beyond Ireland (in fact, it rarely moves beyond the Pale) but the reception of Irish works abroad forms an important part of the story of Irish drama. Just as Dunsany is writing within the Irish tradition of playwriting at the start of the twentieth century, this tradition itself exists within a European framework. Perhaps the most striking evidence of this in Dunsany's case is the performance of *The Gods of the Mountain* in Italy, directed by the Italian dramatist Luigi Pirandello.

In April 1925 Pirandello opened the Societa del Teatro d'Arte's Odescalchi Theatre in Rome. Set up with financial backing from Mussolini's Fascist party, the theatre, in its brief two-year existence, was the ultimate endorsement of Pirandello not just as a

---

<sup>61</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Time and the Gods* (London: Heinemann, 1906), p. 74.

playwright but as a master of the modern stage. Just as the directors of the Irish National Theatre in Dublin found themselves embroiled in the politics of the day, Pirandello's theatre was intricately and controversially linked to the political forces of pre-war Italy. Whether or not Pirandello agreed with the ideals of the fascist party has been debated by biographers, but, whatever his beliefs, he needed Mussolini's backing to fund his enterprise. Like the Abbey directors who formed uneasy alliances with the nationalists in order to create their theatre, Pirandello delicately wove together the needs of art and politics in ways that would resonate in the performances themselves. This chapter will suggest that Pirandello's work, including his production of Dunsany's play, rather than reinforcing actually challenges the ideals of fascism, creating a tension with his public support for the party.

The opening night of the theatre featured two plays directed by Pirandello. One was Pirandello's own *Sagra del Signore della Nave* (The Festival of Our Lord of the Ship), and the other was Lord Dunsany's *The Gods of the Mountain*. The inclusion of the Dunsany play may strike us as surprising; stylistically at least Dunsany has little in common with the theatre of the absurd. It is worth noting that the works of Dunsany and Pirandello had already appeared on the same stage as both had plays put on by the Dublin Drama League, an offshoot of the Abbey Theatre.<sup>62</sup> This again illustrates that audiences in Ireland were just as familiar with European plays as with those written by native playwrights.<sup>63</sup>

The few commentators on Pirandello who mention the inclusion of the Dunsany play at the Teatro d'Arte are bemused, even perhaps slightly disappointed by its inclusion in Pirandello's company's repertoire, finding it difficult to appreciate the relevance of a slight, almost whimsical play to Pirandello's revolutionary theatre practises. In an examination of *The Gods of the Mountain* in its Irish as well as its international context, we may judge whether the inclusion of the Dunsany play was a mere eccentric whim on Pirandello's part, or if in fact the Irish play deserved, and gained, a new significance on the Italian stage.

---

<sup>62</sup> Brenna Katz Clarke and Harold Ferrar, *The Dublin Drama League 1919-1941* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979). Dunsany's *A Night at an Inn* and *The Laughter of the Gods* were performed in 1919 and 1920 respectively; Pirandello's *Henry IV* was put on in 1924.

<sup>63</sup> Lennox Robinson, *Ireland's Abbey Theatre* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd., 1951), p. 121. It is of note that Dunsany was one of only a few Irish playwrights to have his plays put on by the Drama League whose purpose was to stage international drama. The other Irish dramatists represented included Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw and W.B. Yeats.

The play Pirandello chose, *The Gods of the Mountain*, was written in 1910 and was Dunsany's third after *The Glittering Gate* and *King Argimēnēs*. *The Gods of the Mountain* is set, typically for Dunsany, in a vaguely Eastern locale, referred to in the Pirandello performance notes as 'Indian'<sup>64</sup> but equally capable of being read as Middle Eastern or Asian. It is filled with the fantastic commonplaces which are a feature of Dunsany's early short stories and plays, including beggars and nobles, vengeful gods, prophecies and false prophets and an emphasis on fate and destiny.

The plot is to some extent a Dunsany staple. A group of beggars in the city of Marma, led by the crafty newcomer Agmar, decide to impersonate the seven gods of the mountain. They persuade the townspeople that they are their gods, come to live among men, and are duly worshipped and waited on hand and foot. Some of the locals grow suspicious of the beggars and go to the mountain to see if the stone gods are still on their thrones. The climax of the play is reached when the scouts return to report that the stone gods are missing. The beggars are relieved they have escaped detection, only for the seven monstrous idols to appear on stage and turn them to stone. The imposters are left transformed on stage and the townspeople come to worship them, reassured that they were the real gods all along. The play deals with many of the themes already considered in this chapter; the question of the right to rule links the play to *King Argimēnēs*, while the capriciousness of the Gods is reminiscent of *The Glittering Gate*.

The ending of the play initially met with mixed reviews, with a few contemporary reviewers being unconvinced that bringing the gods onstage was entirely effective. In the better produced performances however, the play had the ability to move the reviewer. Frank Harris, speaking of the play's debut at the Haymarket Theatre in London in 1911, said that, 'It was one of the nights of my life,' and added that *The Gods of the Mountain* was, 'The only play, I said to myself, which meant anything to me in twenty years or more.'<sup>65</sup> These sentiments were echoed by the reviewer for *The Times*:

There are all kinds of elements in Lord Dunsany's extraordinary little play, *The Gods of the Mountain*, which will henceforth precede *Lady Patricia*. There is humour, rough and sly, and irony, and wisdom, and the excitement of uncertainty, and horror. Perhaps the horror is what hits one hardest; for it is a grotesque horror. Thunder, wind, music, and other theatrical devices work one

<sup>64</sup> Programme note qtd. in Alessandro Tinterri, 'The Gods of the Mountain' at the Odescalchi Theatre', *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 3, 12 (1987), p. 352.

<sup>65</sup> Frank Harris qtd. in an anonymous 'Review of *The Gods of the Mountain* at the Princess Theatre, New York', *The New York Times* (December 26<sup>th</sup> 1915), p. 77.



up to apprehension; and there creeps, shuffles, rolls before you a huge, green, lucent, hideous, pot-bellied Mongolian monster, with finger-nails a foot long and legs that are weak and crooked from being crossed since the world was made.<sup>66</sup>

The play, it is suggested, is an assault on the senses, an unnerving spectacle which, as we shall see, would attract Pirandello to direct his own version over a decade later. In 1915, four years after the London performance, the play was taken to America, where it met with more praise despite only appearing at private performances. Again, the reviews were generally positive. An article on Dunsany's plays in the *New York Times* in 1919 noted the importance of *The Gods of the Mountain* in establishing Dunsany's reputation as a dramatist in America:

"The Gods of the Mountain" commanded a profound admiration. Here was a playwright who fashioned a world of his own, different from any we had seen before, or imagined – a world of strange beauty and awe, which he yet made as familiar and real, even humorous, as Broadway or the Bowery. And out of it he evolved a situation, a catastrophe, as new to the theatre as it was overwhelming, astounding. With a single play he established himself a genius – a genius of no great calibre, perhaps, yet as distinct as Barrie or Shaw, Singe [sic] or Maeterlinck.<sup>67</sup>

One wonders then if it was the 'beauty and awe' of *The Gods of the Mountain* that persuaded Pirandello to put it on at the Odelscachi Theatre. Pirandello's Theatre was created with similar hopes and aims to the Irish National Theatre, and indeed to some extent took inspiration from the ideals of this institution.<sup>68</sup> Crucial to the establishment of the Irish National Theatre was the concern that theatre should be improving for the audience. If we consider Yeats's famous statement of his desire to use drama to uplift the people: 'Plays about drawing-rooms are written for the middle classes of great cities, for the classes who live in drawing-rooms, but if you would uplift the man of the roads you must write about the roads, or about the people of romance, or about great historical people'<sup>69</sup> then it is of note that Pirandello took up this mantle for his own theatre company, in his own distinctive style. The aim of the Teatro d'Arte was to raise the level of taste of

---

<sup>66</sup> Anonymous, Review of *The Gods of the Mountain* at the Haymarket Theatre, *The Times* (June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1911), p. 10.

<sup>67</sup> John Corbin, 'The Gods of Dunsany' *The New York Times* (26<sup>th</sup> June, 1919)

<sup>68</sup> Indeed, Alessandro Tinterri posits that it was Dunsany's connection with Irish drama that led to his inclusion in the programme; Pirandello had similar aspirations for the importance of his theatre as the Irish cultural nationalists and including a play by an Irish playwright cements this connection. See Alessandro Tinterri, 'The Gods of the Mountain' at the Odelscachi Theatre', *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 3, 12 (1987), p. 352.

<sup>69</sup> W.B. Yeats qtd. in E.A. Boyd, *The Contemporary Drama of Ireland* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1918), p. 35.

the theatre going public, not just with theatrical performances but ultimately the intention was also to provide library facilities and other initiatives within the theatre to make it a central element in Roman society, just as the Abbey Theatre would provide a focus for Yeats's cultural nationalism.<sup>70</sup>

The opening night of the theatre in Rome must have been something of a vindication for Pirandello, whose early playwriting career was full of controversy. The play he chose to put on alongside the Dunsany piece, his own *The Festival of Our Lord of the Ship*, had been banned by the police from being performed in Milan a year earlier. The play features a religious festival in a small town which collides with the annual pig killing when both occur on the same day. The frenzied act of pig killing combines on stage with a dehumanizing of all the characters, so there are the sacrilegious implications of comparing a Christian festival with a pagan blood sacrifice, and presumably this made the play seem dangerous in the minds of the Milanese government. In producing it at his own theatre, Pirandello managed to sidestep the concerns of an external production team. It is unsurprising that the play would be so controversial, since it is a powerful depiction of human nature in all its worst guises, and an uncompromising exposition of hypocrisy, particularly the hypocrisy of religious discourse. Susan Bassnet notes that there are similarities in subject matter between *The Festival* and *The Gods of the Mountain*: 'Both plays may be described as ritual theatre, and both are structured around the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. [...] Neither piece was a work that a faint-hearted, embryonic director could have attempted.'<sup>71</sup> Ritual theatre itself is an interesting concept. Theatre and ritual have much in common; they have the same origins, and both are performances for a specific audience. The ritualistic elements of *The Festival* provide a not so subtle comparison between the blood-cult of Catholicism and the savage consumption of the pig killing festival. Dunsany's play is not nearly as transparent; rather it examines the nature of belief itself.

The choice of the Dunsany play does to some extent make sense when placed next to *The Festival of Our Lord of the Ship*, yet there are significant differences. Pirandello's play comes close to frenzy, with a collection of disjointed, disconnected characters becoming increasingly primitive and deranged as the play goes on. Dunsany's play is much more

---

<sup>70</sup> Susan Bassnett, 'Pirandello's Debut as Director: the Opening of the Teatro d'Arte', *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 3, 12 (1987), p. 349.

<sup>71</sup> Susan Bassnett, 'Pirandello's Debut as Director: the Opening of the Teatro d'Arte', *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 3, 12 (1987), p. 351.

sedate, and indeed its pace may have served to make it ideal as the curtain raiser. *The Gods of the Mountain* hinges upon its moment of climax where the real becomes the unreal – and the unreal real – so this would have led nicely into the whirlwind of the Pirandello play. It may be this moment, the ending of *The Gods of the Mountain* where the gods walk on stage, that was crucial to its selection by Pirandello. The powerful ending of the play turns the work into spectacle and it is spectacle that is fundamental to this play's attraction. Bassnet notes the importance of spectacle for both opening plays at the Teatro d'Arte:

Both *The Festival* and *The Gods of the Mountain* offered Pirandello the chance to move beyond realism and to create moments of mystery and awe – to raise theatre above the expected and to offer the public more of a metaphysical experience than an encounter with an alternate reality.<sup>72</sup>

Spectacle in *The Gods of the Mountain* moves the audience beyond mere viewers encountering an alternate reality; they have a 'metaphysical experience', challenging the fourth wall of the theatre which is, after all, one of Pirandello's ultimate theatrical aspirations.<sup>73</sup> Awe and wonder are emotions that pervade Dunsany's writings, and his work on the stage allows him to convey the feeling of wonder from his characters to the audience.

It may be stretching things a little to see Dunsany's plays quite in the same revolutionary mode as the works of Pirandello, but neither are they completely opposed. Another significant connection between the two is Pirandello's interest in Irish drama. As has already been noted, Dunsany was something of an outsider at the Abbey, and may often have been regarded as more of an English, or even an American, dramatist than an Irish one. Yet in the programme to the opening night Pirandello stresses the Irishness of Lord Dunsany:

For the unusual quality of this writer lies precisely in the fact that all his works hinge upon a special mythical system, derived from customs and legends at the heart of the Irish people, and extended by him against a background of a

---

<sup>72</sup> Susan Bassnett, 'Pirandello's Debut as Director: the Opening of the Teatro d'Arte,' *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 3, 12 (1987), p. 351

<sup>73</sup> The breaking of the fourth wall – the invisible barrier between stage and audience – is central to many of Pirandello's works, challenging the suspension of disbelief previously considered natural for a theatre audience. As Glauco Cambon states, 'the stage is a stage, actors are actors, and even the audience, formerly silent and half invisible in its willing suspension of disbelief, has been drawn into the action and implicated in the theatrical proceedings.' Glauco Cambon, *Pirandello: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 125.

mysterious Indian region, an ancient place, with curious results that are both grotesque and frightening.<sup>74</sup>

The programme note stresses Dunsany as an Irish writer, and explains his exotic mythology by placing it within an Irish locale. The wording of this note echoes the tendency in Dunsany's works to elide East and West, using myth and legend to find common ground between Ireland and India. The reviewers picked up on this:

A fellow countryman of Yeats, and also of Bernard Shaw, he is, like them, a lover of mystification and of the joke, of the long savoured paradox and the well placed *boutade*. This too is Celtic. We must remember this doublesidedness – the faery and the mystificatory, the lyrical and the sceptical, the childish and the cynical of Lord Dunsany's imagination in order to fully understand a work such as *The Gods of the Mountain*.<sup>75</sup>

The use of the word 'Celtic' in its Revival context will be examined at length in Chapter Four, but it is worth noting here that, for Pirandello in particular, Celtic mysticism is central to Dunsany's appeal as an Irish dramatist. It is a fascinating result of the appearance of *The Gods of the Mountain* at the Odescalchi Theatre that it is here, at Pirandello's theatre and under the gaze of Mussolini that Dunsany is finally regarded as an Irish writer, an assignation denied him not only by many of his contemporaries but by present day Irish literary criticism.

Another point of resonance between Pirandello and Dunsany may be found in Pirandello's late unfinished play, *The Mountain Giants*. The title of this play, particularly in its original language, *I Giganti della Montagna*, hints at the influence of Dunsany's *The Gods of the Mountain* on Pirandello's writing. Pirandello's play features a group of actors who are depressed and downtrodden by the failure of the play they have just performed. The play-within-a-play was written by a poet who has since committed suicide, and the performers have been rejected by the city that has no room left for great art. They go to the mountain to perform the work for the giants that rule there. The ending of *The Mountain Gods*, never completed, would have seen the supernatural spectators revolting and ripping the actors to shreds, in an ultimate expression of cynicism concerning the relationship between art and society.<sup>76</sup> At this late stage in his career Pirandello voices his deep fears about the

---

<sup>74</sup> Programme note qtd. in Alessandro Tinterri, 'The Gods of the Mountain' at the Odescalchi Theatre', *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 3, 12, (1987), p. 352.

<sup>75</sup> Review by Adriano Tilgher qtd. in Alessandro Tinterri, 'The Gods of the Mountain' at the Odescalchi Theatre', *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 3, 12 (1987), p. 355.

<sup>76</sup> Daniela Bini, *Pirandello and his Muse* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998), pp. 124-5.

Fascist state and how art and society interact. Yet even as early as *The Festival of Our Lord of the Ship*, society had been portrayed as on the brink of collapse and regression. How then does Pirandello's concern for the modern Italian state, which found its ultimate expression in the bleak ending of *The Mountain Giants*, relate to Dunsany's play? It is *The Gods of the Mountain's* trenchant critique of Irish nationalism that makes it particularly suitable to bolster Pirandello's own questioning of Italian fascism. The beggars in the play who aspire to godhead, seeking positions of power above their stations, may be read as representations of the rebellious Irish who seek Home Rule. The suggestion is that the nationalists are exhibiting naivety, looking for a power that they do not understand and cannot control; and the production history of the play in Ireland suggests that the Irish establishment may have been well aware of these political undertones.

*The Gods of the Mountain* was eventually produced at the Abbey Theatre, but not until 1929, when it ran for six performances alongside Edward McNulty's *The Lord Mayor*. McNulty's play was a slight comedy, a genre that was one of the mainstays of the Abbey Theatre in that period, when the once experimental performance space had become (with a few notable exceptions such as the works of Sean O'Casey) rather staid and predictable. In this context the more troubling elements of Dunsany's play became sanitised: *The Gods of the Mountain* appeared to the audience as just another Abbey comedy. A production taking place before independence could have been politically dangerous; one that took place long after Home Rule may have seemed largely anachronistic.

The play then, which is not overtly political in content, became politicized by the location of its productions, whether in Dublin or in Rome. Barely more than a joke at the Abbey Theatre in 1929, when produced a few years before by Pirandello at the Teatro d'Arte the play became energised by the political moment of its performance. This play strikes to the heart of the political paradox of Pirandello at this point in his career. While the author had declared his support for the fascists in order to gain finances for his theatre, his opening night featured two plays that examined the nature of political mythmaking and the relationship between art and society. The relocating of *The Gods of the Mountain* to Pirandello's stage then places Dunsany's play within a wider context of political plays, yet also highlights its dialogue with native Irish culture.

## Conclusion

The Irish national theatre movement was an integral part of that broader cultural nationalism of the turn of the century which sought to create for a long-colonised Ireland its own national identity.<sup>77</sup>

If the production of Dunsany's *The Gods of the Mountain* by Pirandello in Rome proved to be the pinnacle of his perceived Irishness as a playwright, what does this mean for his role in the Irish theatrical movement of the early twentieth century? When the theatre is viewed, as Nicholas Grene argues it was in early twentieth-century Ireland, as a strand of general cultural nationalism, how could the plays of the unionist Dunsany be meaningfully located upon such a stage?

As this chapter has shown, Dunsany's plays were born from an engagement with the works of the other Abbey dramatists, yet he is consistently described as set apart from this tradition. Part of the problem may be that the Abbey theatre at the start of the twentieth century tends to be regarded as a much more unitary force than it appeared to Dunsany and his contemporaries. Throughout this chapter the case has been made for the Abbey as a nationalist as well as a national theatre. This is undoubtedly the case in terms of the agenda of the Abbey directors, yet it was not so for everyone involved in the theatre, and this goes some way to explaining how Dunsany can be both distinct from and a part of the Abbey canon. While Lady Gregory, Yeats and the other Abbey directors had a specifically nationalist agenda to pursue, the idea of an Irish national theatre in the early years also had its support from those with unionist sympathies. Lionel Pilkington points out that Dunsany's uncle, Horace Plunkett, was among those unionists who were eager for an Irish national theatre for quite different reasons:

whereas nationalists such as Griffith tended to interpret the existence of a national theatre as underlining the urgent need for political separation from Britain, most unionists thought otherwise. For them a national theatre was an indication of political normality and a compelling reason therefore why full political independence in Ireland was not needed.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Nicholas Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Lionel Pilkington, 'The Abbey Theatre and the Irish State' in Shaun Richards, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 235. Horace Plunkett later famously converted to nationalism and by 1912 was a committed advocate of Home Rule; this is another example that shows that the split between nationalist and unionist was never as black and white as it seemed in Ireland.

This may go some way to explaining the attraction for the unionist Dunsany to the Abbey Theatre. What for Yeats was a project of cultural nationalism could just as easily be viewed by Dunsany as an outlet for Irish art within Britain.

This chapter has shown the influence of Yeats's cultural nationalism on Dunsany's first forays into the dramatic form, yet at the point at which Dunsany enters his playwriting career the poetic, legendary drama extolled by Yeats was already going out of fashion at the Abbey. Yeats's work was in many respects Dunsany's dramatic model, despite his concerns over the poet's politics. For example, Christopher Murray traces Yeats's work thematically in a way that may help to highlight the points of interest for Dunsany:

It is possible to divide the plays chronologically into three stages. In the first group, up to 1903, where folklore is the base, the general theme is the consolidation of the self. In the second group, from 1904 to 1919, based on myth, there is the triumph of art. In the final group, to 1939, where the Noh influence is modified, the emphasis is on the irony of history.<sup>79</sup>

All of these themes are relevant to Dunsany's plays, whether it be folklore and myth, the influence of the East or the engagement with the narratives of history and identity. Dunsany may use these influences to different effects, but they are present within his works, as they are for many of the Abbey writers of the period. After the removal of sponsorship from Annie Horniman the Abbey underwent a change of ethos, with Yeats featuring far less prominently in the day-to-day management of the theatre. His presence was removed not just physically, but also as an artistic influence. Whereas Dunsany continued to model his theatrical writing on Yeats, the Abbey dramatists of the 1910s and afterwards wrote largely in realistic modes, with few mythic or fantastic plays finding their way into the repertoire. It is doubtful therefore whether even if Dunsany had not had such ideological differences with Yeats *et al* his plays would have still found a place on the later Abbey stage.

Outside of his fictional output there are several fascinating examples of Dunsany's involvement with the Irish drama. One such instance is Dunsany's remarks on the controversy surrounding the Abbey production of Shaw's *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* in 1909. The play had been banned by the British censor due to its religious irreverence and bad language, but in a coup – due largely to the efforts of Lady Gregory who managed to find a loophole allowing the play to go on in Ireland – the Abbey staged

---

<sup>79</sup> Christopher Murray, *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) p. 16

the first performance of the play. The production of the play was, for Gregory, an act of national, if not nationalist, defiance. Censorship seems to be an issue that united all literary sides as, alongside the Abbey management, James Joyce wrote in support of the play, and so did Lord Dunsany. Dunsany's letter in *The Saturday Review* recollects the opening night with characteristic dry humour:

It appeared that Mr. Shaw had called a spade an agricultural implement, instead of using vaguer and more devious language, though he had since agreed to leave out the words "agricultural" to oblige the Lord Lieutenant. There was even worse than this, though nobody knew what.<sup>80</sup>

The objections to Shaw's play are reduced by Dunsany to mere prudery, but it is his descriptions of the Irish theatregoing public that are most interesting in this letter:

Besides those who were attracted by the horror of what they would hear, many came to judge between the views of Mr. Shaw and the Censor on the subject of decorum, and there came, too, old audiences loyal to their national theatre, among them a man who boasted a scar from former wars in the shape of a gap where two teeth should have been, lost when they tried to wreck the theatre as a protest against Synge's "Playboy". "Ah, Synge was a great man", he said regretfully; "and we were very drunk". (p. 254)

This statement, which could no doubt be viewed as an example of Dunsany's aristocratic snobbery, seems rather poignant, and there is a sympathy with the drunken theatre-goer that is not necessarily there for those audience members who attended looking for a political spectacle. It is what he presents as the apolitical nature of the audience that makes them more attractive to Dunsany than the highly politicized Abbey management.

In addition to supporting the theatre in the press, Lord Dunsany was also involved in the Abbey in a more practical sense. When Annie Horniman gave up subsidizing the Abbey, due to a fall out with the management over their failure to close the theatre on the death of the King, the theatre put out a call for subscribers. Dunsany gave £300, a not inconsiderable amount in 1910, and one of the largest donations made by any single contributor.<sup>81</sup>

Dunsany's artistic relationship with the Abbey Theatre often feels like a case of what might have been. For example, would Dunsany have figured more prominently at the

---

<sup>80</sup> Lord Dunsany, 'A Note on "Blanco Posnet"', *The Saturday Review* (28<sup>th</sup> August 1909), p. 254.

<sup>81</sup> James W. Flannery, 'High Ideals and the Reality of the Marketplace: A Financial Record of the Early Abbey Theatre', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 71, 283 (1982), p. 259.



Abbey had he not fallen out with Lady Gregory over *King Argimēnēs and the Unknown Warrior*? In one of the more startling episodes in Dunsany's Irish literary career, in 1911 he accused Lady Gregory, the esteemed Abbey director and playwright, of plagiarism. Dunsany had read *King Argimēnēs* to Gregory while it was still in draft form; when Gregory's *The Deliverer* appeared on stage at the Abbey in 1911 it seemed clear to Dunsany and his wife where the play had originated, as Lady Dunsany explains in her diary:

He read it to her a year ago and she loved it and wrote to me some days later mentioning that "the play of slaves and kings is much in my mind". [S]he suddenly wrote *The Deliverer* with an Oriental background, slaves, an overseer and even ending with a remark about 'the King's cats' – Eddie's ending with "the King's dog".<sup>82</sup>

An analysis of *The Deliverer* alongside Dunsany's play shows that the Dunsanys' suspicions may well have been right. For example, *King Argimēnēs* opens with the slaves in the fields bemoaning their lot: 'the King's Overseer struck me in the face, and nine times in that year he called me dog. For one month two weeks and a day I was joked with a bullock and pulled a rounded stone all day over the paths, except while we were fed.'<sup>83</sup> The maltreated slaves appear again at the start of Gregory's play: 'We to be without a peck hardly upon our bones, and that King to be nourished with sweets and fooleries, and his stomach as big as that you wouldn't know what to make of it.'<sup>84</sup> Naturally there are differences between the two plays, and the above quotation shows Gregory's use of the Kiltartan dialect which makes clear the Irish context within the Eastern setting. Yet the similarities are striking. We have already considered the allegorical implications of Argimēnēs's battle for power, and Gregory too uses her play for allegorical aims. Her play overtly tells the story of the biblical Moses, but is in fact an unsubtle retelling of the downfall of Charles Stuart Parnell and how he was destroyed by his own people. Whether or not the play was plagiarised it makes an important connection between Dunsany and the Abbey and marks his exotic plays as actually in touch with domestic drama.

One other relationship that illustrates Dunsany's unfulfilled potential to become a canonical Irish playwright is his involvement with Padraic Colum. Colum was, like

---

<sup>82</sup> Extract from Lady Dunsany's diary qtd. in Mark Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany* (London: Collins, 1972), p. 75-6.

<sup>83</sup> Lord Dunsany, *King Argimēnēs* in *Five Plays* (London: Grant Richards, 1918), p. 69.

<sup>84</sup> Lady Gregory, *The Deliverer* in *Irish Folk-History Plays* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), p. 150.

Dunsany, a member of the Irish literary circle for the first half of the twentieth century, although he never achieved the fame of some of the other members of that group, partly because he spent much of his time in America. Colum's drama was directly influenced by the early plays of Dunsany, most clearly in *Mogu the Wanderer* (1917) which is dedicated to the Lord. Set in the East and featuring an array of exotic Persian characters, this play is clearly analogous to *King Argimēnēs* and the other Eastern plays. Mogu is a beggar and con artist who finds a higher station in life when his daughter marries the king and he becomes a lord. The play follows the arc of his success and eventual failure, and ends with him returning to his lowly station, recalling the ending of Dunsany's *If*. The play is highly reminiscent of Dunsany's plays of the period, with kings, prophecies and the importance of Destiny:

THE MAN. I am Mogu, the Wanderer, the possessor of the Book.

SECOND ASS-TENDER. Do you not foretell events?

MOGU. Young man, I read in the Book.<sup>85</sup>

Mogu's book of prophecy cannot save him from fate, and just like John Beal in *If* he is betrayed by his servants: 'To-day I was the Vizier clad in cloth of gold, and I sat judging the case of kings. Now I go back to the desert, hungry and an outcast.' (p. 113). The story of Dunsany and Colum's interaction in the theatre is also the story of the collaboration that never was. The two friends decided that they would write a play together, to be produced at the Abbey, based on the life of Alexander the Great.<sup>86</sup> This collaboration never happened – Dunsany ended up writing the play alone – but it is tempting to speculate on what might have been. Had Dunsany and Colum collaborated, or had he and Lady Gregory healed the rift at the Abbey, the Lord might have had a greater impact on the narrative of Irish theatre history.

Although he has disappeared from the story of Irish drama, Dunsany was clearly influential for his contemporaries. The Irish theatre critic Ernest A. Boyd wrote many positive reviews of Dunsany's plays, but in 1918 he wrote something altogether stranger. *The Glittering Fake: A Fantasia* is a brief play based upon *The Glittering Gate* but explicitly

---

<sup>85</sup> Padraic Colum, *Mogu the Wanderer or The Desert* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1917), p. 6.

<sup>86</sup> The correspondence between the two during 1912 (which consists largely of Colum making excuses for not writing his share of the play) is unpublished but is found in the Dunsany Archive in Castle Dunsany.

written ‘*Not by Lord Dunsany*’.<sup>87</sup> Boyd was another politically conflicted individual. He worked for the British Consulate, but was known to have Irish nationalist sympathies which eventually led him to leave his job. *The Glittering Fake* uses Dunsany’s play to express concerns over the British refusal to discuss Irish Home Rule at the Paris Peace Conference. The satire is quite transparent, as this passage demonstrates:

Eamonn. John! John! I’ve opened it! I’ve opened the door of the Peace Conference! Come and help me!

[...]

Eamonn. Hullo Woodrow! You there? Hullo, you there? It’s Ireland, Woodrow!

*(The gates swing open revealing empty faces and the diplomatic manner.)*

Eamonn. *(staggering and gazing into revealed nothing, where fine phrases go wandering.)* Words. Blooming great words. There is no self-determination at all, John.

*(Ever since the revelation a cruel and violent laugh has been audible in the British section of the Conference. It increases in volume until all the great Powers are laughing.)*

John. That’s like them. That’s very like them. Yes, they’d do that.

*(The Curtain falls and the laughter howls on.)* (pp. 18-19)

For this pamphlet to have had an impact, the general public in Dublin must have been sufficiently familiar with Dunsany’s play to get the joke, even in 1918, nearly ten years after *The Glittering Gate*’s first performance. The English burglars have become personifications of Ireland and the laughing gods are the international community refusing to take Irish independence seriously. The vacuum of empty stars is now representative of the empty words of the politicians avoiding the subject of Ireland. There is no mention anywhere of Dunsany’s reaction to this pastiche, yet presumably he was aware of its existence. It is curious to think that such a little play should have spawned not one but two parodies, *The Glittering Fake* and *Sinn Fein*’s ‘A Cross Image’. Dunsany may not have been politically in tune with his contemporaries at the national theatre, but his plays seem to have struck enough of a chord with the Irish public to have become the effective subjects of satire. Dunsany’s own interest in the satire of J.M. Synge suggests that he might not have been unhappy to see his own work absorbed into the Irish satirical tradition.

---

<sup>87</sup> E.A. Boyd, *The Glittering Fake: A Fantasia* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1918). The real author is not named, although the preface is signed E.A.B. so presumably Dublin literary society at the time would have been aware that Boyd wrote the sketch.

If one takes the examples of parody and plagiarism into account, Dunsany had a legacy at the Abbey that went well beyond the five plays he had produced on stage. Ultimately, many reasons led to Dunsany's later marginalised status at the Abbey Theatre and it was the changes to Irish society as much as the format of his own plays that led to their drop in popularity. Only through an international audience, in the United States or onstage in Italy in front of Mussolini, would Dunsany be truly located in the canon of Irish dramatists. The importance of place, whether of performance, publication or within the texts themselves, is a theme that runs throughout Dunsany's fiction, as we will see in the next chapter which examines his early novels.

## Chapter 2: The Early Novels

### Introduction to the early novels

There are such nights as Sheherazade, with all her versatility, never dreamed of.<sup>88</sup>

Locating Lord Dunsany's texts within an Irish cultural background is of as much significance to the novels as it is to the plays. The previous chapter placed Dunsany's plays on the national and international stage, examining how his works interacted with the political ideologies of his contemporaries. But alongside geographical location, it is vital to place these texts within their historical contexts. The timing of the composition of Dunsany's novels is key to critiquing them within a tradition of Irish writing. Between the early performances of Dunsany's plays at the Abbey Theatre and his first novel, published in 1922, there occurred several key events in Irish history, including the First World War, civil unrest such as the Easter Rising, and the battle for Independence. The plays before the war had interrogated nationalist concepts and Irish symbols in the run up to Home Rule. The novels written after the war emerge from an Ireland beset by cultural and political conflict, and by the physical violence and strife that resulted from the clash of political ideologies. The novels, like the plays, challenge nationalist idealism in relation to a world which is experiencing events beyond the imagination of Sheherazade or even Lord Dunsany.

All of Dunsany's novels were written after the end of World War One, and thus also after the Easter Rising in Ireland. Not only was the whole of Europe reeling from a devastating war, but at home in Ireland Dunsany felt increasingly alienated from the newly independent nation. At home and abroad, Dunsany felt his ideas and way of life were under threat. The Civil War which followed independence in 1922 had perhaps the most impact on the landed classes. Many prominent supporters of Home Rule soon found themselves attacked by men who had a few years earlier been on their side. Oliver St. John Gogarty, an author and close friend of Dunsany, had his house burned, as did Dunsany's uncle, Horace Plunkett. Plunkett, initially a Unionist who became a Free State senator, never recovered from what he regarded as the betrayal of the Irish people who burned his grand house at Kilteragh. Lord Dunsany's house was never burned, but the

---

<sup>88</sup> Lord Dunsany, 'Shells', *Tales of War* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1918), p. 53.

family were threatened, and it was only the affection held for him by those living on the Dunsany Estate that protected him. It is hardly surprising that Dunsany's fiction of this period is marked by shifting boundaries and a deep suspicion of war and propaganda.

Not only was Dunsany under threat at home in Ireland, he had also been a serving British army officer who fought in the Great War. The First World War was a turning point for many writers, and Dunsany was no exception. He suffered from writer's block during the war, although only by his own standards could his writing be called anything less than prolific. The two collections of short pieces published during and just after the war, *Tales of War* (1918), and *Unhappy Far-Off Things* (1919), chronicle his imagination trying to come to terms with the extreme nature of modern warfare:

It is the Abomination of Desolation, not seen by prophecy far off in some fabulous future, nor remembered from terrible ages by the aid of papyrus and stone, but fallen on our own century, on the homes of folk like ourselves: common things that we knew are become the relics of bygone days. It is our own time that has ended in blood and broken bricks.<sup>89</sup>

In this short piece, one of several written when Dunsany visited the areas of Europe devastated by the full impact of war, the author sees the worst that the fantastic imagination could foresee brought to life in reality. Fantasy, or horror, becomes literal in times of war. The position of the writer of fantastic fiction then becomes strained and self-contradictory. The use of the biblical phrase 'Abomination of Desolation' in this passage suggests that the worst of apocalyptic prophecies has been made real. Faced with such horror, the writer is left to collect fragments, broken bricks which cannot be reconstructed into a recognisable whole. At the end of 'The Waste Land' Eliot states that: 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins,'<sup>90</sup> pleading a case for art in a time of ruin, even if it is only mere fragments. The stories and non-fiction tales that Dunsany wrote during war time are short, fragmentary pieces, little more than a few pages long and like Eliot's fragments they are the only response possible to such devastation.

In *Tales of War* and *Unhappy Far-Off Things* Dunsany oscillates between the futility of art to help the dead, and the necessity of the artist to immortalise them. For example, in 'The Cathedral of Arras' from *Unhappy Far-Off Things* Dunsany meets a Frenchman who comments on the graffiti written on the stones of the ruined church: 'With but a touch of

---

<sup>89</sup> Lord Dunsany, 'In Bethune' *Unhappy Far-Off Things* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1919), p. 88.

<sup>90</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land' *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003) p. 69.

irony the Frenchman said “All that is necessary to bring your name to posterity is to write it on one of these stones.” “No,” I said, “I will do it by describing this.” And we both laughed.’<sup>91</sup> The gallows humour of this section recalls the laughter of the gods in plays like *The Glittering Gate* and this emphasises the brutality of modern existence. The impossibility of realistic description and memorialisation is one reason why the imaginative artist may be particularly suited to articulating the horror of war. It is fantasy literature, Dunsany suggests, that may be most appropriate to speak of war: ‘For the wars we fight to-day are not like other wars, and the wonders of them are unlike other wonders. If we do not see in them the saga and epic, how shall we tell of them?’<sup>92</sup> Implicitly, for Dunsany, the only real way to deal with the new terrors of modern warfare is to use the forms of ‘saga and epic’; yet even these forms may be unable to express the new wonders of twentieth century conflict. In his fantasy literature of this period Dunsany deploys tropes of the saga and epic, but always in an ironic, knowing fashion. These techniques situate the elements of romance in new, modern forms that use the fantastic and mythic to explain the incomprehensible. M. Keith Booker makes a claim similar to Dunsany’s for the value of fantasy novels in a time of war:

Although fantasy and its companions certainly have escapist aspects, in a way that seems a departure from “the novel’s” investments in realism and history, they powerfully address contemporary life; by opening the door to unlimited imaginative possibilities, by contemplating the other side of history – the fantastic side – they can lead to action in the real world.<sup>93</sup>

It is interesting to think of Dunsany’s novels as writing imaginative history, a critique of the real world by considering it as it might have been. One real-world wound that is felt throughout Dunsany’s works of this period is the literal and metaphorical scar left on the writer by the 1916 rebellion.

During the First World War, Ireland’s relationship with Britain had come to a violent head. The Easter Rising was a pivotal moment for Lord Dunsany, both on a personal and public level, as he was directly involved on the day itself. On Easter Tuesday, 1916, Dunsany received news that there was a Sinn Féin uprising in Dublin, and, as a British officer, felt it was his duty to go to the city and support the troops. He arrived at army headquarters and

---

<sup>91</sup> Lord Dunsany, ‘The Cathedral of Arras’, *Unhappy Far-Off Things* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1919), pp. 8-9.

<sup>92</sup> Lord Dunsany, ‘The Homing Plane’, *Tales of War* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1918), p. 48.

<sup>93</sup> M. Keith Booker, ‘The Other Side of history: Fantasy, romance, horror, and science fiction’ in Robert L. Caserio, *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 251.

was told to proceed to Amiens Street and assist the Major in charge of that district. In a typical case of the British army's lack of foresight, no one thought to warn him that the direct route there would take him straight into the path of the nationalists.

Lord Dunsany drove directly into the fire of the rebels and took a shot to the face. The first of the rebels to reach him reportedly took one look at the writer's face and simply said, 'I am sorry'<sup>94</sup>. Captured by the nationalists, Dunsany was treated as a patient, not a prisoner, and well cared for until the surrender a few long days later. The juxtaposition of death and farce, idealism and reality which marked the Easter Rebellion seems to be summed up in this anecdotal episode, and finds its way into many of Dunsany's early novels examined in this chapter.

Prior to Easter week, Dunsany, although he always considered himself a unionist, had some sympathy for the nationalist cause. The events of 1916 were a turning point in Dunsany's mind however, as, in his opinion, British soldiers had died when there was great need of them overseas. It is at this point that Dunsany's relationship with Ireland is at its most fraught, so it is particularly interesting to note the relevance of an Irish context in the texts written after the Rising.

As well as being haunted by the spectre of war at home and abroad, these novels are also visited by the phantom of the Irish Revival, whose influence continues in Dunsany's texts long after it had ceased to be the driving force in Irish culture. One legacy from the Revival that haunts Irish culture throughout the first half of the twentieth century is the notion of progression to the future by way of reverence for the past:

For many involved in Ireland's cultural Revival, and for many of the critics of this key period, the value of Irish culture lay in the past. So powerful was nostalgia as a sociological phenomenon in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Irish culture, in fact, that it established a stranglehold on culture and politics.<sup>95</sup>

The importance of nostalgia then is a central Revivalist trope, and this chapter will show Dunsany's take on this nostalgia in his early novels, particularly in the longing for the primitive in *The Blessing of Pan*. Another legacy of Revival thought, Dunsany's parody of the Irish hero, which was previously mentioned in the context of plays such as *King*

---

<sup>94</sup> Mark Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany* (London: Collins, 1972), p. 127.

<sup>95</sup> Oona Frawley, *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-Century Irish Literature* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005), p. 3.



*Argimēnēs and the Unknown Warrior*, will be examined and exposed throughout the early novels, particularly those set in the Golden Age of Spain. As this chapter will show, these early novels are located in an environment of national and international conflict, as well as being inextricably linked to the cultural contexts of the period.

## **Section 1: *Don Rodriguez: Chronicles of Shadow Valley* and *The Charwoman's Shadow*: Shades and Shadows in two early novels.**

To locate Lord Dunsany's position within an Irish literary tradition subsequent to World War One, it may seem curious to begin with two novels set in medieval Spain. There are however specific reasons why the Spanish narrative tradition would have appealed to the Irish writer. Key to the appeal of the depictions of Spain in this period is the focus on romance. In romance literature in general, and works that play with this tradition such as *Don Quixote*, Dunsany finds a precedent for transposing his short fantasy tales into the longer novel form. *Don Quixote* is a key text for Dunsany, and influences not only those early novels set in Spain but his entire oeuvre. Miguel de Cervantes published *The Witty Hidalgo Don Quixote of la Mancha* in 1605 and in doing so created a touchstone for writing which parodied the chivalric and heroic modes.<sup>96</sup> *Don Quixote's* eponymous hero, who shapes his world through his dreams and fantasies, captures Dunsany's imagination from the beginnings of his career as a novelist.

The early stories and plays tend in the main to be brief sketches of wonders and supernatural events colliding with the lives of men. This use of wonder is integral to Irish writing:

The Irish imagination plays not only with words, but with ideas and planes of reality. An element of fantasy is found widely in Anglo-Irish writing, together

---

<sup>96</sup> Roberto Gonzales Echevarria, *Cervantes' Don Quixote: A Casebook* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p. 3.

with a love of the marvellous and supernatural. The Gaelic tradition bears strongly in this direction and a story was expected to contain wonders.<sup>97</sup>

Indeed, Lord Dunsany's first novel, *The Chronicles of Rodriguez*, with its separate chronicles instead of chapters feels more like a collection of wonders, encountered one after the other during Rodriguez's picaresque journey, than a piece of twentieth-century prose fiction. Dunsany harks back to Spenser's *Faerie Queen* as well as *Don Quixote* to present the reader with a collection of adventures or wonder tales, loosely connected by Don Rodriguez's wanderings.

The episodic, meandering nature of Dunsany's first novel is appropriate to its subject matter, since the picaresque was invented in the Golden Age of Spain. The concept of a Golden Age is, however, not merely a nostalgic one, but also a reactionary one for Dunsany. *The Chronicles of Rodriguez* was published in the same year as Joyce's *Ulysses* and illustrates both Dunsany's antipathy towards modernism and the connections to this movement found within his works. Dunsany's use of older forms is indicative of his mistrust of modernist literature and he certainly avoids the wilful obscurity of many of his contemporaries. Yet the use of archaic forms for modern purposes that Dunsany employs in his Spanish novels is central to many modernist texts, not least *Ulysses*. In addition to the recycling of older forms, Dunsany shares a common subject matter with the modernists of the 1920s, namely the repercussions of a world war. At the close of the First World War, Dunsany felt tired and jaded; as his biographer explains, 'The war was a great division for everyone, but the contrast was particularly painful for the Dunsanys; before the war they had been young, now they were not.'<sup>98</sup> The youthful eponymous character of *Rodriguez* represents a kind of innocence lost, the story of a young man who starts out looking for adventures and wars that ultimately fail to live up to his ideals. The reality of war in this novel does not compare with the wars of Romance.

The novel begins with a conversation between Rodriguez and his dying father who, instead of leaving his son his estates, sends Rodriguez out to make his own way in the world. His father urges him to seek wars where he may win himself a castle, and provides him with two items necessary for his journey: 'Then gathering up his strength for the last time and looking at his son, "The sword to the wars," he said. "The mandolin to the balconies."

---

<sup>97</sup> Alan Warner, *A Guide to Anglo-Irish Literature* (New York: Gill and MacMillan, 1981), p. 30.

<sup>98</sup> Mark Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany* (London: Collins, 1972), p. 159.

With that he fell back dead.’<sup>99</sup> The sword and the mandolin represent the two elements most important to the heroic and chivalric character; power and strength on the one hand, poetry and love on the other. The combination of war and art found in the juxtaposition of these items would have been fresh in Dunsany’s mind as a writer involved in World War I, as well as a participant in civil conflict in Ireland.

Despite being removed from contemporary Ireland both geographically and temporally, *The Chronicles of Rodriguez* is not mere fantastic escapism.<sup>100</sup> Instead, the setting of the Golden Age of Spain allows Dunsany to interrogate the meaning of different kinds of conflict, whether physical or ideological, at a distance from his Irish subject matter that allows him to critique society in an indirect manner. This novel is about the loss of ideals, and along with the interrogation of romance narrative, the novel engages with the ending of the aristocratic values that were under threat in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century.

During a time in Ireland when the aristocracy were being burned out of the big houses, it must have seemed to Dunsany that he and his aristocratic family were ending their own Golden Age. The Anglo-Irish landowners who, whether nationalist or unionist, had always been central to Irish politics and culture were beginning to be supplanted by the Catholic nationalist majority. Popular antipathy towards the Anglo-Irish aristocracy reached its peak during the Civil War which followed Irish independence in 1922. The Civil War was fought between two sets of nationalists, those who accepted the Irish Free State and those who believed the Treaty to be a betrayal as it meant partition of the country. This Civil War, which seemed a nonsensical loss of life to most in Ireland, had particular personal relevance for Dunsany. Dunsany Castle itself was never burned, although the Dunsanys were threatened, but many of the ‘big houses’ were attacked, including the house of Horace Plunkett, Dunsany’s uncle, as was mentioned previously. Horace Plunkett was a nationalist who accepted a position in the Free State, and the burning of his house by the other nationalist faction was seen by him as a betrayal from which he never recovered.

---

<sup>99</sup> Lord Dunsany, *The Chronicles of Rodriguez* (London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1922), p. 6.

<sup>100</sup> In fact, Ireland had historical connections to Golden Age Spain, including the landfall of the Spanish Armada on the coast of Ireland in 1588. The fear of the English government that the more rebellious elements among the Irish might join the Spanish fleet is an early example of the tenuous relationship between Ireland and England. Thomas Bartlett, *Ireland: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 95.

The echoes of this conflict can be found in all the early novels. In an early chapter of *Rodriguez* a sinister inn-keeper tries to kill the hero, yet it is the decay of the grand house that has become an inn that is particularly memorable:

[Rodriguez] perceived when they came to the great corridor at the end of which was his appointed chamber, that here was no ordinary inn, as it had appeared from outside, but that it penetrated into the fastness of some great family of former times which had fallen on evil days. The vast size of it, the noble design where the rats had spared the carving, what the moths had left of the tapestries, all testified to that. (p. 11)

The sense of decay is typified by the noble home that has become a gloomy, disreputable inn. The aristocracy has been usurped by the middle class, the grand home is now owned by a seedy merchant who is also a criminal character. This section in particular ties Dunsany in with the tradition of the Irish Gothic 'big house' novel. Written in the main by the landed Anglo-Irish class, the gothic novels of Charles Maturin, Maria Edgeworth and others featured the country homes of the aristocracy being beset by hidden secrets and self-destruction. V.S. Pritchett notes that in the nineteenth century 'Anglo-Irish society, the most charming in the British Isles, was a guilty society.'<sup>101</sup> Pritchett sees the gothic writings of the Anglo-Irish in the nineteenth century as laden with guilt at the misappropriation of land by colonialists from the native Irish and the misrule of landlords during the famine. Part of the difficulty here is that critics tend to elide all the invasions of Ireland into one; if anything Dunsany, whose family were descended from the Danes and had been in Ireland since the twelfth century, was Norman-Irish rather than Anglo-Irish. The argument, endorsed by Roy Foster<sup>102</sup> among others, that the Irish Gothic of the late nineteenth century is a response to colonial anxieties by a beleaguered aristocracy may or may not always be applicable to Dunsany, but the descriptions of the Inn of the Dragon and Knight in this novel show that he is to some extent engaging with this tradition.

Along with scenes of usurped big houses, *Rodriguez* engages with the Irish wars of the early twentieth century through an exploration of the idea of war itself. One of the most fascinating episodes in the novel occurs when Rodriguez visits the house of an old sorcerer. When the sorcerer learns that Rodriguez is on a quest to find a war he shows the young hero two magical windows, one that shows past wars and one which shows wars of

---

<sup>101</sup> V.S. Pritchett qtd. in Patrick Rafroidi, *The Irish Short Story* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1979), p. 30.

<sup>102</sup> R. F. Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 220.

the future. On looking out of the first window, Rodriguez loses some of his naivety regarding warfare:

War after war he saw. Battles that long ago had passed into history and had been for many ages skilled, glorious and pleasant encounters he saw even now tumbling before him in their savage confusion and dirt. He saw a leader, long glorious in histories he had read, looking round puzzled, to see what was happening, and in a very famous fight that he had planned very well. He saw retreats that History called routs, and routs that he had seen History calling retreats. He saw men winning victories without knowing that they won. Never had man pried before so shamelessly upon History, or found her such a liar. (p. 76)

Here Dunsany connects conflict with propaganda, and notes that it is the winners who write, or rewrite, history. It complicates the idea of Dunsany as an unquestioningly nostalgic writer as he is clearly aware that the past ages of which he writes never existed, at least in the way that they have been depicted in Romance literature. This theme will recur later in the novel when Rodriguez experiences actual warfare for himself. In the sorcerer's house, having learned not to trust the history of war, Rodriguez next turns to a vision of future wars seen through the second window:

But in the other window through that deep, beautiful blue Rodriguez saw Man make a new ally, an ally who was only cruel and strong and had no purpose but killing, who had no pretenses or pose, no mask and no manner, but was only the slave of Death and had no care but for his business. He saw it grow bigger and stronger. Heart it had none, but he saw its cold steel core scheming methodical plans and dreaming always destruction. Before it faded men and their fields and their houses. Rodriguez saw the machine. (p. 83)

Rodriguez is given a terrifying vision of the future, a glimpse into Lord Dunsany's recent past, the world of Europe gripped by modern warfare. Rodriguez even glimpses the author himself, haunting the European battlefields: 'Rodriguez saw a captain going back to the wars in that far-future time, who turned his head a moment as he passed, looking Rodriguez in the face, and so went on through the ruins to find a floor on which to lie down for the night.' (p. 84). In terms of playing with metafiction, this is as close as Dunsany gets to the modernists, yet there is a definite similarity throughout the text to the attitude to war found in many modernist texts. Paul Fussell in *The Great War and Modern Memory* notes that writers during the war looked to romance literature and archetypes of the quest and the hero to attempt to come to terms with, and to represent, a new kind of experience: 'The problem for the writer trying to describe elements of the Great War was

its utter incredibility, and thus its incommunicability in its own terms.’<sup>103</sup> Fantastic literature gives a frame of reference to an experience uniquely modern, enabling the writer to define modernity in familiar terms. Dunsany, in this novel and throughout his writing of this period, refuses to articulate his wartime experience in familiar or realist terms. Like Don Rodriguez, Dunsany clings to romantic convictions in a world where such a stance has never been, and may never be, adopted. Rather than mere escapism, therefore, Dunsany articulates in these early novels a position in relation to warfare that paradoxically notes the importance of frameworks such as romance and myth for humanity to deal with such extreme circumstances, while acknowledging that they are merely illusions.

After a series of comic adventures, Don Rodriguez and his faithful servant Morano finally find the war they have been seeking. The war is not however a valiant battle from legend, and once again Rodriguez finds his romantic notions dashed. For two thirds of the book Rodriguez has been searching for a war in which to win his fortune, but when he does find the battle it lasts for only a few pages and ‘they fought unseen by those that seek for the Muses’ (p. 239). Rodriguez is on the winning side and captures an enemy who promises to surrender his castle to the hero. It becomes quickly apparent however that the man has no castle and is just a farmer. The tale he told of a rose pink castle was mere fantasy, ‘and sometimes he almost seemed to contradict himself, but in so vast a castle may have been many styles of architecture, and it was difficult to trace a contradiction among all those towers and turrets. His name was Don Alvidar-of-the-Rose-Pink-Castle-on-Ebro.’ (p. 250). The reader’s suspicions are proved right when Rodriguez arrives at the Ebro and finds there is no castle. Don Alvidar quickly explains that a magician must have stolen the castle and left a meagre farm in its place. Instead of punishing Alvidar, Rodriguez gives him the benefit of the doubt, much to the knowing Morano’s horror: ‘Then he ran round and kissed Rodriguez’ hand, who still was silent, for his hopes were lost with the castle; but he nodded his head and so parted for ever from the man whom his wife called Pedro, who called himself Don Alvidar-of-the-Rose-Pink-Castle-on-Ebro.’ (p. 254). Rodriguez’s hopes of prosperity may have disappeared with the loss of the castle, but by refusing to condemn Alvidar’s fantasy his belief in romance is crucially left intact.

Romance itself is a loaded concept in this text. David Carlson argues that ‘the rhetorical approach of the novel as a whole is to subtly undermine modern cynicism and gradually

---

<sup>103</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 139.

restore a more idealistic faith in at least some of the values of romance tradition.’<sup>104</sup> He goes on to suggest that far from accepting ‘Cervantes’s scepticism of romance’<sup>105</sup>, *Rodriguez* returns to the earlier romance works that *Don Quixote* parodies. Yet Carlson neglects the reverence for romance in *Don Quixote* itself, which while a parody of earlier tales of chivalry in the Golden Age of Spain, still endeavours to sympathize with Quixote’s idealism and commitment to older values, and in this too Dunsany follows his predecessor.

Rodriguez does eventually win himself a castle, but it is through mercy rather than through combat. A man that Rodriguez had earlier saved from hanging turns out to be the King of Shadow Valley and builds Rodriguez a castle to show his gratitude. Rodriguez goes to live in the castle with his wife and the ending of the novel actually includes the phrase ‘they lived happily ever after’ (p. 322). The fairy-tale ending is fitting for a novel that insists on the importance of finding a place for story and romance in the everyday world. When Rodriguez finds himself at a low point in the novel even the weather seems to challenge his adventures:

A light rain woke Rodriguez, drizzling upon his face; the first light rain that had fallen in a romantic tale. Storms there had been, lashing oaks to terrific shapes seen at night by flashes of lightning, through which villains rode abroad or heroes sought shelter at midnight; hurricanes there had been, flapping huge cloaks, fierce hail and copious snow; but until now no drizzle. (p. 166)

Rodriguez creates himself as a figure of romance, being chivalrous to the point of ridicule, as when he ends up fighting a rival with one shoe on and one eye patched just to make the duel fair. It is only when his romantic quest for a castle is found to be no more than a mirage that he gains his real castle in the forest. The ideal has to be exposed before Rodriguez can take comfort in the real. The castle that Rodriguez receives is much more natural than any rose pink fantasy creation. It is created from the trees of the forest: ‘And the trees that grew up through the building were worked by the craftsmen in every chamber into which they grew.’ (p. 312). The castle has been built by the men of the forest, the ‘green bowmen’ (p. 319) reminiscent of Robin Hood and his merry men. Here again we find the Dunsany Green noted by Stuart Walker in the plays, its connotations extending out from notions of Ireland and the East to the power of nature, and the call of the wild over our domestic civilization. If we take the Dunsany Green of the bowmen in *Rodriguez* as a

---

<sup>104</sup> David J. Carlson, ‘Lord Dunsany and the Great War: Don Rodriguez and the rebirth of romance’ *Mythlore* 25 (2006), p. 93.

<sup>105</sup> David J. Carlson, ‘Lord Dunsany and the Great War: Don Rodriguez and the rebirth of romance’ *Mythlore* 25 (2006), p. 93

colour coded signal for Ireland then Rodriguez's contentment lies not just with nature but with the country of its author. It is a contentment that has to be worked for, not merely dreamed of, and reality and illusion must combine to create the happy ending.

Dunsany Green features strongly in *The Chronicles of Rodriguez* not just as the colour of nature but also – in a manner not unrelated – as the colour of magic, which has close affinities with nature. When Rodriguez and Morano reach the sorcerer's house they are alerted to the presence of magic by the colour of the light from the windows: 'one light high in a tower shone green.' (p. 66). This green flame is the sorcerer's power, and it links him to the sorcerer in the later novel, *The Charwoman's Shadow* (1926) whose house is reached through a green door. If green is the colour of magic and the East, yet also the colour of Ireland, then it suggests that Ireland, even in these novels set in medieval Spain, has a magical presence. Ireland is connected with magic through the colour green, and magic in Dunsany's works is always associated with the imagination and Romance. Ireland is unknowable and mysterious, forever shifting out of focus for the writer, recalling his comments on magic in the preface to *Rodriguez*: 'where magic is concerned, to however slight an extent, there must always be some element of mystery' (p. i). Dunsany's sense of mystery is hard won by the captain who had experienced first-hand the horrors of the trenches.

Magic as a central concern looms large in the sequel to *The Chronicles of Rodriguez*. In fact, the sorcerer in *The Charwoman's Shadow*, published in 1926, mentions the great sorcerer in *Rodriguez*, and notes that he is now living eternally in hell, merrily 'burn[ing] in that bright splendour that torments but cannot subdue him' (p. 251). The relationship between the old and new sorcerers is just one way in which *The Charwoman's Shadow*, published four years after *Rodriguez*, shadows the earlier text.

*The Chronicles of Rodriguez* and *The Charwoman's Shadow* are set in the same part of Spain in the same period, the connection being noted in the later novel: 'This was that very potent Magnifico, the second Duke of Shadow Valley, of whose illustrious father some tale was told in the Chronicles of Rodriguez.'<sup>106</sup> The titles of the two novels both contain 'shadow', alerting the reader that the second novel shadows the first, taking the themes of *Rodriguez* and challenging its conclusions. The setting of 'Shadow Valley' is a shadowy

---

<sup>106</sup> Lord Dunsany, *The Charwoman's Shadow* (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926), p. 65.



space, one that may represent the Golden Age of Spain just as easily as a potential or lost Golden Age of Ireland.

Just as Rodriguez sets out on a quest looking for romance, Ramon Alonzo in *The Charwoman's Shadow* leaves his home to follow the Black Art of magic. Yet magic, which in *Rodriguez* was merely another wonder encountered on Rodriguez's travels, is in this novel a much more challenging phenomenon. In *The Charwoman's Shadow* Dunsany cleverly juxtaposes pagan magic and Christianity in a way that will be repeated throughout his fiction. This has particular relevance in early twentieth-century Ireland where the Church would come into conflict with popular superstitions and the peasant's belief in magic, a theme which will be further explored in the second section of this chapter.

One of the ways in which Dunsany examines the relationship between the Church and magic is through his portrayal of priests in both novels. In *Rodriguez*, Rodriguez and his companion meet a priest who helps them evade the law, and the priest's ethics are gently mocked: 'The spiritual man rejoiced to hear such a tale, as do all men of peace to hear talk of violent deeds in which they may not share.' (p. 39). Thus in this novel the Priest is a genial voyeur, who enjoys hearing the escapades of the man of action as much as any reader of romance literature.

In *The Charwoman's Shadow* the priest is no longer merely a comic character; he has a central role in the story as the sorcerer's rival. Ramon Alonzo has been ordered by his father to study the Black Art, so that he may make gold out of base metal to provide a dowry for his sister Mirandola, something which cannot be hidden from the priest:

"The power of the Holy Church is waning," said Father Joseph. "It is not what it was in the good old days."

"Alas," said Gonsalvo. And there were looks of commiseration towards Father Joseph.

"It is because of all this sin," Father Joseph continued, "that there has been in the world of late." And the commiserating looks changed all of a sudden, for they knew that Father Joseph knew all their sins. (p. 192)

In fact, the power of the Holy Church is waning just as the power of magic is waning, as we see when Ramon Alonzo begins to study under the magician's tutelage. In fact, the action of the novel revolves around a religious dilemma. Ramon Alonzo finds that he must lose his shadow, both literally and figuratively in the sense of his good Catholic soul, as

payment for learning the knowledge of the Black Art. The priest's attitude to Ramon learning the studies of his enemy is surprisingly mercantile:

Behind that beneficent smile that lingered after his speaking he pondered somewhat thus, so far as thoughts may be overtaken by words: "The Black Art! An evil matter. The earning of gold by dark means, perhaps even the making of it. Let us see to it that it be put to righteous uses, so that it be not entirely evil, both end and origin."

And he began to plan uses for some of the gold that Ramon Alonzo should so sinfully earn, blessed and holy uses, so that not all should be evil about this wicked work, but that good should manifestly arise from it, like the flower blooming in April above the dark of the thorn; and the Powers of Darkness should see and be brought to shameful confusion. (p. 74)

This passage gently mocks the priest who wishes to use the gold made from dark magic for 'blessed and holy uses', exposing his hypocrisy but, it could be argued, also to some extent praising his practicality, as the priest is a largely sympathetic character in the novel. It is the priest who manages to rid Ramon of the false shadow the magician gave him, in a ritual that is reminiscent of the sorcerer's pagan magic:

Thereupon he made the sign of the Cross before Ramon Alonzo. At which, though Ramon Alonzo did not see it, for his face was towards the sun, the false shadow fell off from his heels. Then Father Joseph took a bottle of holy water, a hollowed rock-crystal that hung on a small silver chain from his belt, and cast the holy water upon the moss round Ramon Alonzo's heels. And the false shadow lying upon the moss got up and ran away. (p. 224)

Catholic ritual is compared here to the Black Art, and emerges not unfavourably from the comparison; the two belief systems seem to operate on the same level. The clearest moment of this comparison between religion and magic is when the priest comes towards the magician's house. Ramon is warned by the magical creatures of the wood that white magic approaches: 'This was nothing that fled: this then was the white magic. The hooves drew nearer and the brushing of large branches. Then a mule's face came through the foliage, and, bending low to avoid the bough of an oak tree, there appeared Father Joseph.' (p. 222). The priest is white magic as opposed to black magic, but he is magic nevertheless. This echoes the sentiments of Ramon's father at the beginning of the novel:

"The Black Art!" exclaimed Ramon Alonzo.

"There is but one art," said his father; "and it shall all the more advantage you to follow it in that there hath been of late but little magic in Spain, and even in this forest there are not, but on rarest evenings, such mysteries nor such menace as I myself can remember; and no dragon hath been seen since my grandfather's days."

“The Black Art!” said Ramon Alonzo. “But how shall I tell of this to Father Joseph?”

And his father rubbed his chin awhile before he spoke again.

“’Twere hard indeed,” he said, “to tell so good a man. Yet are we in sore need of gold, and God forbid in His mercy that one of us should ever follow a trade.”

“Amen”, said his son. (pp. 4-5)

By stating that there is but one Art, Ramon Alonzo’s father elides the differences between Priest and sorcerer, noting that Black and White magics are merely two versions of the same phenomenon. Dunsany subtly exposes the pretensions of the Church in Ireland which claims to truth while denigrating the pagan beliefs of the natives. Although Ramon escapes the sorcerer, the reader is never sure whether he has made the right choice in turning his back on pagan magic. In fact, as the end of the novel makes clear, the end of magic is the end of the Golden Age.

The ending of *The Charwoman’s Shadow* again shadows and parodies *The Chronicles of Rodriguez*. Whereas the earlier novel closes with Rodriguez and Serafina living happily ever after in their castle in the forest, the happy ending of *The Charwoman’s Shadow* is qualified by a refusal to ignore reality. When the novel ends with Ramon Alonzo marrying the charwoman, Anemone, the wording echoes *The Chronicles of Rodriguez*: ‘And all those golden books agree on one quaint exaggeration, and record, sometimes with curious and solemn oath, that she and Ramon Alonzo lived happily ever after.’ (p. 334). The fairy-tale happy ending that was unquestioned at the close of *The Chronicles of Rodriguez* is here put down to a ‘quaint exaggeration’ suggesting the theme of the loss of innocence central to the novel. The last few pages change to a different scene entirely, that of the passing away of the magician who, having been abandoned by the charwoman and Ramon Alonzo, makes his way to the East where his body will die and his soul will live on: ‘And now for him, and the creatures that followed after, the gates were wide that led through the earthward rampart of the Country Towards Moon’s Rising. He limped towards it with all his magical following. He went therein, and the Golden Age was over.’ (pp. 338/9). Just as Tolkien would later end his great novel with the end of an age and the characters departing into the West, Dunsany’s magician abandons Spain for the Country Beyond Moon’s Rising, taking magic and fantasy with him. The priest and his Catholicism seem more sinister when one considers their responsibility for the end of the Golden Age. However, as the priest is described as ‘white magic’ in *The Charwoman’s Shadow*, the novel suggests that the black magic of the sorcerer has merely been exchanged for the

white magic of priests. Lord Dunsany, like many Irish writers is fascinated by priests. They figure largely in his volume of autobiography *My Ireland* written in 1937, and in at least one example the word priest is applied even to pre-Christian men of worship:

as we stand on Tara, we look over land that knew Christianity when in most other lands there were still being worshiped gods against whom I do not wish to say anything critical, but who certainly had a liking for human sacrifice (if their priests understood their wishes), a custom with which since the teaching of Patrick no Irishmen have had anything to do – for any Cause except politics<sup>107</sup>

Dunsany's mocking of Irish politics is particularly sharp in this passage, but just as important is his understanding of the way that religions and belief systems ebb and flow and attempt to supplant one another, and the links between religion and politics that he explores as much in the short stories and plays as in the novels. In Dunsany's best known novel of this period, *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, the author explores the connection between priests and magic, and the blurring of the boundaries between Christian and pagan that suggests an instability in the divisions between belief-systems.

## **Section 2: *The King of Elfland's Daughter* as Dunsany's fairy tale**

Fairy tales, which have strong connections to the oral and literary worlds, are also means of tracing the boundaries between these two conditions, as well as between the worlds of the sacred and the profane, the Irish and the English, colonised and coloniser, children and adults, tradition and modernity; they belong uneasily to both and yet to neither.<sup>108</sup>

Jarleth Killeen in his work on Oscar Wilde notes the particular attraction of the fairy-tale form for the Irish writer. Killeen's analysis of Wilde's stories provides a useful analogy for Dunsany's fairy-tale novel *The King of Elfland's Daughter* (1924) which also traces and crosses these boundaries between oral and literary, sacred and profane and Irish and English. Lord Dunsany, whose position in Ireland oscillates between Irish and English,

---

<sup>107</sup> Lord Dunsany, *My Ireland* (Plymouth: Mayflower Press Ltd., 1937), p. 19.

<sup>108</sup> Jarleth Killeen, *The Fairytales of Oscar Wilde* (London: Ashgate, 2007), p. 16-17.

coloniser and colonised, in this novel uses fairy-tale conventions to explore his own Irish identity.

Despite being published in between *The Chronicles of Rodriguez* and *The Charwoman's Shadow*, Dunsany's second novel is at first glance startlingly different from his works set in the Golden Age of Spain. *The King of Elfland's Daughter* is set in the rural English countryside, a setting familiar to Dunsany who spent a good deal of time at a family residence in Kent. In keeping with the domestic setting, in this novel Dunsany turns not to exotic myths and legends for inspiration but to the genre of the fairy-tale. All of Lord Dunsany's fantasies were influenced by folk stories and fairy tales all around him in rural Ireland. This influence may be indirect, as in the many references to superstitions and magic throughout his work, or it may be more direct, as in the twin worlds of *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. The culmination of Dunsany's fascination with the fairy-tale form found in this novel comes with the satirical and knowing exposure of belief in *The Story of Mona Sheehy*. In *Mona Sheehy* Dunsany uses an Irish setting to expose and examine folk beliefs, but with his earlier novel he also uses the fairy-tale format to interrogate the nature of belief.

*The King of Elfland's Daughter* is set in the land of Erl, somewhere in rural England in a period that appears to be medieval. Erl lies close to the border of Elfland; it is a liminal, border space. Indeed, Erl has connotations of Elf in German<sup>109</sup> – as we know from Goethe's poem 'Erkkoenig'<sup>110</sup> – so from the beginning the distinction between the two realms is not static, and the border between the two is constantly shifting throughout the narrative. Ireland (whose name is also recalled by the syllable Erl/Irl) perhaps more than any Western country, is defined by the concept of the border, in our age as it was in Dunsany's. The partition of Ireland occurred in 1921, after the Irish war of Independence. When Ireland became a separate state from Britain the option was given to the North to opt out, which they duly did. This process in itself shows the fluidity of Irish and, for that matter, British identity in Ireland at the period in which Dunsany was writing *The King of*

<sup>109</sup> S.T. Joshi notes that Erl is German for Elf, but as noted in the next footnote this is not entirely correct. S.T. Joshi, *Lord Dunsany: Master of the Anglo-Irish Imagination* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), p. 96.

<sup>110</sup> In actual fact, the translation of Erkkoenig as Elf King is to some extent a mistranslation, as it literally translates as 'Alder King' (Elf King would be Elfenkonig in German). Yet the character in Goethe's well known work is certainly the figure of the Elf or demon king, and Goethe's source was certainly a story of an Elf King. For an extended explanation of this linguistic confusion see John R. Williams, *The Life of Goethe: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 86. If anything, the mistranslations and misreadings of the etymology of erl only enforce the slipperiness of such terms in Dunsany's novel.

*Elfland's Daughter*. By using fairy-tale conventions Dunsany finds a means of expressing this unstable, changing Irish identity in both new and old forms. With the complicated political situation at the time, it is little wonder that the action of this novel begins with the workings of an ineffectual parliament. The parliament of Erl declares that they wish to be ruled by a magic lord, and to achieve this they decide to send Alveric, the son of the King, on a perilous quest. He is sent to win the hand of the King of Elfland's daughter, Lirazel, and thus bring magic to the land of Erl. Alveric duly obeys the parliament's injunction, and brings Lirazel to Erl where they are married. Their marriage is a literal union of two lands, recalling the joining of Ireland to England, magic to rationalism.

The first part of the novel largely follows fairy-tale conventions, with magic swords, elfin princesses and dangerous quests to be followed. The attractions of the fairy-tale format for Dunsany are easy to apprehend, as Marina Warner notes:

all the wonders that create the atmosphere of fairy tale disrupt the apprehensible world in order to open spaces for dreaming alternatives. The verb 'to wonder' communicates the receptive state of marvelling as well as the active desire to know, to inquire, and as such it defines very well at least two characteristics of the traditional fairy tale: pleasure in the fantastic, curiosity about the real.<sup>111</sup>

Wonder is always a key term in Dunsany's works, and in *The King of Elfland's Daughter* we can see this combination of awe and curiosity when Alveric passes the border into Elfland: 'Know then that in Elfland are colours more deep than are in our fields, and the very air there glows with so deep a lucency that all things seen there have something of the look of our trees and flowers in June reflected in water.' (p. 17). The awe of Elfland comes not just from its astounding beauty but by its comparison with our own world, the familiarity in its unfamiliar fields. The contrast between the familiar and the unknown and the importance of wonder throughout Dunsany's works is reminiscent of the Burkean sublime. The act of wonder, or marvelling as Warner puts it, is the reaction of the viewer to the sublime object. The difference between the wonder of the sublime and everyday beauty is explained thus by Burke:

it will appear that the sublime and beautiful are built on principles very different, and that their affectations are as different: the great has terror for its basis, which, when it is modified, causes that emotion in the mind which I have

---

<sup>111</sup> Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde; On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. xvi.

called astonishment: the beautiful is founded on mere positive pleasure, and excites in the soul that feeling which is called love.<sup>112</sup>

Burke, another Anglican Irishman, provides a model here for the difference between Elfland and the fields we know. For example, in the passage where Alveric enters Elfland he is struck by the lucency of the colours which are more deep than in our fields which recalls Burke's comments on the colour of the sublime: 'Among colors, such as are soft and cheerful [...] are unfit to produce grand images. An immense mountain, covered with a shining green turf, is nothing, in this respect, to one dark and gloomy'.<sup>113</sup> What is important to note here is that there is nothing unnatural about the sublime, rather it is nature but at its most extreme, and this provides us with clues to the relationship between Elfland, Erl and Earth. Elfland is not necessarily foreign, alien to our world: rather it is our world intensified, the world of our dreams.

The fairy-tale format allows Dunsany to challenge conceptions of the real and the unreal just as he did through the use of the exotic and the mythical in earlier plays and novels. The shifting relationships already noted between Erl and Elfland highlights the permeability of the boundaries between them. As mentioned earlier, this novel is written after the partition of Ireland, where a boundary can appear almost out of nowhere, and where borders of nations were being redrawn and challenged. Joseph Cleary notes that there is relatively little mention of the partition in Irish literature of the 1920s and 30s, explaining that 'The lack of major literary material on the topic in the decade or so after partition [...] seems to suggest that the trauma of the Civil War did indeed overwhelm the border issue for southern writers.'<sup>114</sup> Lord Dunsany in *The King of Elfland's Daughter* bucks this trend, and by his imaginative setting provides a framework with which to examine the concept of partition in contemporary Ireland. Part of the attraction for the use of the fairy-tale mode for Dunsany in this novel is explained by the use of boundary crossings in fairy-tales:

The dimension of wonder creates a huge theatre of possibility in the stories: anything can happen. This very boundlessness serves the moral purpose of the tales, which is precisely to teach where boundaries lie. The dreaming gives pleasure in its own right, but it also represents a practical dimension to the

---

<sup>112</sup> Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1856), p. 200.

<sup>113</sup> Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1856), p. 103.

<sup>114</sup> Joseph N. Cleary, *Literature, partition and the nation-state* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), p. 105.

imagination, an aspect of the faculty of thought, and can unlock social and public possibilities.<sup>115</sup>

Far from teaching where boundaries lie, Dunsany's mocking of the fairy-tale format means that boundaries are constantly shifting, eroding and changing. The shifts in physical boundaries are reflected in the fluctuating moral and social spaces. Lirazel is both human and inhuman, Erl is both England and Elfland; a combination of native and foreign that is an expression of the hybridity of early twentieth-century Ireland. Hybridity is an important term in postcolonial theory, as defined by Homi Bhabha:

The margin of hybridity, where cultural differences 'contingently' and conflictually touch, becomes the moment of panic which reveals the borderline experience. It resists the binary opposition of racial and cultural groups, sipahis and sahibs, as homogenous polarized political consciousnesses. The political psychosis of panic constitutes the boundary of cultural hybridity across which the Mutiny is fought.<sup>116</sup>

Bhabha is referring to the Indian experience, and the critic must always be wary of appropriating colonial experiences from other cultures into that of Ireland, yet the stress on 'borderline experience' seems particularly relevant to an Irish author like Dunsany. The most prominent physical boundary in the novel is that between Erl and Elfland, but in fact this boundary is often crossed and breached, and even moved by the Elf King. This instability serves to highlight the similarities, not the differences between these two realms. Before travelling to Elfland to win Lirazel, Alveric employs a witch to make a magical sword, but the magic she uses is not that of Elfland:

And so it became a magical sword. And little magic there is in English woods, from the time of anemones to the falling of leaves, that was not in the sword. And little magic there is in southern downs, that only sheep roam over and quiet shepherds, that the sword had not too. And there was scent of thyme in it and sight of lilac, and the chorus of birds that sings before dawn in April, and the deep proud splendour of rhododendrons, and the liveness and laughter of streams, and miles and miles of May. And by the time the sword was black it was all enchanted with magic. (p. 8)

The magic sword that troubles the kingdom of Elfland is made from a native magic, one found in the fields we know. What is magical about Erl in this passage is its ability to change; the beauty of the seasons and the passing of time are the magics that make the sword and allow it to battle Elfland's static perfection. Magic thus may still be found in

---

<sup>115</sup> Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde; On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. xvi.

<sup>116</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 296



our own world, especially in rural lands which remain unspoilt by machinery. Part of Elfland's function is to remind us of a connection with nature that man has lost: 'And, so strong lay the enchantment deep over all that land, that not only did beasts and men guess each other's meanings well, but there seemed to be an understanding even, that reached from men to trees and from trees to men.' (p. 19). There is an aspect of nostalgia here for a lost connection that man and beast used to share in some kind of primitive Eden.

One of the main differences separating Erl and Elfland then is the way that each realm experiences time. The troll that follows Lirazel from Elfland to the land of men is fascinated by the way time passes in our world:

A land of change! The decay of the boards in the loft, and the moss outside in the mortar, and old lumber mouldering away, all seemed to tell the same story. Change and nothing abiding. He thought of the age-old calm that held the beauty of Elfland. And then he thought of the tribe of trolls he had left, wondering what they would think of the ways of Earth. And the pigeons were suddenly terrified by wild peals of Lurulu's laughter. (p. 189)

Elfland may be eternal, but it is the changing nature of Erl that makes our world so attractive, and indeed magical, to the fairy folk. One of the novel's rare mentions of people from our reality explains further the relationship between the two realms:

And how the horns of Elfland blew over the barrier of twilight, to be heard by any ear in the fields we know, I cannot understand; yet Tennyson speaks of them as heard "faintly blowing" even in these fields of ours, and I believe that by accepting all that the poets say while duly inspired our errors will be fewest. So although Science may deny or confirm it, Tennyson's line shall guide us here. (p. 93)

If Elfland provides inspiration for our poets, the influence also flows in the other direction. As is found in many of Dunsany's works, the poet or artist is placed against bare materialism as the conduit to another, more fulfilling means of existence. As in *The Chronicles of Rodriguez*, there is a determination in this novel to follow the ways of romance instead of more rational modes of discourse. When Lirazel flees Erl and returns to Elfland, Alveric follows her, but finds that the King of Elfland has pushed back his borders. The description of this forsaken land is fascinating:

Dreary with lost romance was the plain from which Elfland had gone, though here and there Alveric saw again and again those little forsaken things that had been lost from his childhood, dropping through time to the ageless and hourless region of Elfland to be a part of its glory, and now left forlorn by this immense withdrawal. (p. 68)

Thus just as Elfland can inspire us, it seems to be somehow constructed from our childhood, from the days of our innocence. This connection of Elfland with innocence is seen in Alveric's loss of that land: 'and on that dreary plain he soon discovered, as sooner or later many a man must, that he had lost Elfland.' (p. 70). Alveric ages quickly on his quest to regain Lirazel so his loss of Elfland is also a loss of innocence and youth.

Elfland may represent innocence and childhood on one level, but it is also a dangerous force in the novel. The parliament of Erl may desire to bring magic into their realm, but it quickly becomes apparent that they have got more than they bargained for. Lirazel and Alveric have a son, Orion, who grows up to be the magical lord that the men of Erl desired. Yet when Orion brings magical creatures out of Elfland to live in Erl, the citizens are frightened: 'The elders had desired magic for Erl, but the actual touch of it, or the mere thought of it, perturbed the folk in their cottages.' (pp. 182-3)

The position of the people of Erl, caught between Christian beliefs and older, pagan folklore, echoes the situation of rural Ireland that so fascinates Dunsany in his later novels. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there was a fascination with anthropology, particularly in Ireland where many writers attempted to tap into the peasant folkloric tradition. One of the collectors of Irish fairy tales was another Irish aristocrat, Lady Wilde, who noted the Irish capacity to combine fairy tale with Christian doctrine. Her introduction to *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland* explains this melding of beliefs:

The Irish race were never much indebted to the written word. The learned class, the ollamhs, dwelt apart and kept their knowledge sacred. The people therefore lived entirely upon the traditions of their forefathers, blended with the new doctrines taught by Christianity; so that the popular belief became, in time, an amalgam of the pagan myths and the Christian legend, and these two elements remain indissolubly united to this day. The world, in fact, is a volume, a serial rather, going on for six thousand years, but of which the Irish peasant has scarcely yet turned the first page.<sup>117</sup>

Lady Wilde highlights the integration in Ireland of Christianity and older, pagan myths, yet for Dunsany these two strains are not happily 'united'. Dunsany sees Christianity as usurping the natural relationship of man and nature in Ireland, a relationship more suited to earlier belief systems that retain the link between the human and natural worlds, and this is seen clearly in *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. Yet he is also aware that Christianity and

---

<sup>117</sup> Lady Wilde, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland* (London: Ward & Downey, 1887), p. xi.

paganism have their roots in the same basic human need for faith and a world beyond the material, as is noted in the relationship between priest and sorcerer in *The Charwoman's Shadow*.

The conflict between Christianity and paganism in the novel is most clearly seen in the clash between two characters, the Priest figure referred to as the 'Freer' and Lirazel, the princess of Elfland. When Lirazel arrives in the mortal realm she is fascinated, but baffled, by the ways of men. Her inability to adapt to her new surroundings means that she remains an exile from another land, and an alien to her husband:

We may understand his feelings easily: the strangeness of her, her unexpected acts, her contrariness to all established things, her scorn for custom, her wayward ignorance, jarred on some treasured tradition every day. The more romantic she had been far away over the frontier, as told of by legend and song, the more difficult it was for her to fill any place once held by the ladies of that castle who were versed in all the lore of the fields we know. And Alveric looked for her to fulfil duties and follow customs which were all as new to her as the twinkling stars. (p. 69)

Alveric finds that his fairy-tale princess is still fairy, and that he cannot simply supplant the world of Erl with the world of Elfland. Her quality of romance, her other-worldliness that made her the object of desire is the very thing that makes her an unsuitable wife. Here Dunsany juxtaposes fairy-tale with realism, showing the incompatibility between the fantastic and the domestic. Yet it is not Lirazel's fairy beliefs that are most criticized, it is the earthly society that receives the blame as it cannot bend to accept her. The difference between Elfland and Erl is here shown to be romance on the one hand and banality on the other, and this difference finds its most troubling expression through religious conflict. Lirazel's otherness to the people of Erl is shown most clearly by her inability to understand the importance of Christianity. Early in the novel at the wedding between Lirazel and Alveric the reader is alerted to the differences between the two realms:

“But I cannot wed Christom men,” the Freer replied, “with one of the stubborn who dwell beyond salvation.”

Then Alveric implored her and she said the say in the book, “though my father could blast this spell,” she added, “if it ever crossed one of his runes.” And, the bell being now brought and the tapers, the good man wedded them in his little house with the rites that are proper for the wedding of a mermaid that hath forsaken the sea. (p. 29)

That Lirazel refers to Christian vows as a 'spell' is fascinating. Just as the priest in Dunsany's earlier novel, *The Charwoman's Shadow*, is described as 'white magic'<sup>118</sup>, in *The King of Elfland's Daughter* what initially seems like an opposition between the mysticism of Paganism and the more modern, rational Christianity is actually an examination of the roots of modern religion in folk 'magic'. Lady Wilde may have noted that Christianity and paganism are worshiped simultaneously in Ireland, but Dunsany goes further by challenging the accepted differences between the two religions.

Lirazel, however cannot easily be normalized like a mermaid who has forsaken the sea: there is the sense that she will never understand the men of Erl, and their religion in particular:

Between the spirits of Alveric and Lirazel lay all the distance there is between Earth and Elfland; and love bridged the distance, which can bridge further than that; yet when for a moment on the golden bridge he would pause and let his thoughts look down at the gulf, all his mind would grow giddy and Alveric trembled. What of the end, he thought? And feared lest it should be stranger than the beginning. (p. 44)

The ending is stranger than the beginning, at least in fairy-tale terms, when Lirazel flees earth and returns to Elfland, only to bring about a final coming together of the two realms which was far from the wishes of the people of Erl. The novel suggests that Lirazel *is* Ireland, trapped between the irrational, the natural and the pagan on the one hand, and the rational, the material, and the Christian on the other.

Lirazel's real nemesis in the novel is the Freer, the representative of Christianity for the people of Erl. Unlike the rest of the men of Erl who, initially at least, are eager to embrace Elfland and bring some of that place's magic into their world, the Freer is completely hostile to Lirazel and all the creatures of Elfland: 'And curst be all doubts, all singular dreams, all fancies. And from magic may all true folk be turned away. Amen' (p. 136). Just as in *The Blessing of Pan*, which will be dealt with in the next section of this chapter, where an English cleric tries in vain to prevent his flock from worshipping Pan, here the Freer is fighting a losing battle against the lure of magic. The difference between the two figures is that the Freer sets himself apart from the community he is meant to serve, whereas the English vicar commits himself to his parish, and by the end of the novel he even forsakes his own beliefs. The Freer recalls, in contrast, the more reactionary type of priest in Ireland who, in trying to stamp out folk beliefs, ends up instead by alienating

---

<sup>118</sup> Lord Dunsany, *The Charwoman's Shadow* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1983), p. 126.

himself from his community. The difference between the two figures might be put down to Dunsany's greater sympathy for Anglicanism than Catholicism, except that the priest in *The Charwoman's Shadow* is as sympathetically portrayed as the Anglican vicar in *The Blessings of Pan*.

The Freer in *The King of Elfland's Daughter* refuses to make any concessions to the folk beliefs of his people: 'Cursed be fairies and all tales told of them, and whatever enchants the meadows before the sun is up, and all fables of doubtful authority, and the legends that men hand down from unhallowed times.' (p. 215). Whereas Lady Wilde pictures Ireland's belief system as a harmonious 'unity' of Christian and pagan belief, Dunsany portrays the Freer as deeply resentful of magic and pagan symbols. The difference in time between Lady Wilde's writings at the end of the nineteenth century and Dunsany's novel written in the early twentieth may explain some of this change. Jarleth Killeen explains that:

The religion of Irish people up to the nineteenth century was a version of folk-Catholicism, an eclectic mixture of the theologically heterodox and the orthodox, common among communities which were relatively untouched by the modernising projects of church and state. In most communities 'folk belief' and Catholic orthodoxy lived side by side in people's minds without any clashing or difficulty [...] This changed during the nineteenth century [...] but it was a slow transformation.<sup>119</sup>

So the change in attitude of the priests toward the folk beliefs of the Irish partly explains the hostility of the Freer towards Lirazel in *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. This relationship between Christian and pre-Christian beliefs is further examined by the comparisons between the Freer and the witch Ziroonderel. While the Freer curses, the witch blesses in a neat subversion of the reader's expectations, as seen when the men of Erl look to the witch for advice on ridding their land of magic: 'And all were wearing the clothes they were wont to wear when they went with the rest to the holy place of the Freer, though there was scarcely a soul he had ever cursed that was not blessed by her.' (p. 264). It is unsurprising that the witch chastises the parliament of Erl for trying to get rid of the magic they requested in the first place. She points out to them that magic is essential even in the fields we know:

I would make you spells against comfort and clothing, food, shelter and warmth, aye and will do it, sooner than tear from these poor fields of Earth that magic that is to them an ample cloak against the chill of Space, and a gay raiment against the sneers of nothingness. (p. 266)

---

<sup>119</sup> Jarleth Killeen, *The Fairytales of Oscar Wilde* (London: Ashgate, 2007), p. 6.

Magic, far from being an invading force from Elfland, is actually already in the world as we perceive it, providing humanity with a buffer from the bare materialism of the world of fact. The Freer in this novel is chastised not for hating Elfland, but rather for ignoring the needs of human beings to find magic in the everyday world. One of the best examples of Dunsany's ironic sense of humour in regard to religion is when the trolls of Elfland debate whether or not to cross over to Erl. Their main fear is that in our world they become mortal and die, and would then be subject to Christian heaven:

And Lurulu who had sat angry all this while to hear that weighty troll speak ill of Earth, where he would have them come, to astonish them with its quaintness, spoke now in defense of Heaven.

"Heaven is a good place," he blurted hotly, though any tales he had heard of it were few.

"All the blessed are there," the grizzled troll replied, "and it is full of angels. What chance would a troll have there? The angels would catch him, for they say on Earth that the angels all have wings; they would catch a troll and smack him for ever and ever." (p. 206-7)

The holy angels become little more than bullies in this passage. This is a cutting swipe at the jealous priests of Catholic Ireland, determined to smack paganism out of their subjects. This satire of Irish Christianity will find full expression in the later novels set in Ireland discussed in the next chapter.

The ending of the *The King of Elfland's Daughter* sees the full fears of the men of Erl realised when Lirazel and her father the Elfland king move Elfland so that it subsumes Erl:

Then Elfland poured over Erl.

Only the holy place of the Freer and the garden that was about it remained still of our Earth, a little island all surrounded by wonders. (p. 300)

The only place left uncovered by Elfland is the house of the Freer, but there seems little to envy him in this small triumph:

And within the dark circle in which the Freer stood making his curses were no unhallowed things, nor were there strangenesses such as come of night, nor whispers from unknown voices, nor sounds of any music blowing here from no haunts of men; but all was orderly and seemly there and no mysteries troubled the quiet except such as have been justly allowed to man. (p. 271)

The Freer has avoided not only the magic of Elfland, he has also lost all the native magic of Erl. The wonder or sublime of the natural world has been replaced by the mere familiar,

there is now no imaginative framework to enable man to deal with the facts of life.

Dunsany's fairy-tale thus does not end on a comforting, happily-ever-after sentiment. It ends with a warning to twentieth-century Christian Ireland not to forsake the natural world, and the folk beliefs of the rural people.

### Section 3: *The Blessing of Pan*

If *The King of Elfland's Daughter* closes with the immersion of our own world in a deeper magic, *The Blessing of Pan* has this pagan invasion as its central theme. In the novel, published in 1927, a middle-aged minister in a sleepy middle-England locale finds that the spirit of Pan has invaded his village. The novel follows the clergyman's battle with, and eventual conversion to, paganism. *The Blessing of Pan* is one of Dunsany's most engaging novels in that it presents a touching and accurate portrait of its protagonist, but still retains the air of the fantastic so central to the author's early work.

The main character, Elderick Anwrel, is an unusual protagonist for Dunsany, particularly if we consider the scepticism concerning religious figures which manifests itself in the previous novels. Anwrel is a low-level clergyman who is enjoying a rather sedentary lifestyle in an English village: 'a clergyman, plump and touched with grey, such a one as seemed just to have entered the placid years with the sharper cares left behind him, was watching the blow-fly from out of a long wicker chair.'<sup>120</sup> Soon, however, Anwrel will be rudely awakened from semi-slumber when one of the villagers starts to channel Pan and begins slowly converting the villagers to the cult of nature. Anwrel is torn between his duty to the church and the increasing impulse he feels to join the dancers in the wood embracing the music of the pipes of Pan. The novel ends with Anwrel finally surrendering to Pan and sacrificing a bull to mark his conversion to paganism, helping to create a hidden modern arcadia in rural England.

---

<sup>120</sup> Lord Dunsany, *The Blessing of Pan* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1927), p. 1.

Elderick Anwrel is perhaps Dunsany's best drawn character, utterly believable and entirely sympathetic. Dunsany is often criticised for not having an interest in real human beings,<sup>121</sup> relying on types rather than characters, yet the pathos with which Elderick is treated engages the heart as well as the mind, as we follow his struggles with his desire to join the converted:

Why not go too?

Yet if he went, who would stay? What would be left if he went? And in the end duty held him.

When that was decided the tune had gone over the hill; and an old man stood alone, a little weary, very cold, and in tears. (p. 129)

Elderick is almost childlike in his unthinking commitment to his faith and his religion and the conversion at the end of the novel can be seen as an awakening, an opening up of the self to the power of imagination. Even his name Elderick/Eldritch hints that the oppositions at work in the novel are never entirely clear cut, and that magic and mystery may lurk beneath even the most conservative person.

*The Blessing of Pan* continues the exploration of the relationship between Christianity and Paganism in *The Chronicles of Rodriguez*, *The Charwoman's Shadow* and *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. Yet the novel goes further than before by giving this battle a realistic setting, in the fields we know as it were, lending a particularly unsettling quality to the fantasy.

The novel opens with Elderick Anwrel writing to the Bishop about his fears that paganism through the figure of Pan is gaining a stronghold in his parish. Pan as an invading force recalls James Stephens' novel *The Crock of Gold* (1912) and this work was certainly well known to Dunsany. Stephens, a contemporary and friend of Dunsany's, was one of the writer-Lord's links with Irish literary society. It was through Stephens' urgings that Dunsany invested a considerable amount of money in the *Irish Review*, giving him a material as well as intellectual link with the Irish Revival. Stephens was also an influence on Dunsany's writing, and this can be seen most clearly in the early novels, and in *The Blessing of Pan* in particular.

---

<sup>121</sup> For example, Darrell Schweitzer bluntly states that 'What Dunsany lacked was emotional depth' in his *Pathways to Elfland: The Writings of Lord Dunsany* (Philadelphia: Owlswick Press, 1989), p. 156.



James Stephens's *The Crock of Gold* is set in Ireland and features the god Pan who arrives to challenge the Irish gods such as Angus Og. For Stephens, Pan is an external influence, unwelcome in Ireland: 'Most of the races of the world have at one time or another been visited by this deity, whose title is the 'Great God Pan,' but there is no record of his ever having journeyed to Ireland, and, certainly within historic times, he has not set foot on these shores.'<sup>122</sup> Stephens's Pan is a foreign entity, and this is partly a dig at the conservative aspects of Irish society as Pan represents a sexual freedom which is unwelcome in Ireland. It is also recognition that Ireland is already saturated with gods, saints, fairies and others so there is little territory left for Pan to claim. Dunsany circumvents this difficulty by setting *The Blessing of Pan* in rural Kent, so that the only opponent with which his Pan must compete is the Christian god.

When Elderick Anwrel finds the influence of Pan at work in his parish, he writes to his Church for help. He tells the Bishop that young women from the village have been going into the woods enticed by the music of the panpipes. Constrained by a wish to sound believable – to avoid sounding fantastic – Elderick couches his fears with typical English reserve, but this later breaks down into real emotion: 'But oh, my lord, believe me when I say that that tune is no common melody, but is something I never have known to come out of music, and has some power I never dreamed to be possible, and I need your help in this trouble as I never needed it yet.'<sup>123</sup> Elderick's pleas for help fall on deaf ears; not only does the Bishop fail to help him, but it is also intimated that Elderick's over-active imagination is to blame. The uncommon melody that troubles Anwrel recalls the musical Pan of Stephens's *The Crock of Gold*:

The following day she heard the music again, faint and thin, wonderfully sweet and wild as the song of a bird, but it was a melody which no bird would adhere to. A theme was repeated again and again. In the middle of trills, grace-notes, runs and catches it recurred with a strange, almost holy, solemnity, – a hushing, slender melody full of austerity and aloofness. There was something in it to set her heart beating. She yearned to it with her ears and her lips. Was it joy, menace, carelessness? She did not know, but this she did know, that however terrible it was personal to her. It was her unborn thought strangely audible and felt rather than understood. (p. 55)

The tune of Pan produces a physical as well as spiritual awakening in the novel. Stephens' Pan is a physical presence whose materiality is sexually attractive, whereas Dunsany's is more of a parasitic creature, appearing through the tune played by a young man in the

---

<sup>122</sup> James Stephens, *The Crock of Gold* (London: MacMillan, 1912), p. 69.

<sup>123</sup> Lord Dunsany, *The Blessing of Pan* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1927), p. 7.

village. The combination of wildness and holiness found in the melody in *The Crock of Gold* is echoed in the panpipes from *The Blessing of Pan*:

And a tune welled up inspired by a magic he knew not, that was older than all those trees, a primaeval thing crooning a tale to the sleeping valley; and it seemed so old in a knowledge of dreams that had troubled men that it almost sounded human; and yet the notes that came out of those pipes of reed were more like those of strange birds with enchanted voices than any notes of men, and called to mind no tune that any knew. (p. 57)

The tune of Pan is both natural and magical, terms that are applicable to Dunsany's definition of paganism. The pagan is an ancient belief system which provides a link to nature that is largely absent in more modern religions. The most significant opposition in the text, just as in the other novels of this period, is between Paganism and Christianity. Indeed, S.T. Joshi has seen this novel as Dunsany's vindication of Paganism as the religion to be preferred over Christianity.<sup>124</sup> Yet nothing is ever black and white in Dunsany's works, and there is often a hefty dose of irony involved whenever he seems to be advocating a particular world view. We have already noted the links forged between Christianity and paganism in early works, particularly the role of the priest's 'white magic' in *The Charwoman's Shadow*. Thus in *The Blessing of Pan* while the conflict for Elderick may be choosing between Christianity and older, pagan beliefs, the relationship between the two faiths is explored with a great deal of subtlety. From the beginning of the novel, Elderick's faith is constantly under attack, and in an attempt to find some grounds for hope he visits a cathedral. There he sees a stained glass window of St. Ethelbruda beating back the last of the pagans, but instead of inspiring him Elderick finds this image completely demoralising:

He looked again at St. Ethelbruda in her gay dress beating the pagan, then to the gloom of the pillars; and nowhere could he find any support for the tale he had to tell. A great bell struck. It was time now to start for the palace; yet the vicar did not rise. It seemed to have all been decided, once for all and long ago, in ritual, in glass and in stone, that this story of his was wrong. (p. 82)

Elderick's world is somehow out of synch with the rest of the country, as for him Paganism still remains a threat to Christianity. Rather than being two opposed religions, Dunsany suggests that Paganism and Christianity are both mere structures of belief that may help us to find magic in the everyday world. The problem occurs when organised religion such as the intolerant priests in Ireland refuse to acknowledge common ground

---

<sup>124</sup> S.T. Joshi, *Lord Dunsany: Master of the Anglo-Irish Imagination* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), pp.99-100.

with rival belief systems. Paganism is a threat to the Church due to its attractive qualities, a theme continued in novels such as *The Curse of the Wise Woman* which will be discussed in the following chapter. One cannot help but picture the Irish countryside that so inspired the writers of the Irish Revival where folk legends were accorded as much respect as the tenets of the Catholic Church. In *My Ireland* Dunsany recounts the history of the Irish wells which have always been considered sacred, no matter which religion is holding sway:

Nearly all such springs in Ireland are holy: the mystery of them, their brightness and their value, probably appealed to the Irish people, who have so much mystery in their story; and, when Ireland was converted to Christianity, these wells remained as reminders that the people had not always been so civilized. So the priests, who could not stop the wells being holy, picketed each one with a saint, and now they are St. John's well and St. James's well and St. Peter's well that are dotted about the country.<sup>125</sup>

In Ireland the priests were content to place a veneer of Christianity over pagan ritual, and Elderick finds that this is also the case for the English church. By setting the novel in England rather than Ireland Dunsany avoids exoticising Ireland, and also prevents the accusation of anti-Catholicism that might have occurred had Elderick been an Irish priest.

Elderick's second visit to the cathedral is another important episode in the novel as he notices that among the statues carved around the church is one of Pan. Elderick is initially comforted by the fact that his fears are not alien to the church: 'They have known it. They have had this very thing in their consciousness. Christian men at work on a cathedral. And simple minds, not inventors or poets.' (p. 160). Sadly for Elderick, his relief is short lived as he then visits the Bishop only to have his fears belittled. Although, in keeping with the dark humour of the book, he is given one possible solution: "'And I should get them to play cricket as much as possible,'" said the chaplain. "Get them interested in that, and they'll give up any wiliness with those stones.'" (p. 164). Even Dunsany, with his lifelong commitment to the cricket ground, must admit that the game has some limitations.

Although good advice may be hard to come by from the Church establishment, Elderick does find some help from a man named Perkins, a kind of idiot savant whom he meets wandering near the cathedral. Elderick asks Perkins what is wrong and the tramp replies that he has lost his illusions, telling Elderick: 'Keep your illusions, man; keep your illusions. Why, many a time I can't sleep all night long for thinking of the futility of the

---

<sup>125</sup> Lord Dunsany, *My Ireland* (Plymouth: Mayflower Press Ltd., 1937), p. 20.

planets going round and round as uselessly as ours through the empty bleakness of Space.’ (p. 173). This reverence for illusion over reality recalls the Golden Age novels with their faith in the romantic mode. Perkins, who is thought of as a mad man, is merely a materialist, horrified by the loss of illusions which leads us to be confronted by bare, uncompromising facts. Perkins suggests that Pan and paganism, in much the same way as the Christian Church, is merely one illusion by which one may deal with this unimaginable reality. Perkins is mad because he has no illusions, but Elderick is troubled that one illusion – Christianity – is being challenged by another, the cult of Pan. Perkins suggests however that there is little to fear from Pan: ‘Pan was always friendly to Man. That’s you and me you know. We may have changed a lot in this last two thousand years; but that’s you and me still. Why, I’d let him come nosing in.’ (p. 175). When Elderick succumbs to paganism at the end of the novel Perkins congratulates him on having found an ‘illusion’ (p. 271), suggesting again that far from being the triumph of nature over organised religion, the ending represents the replacement of one system of symbols for another. The figure of Pan in *The Blessing of Pan* is nature personified, and therefore, according to Dunsany’s ideology, symbolic of fancy and the imagination, just as the exaggerated natural world that is Elfland is the land of the imagination in *The King of Elfland’s Daughter*. In *Patches of Sunlight* Dunsany explains how the closer one is to nature, the better for the poetic imagination:

Dunstall [Priory, Dunsany’s English house] gave me a rural home and, as I have already said, a beautiful one; and the value of that for the follower of any one of the arts cannot be overestimated, especially in a time like this when so much of the world is becoming urbanized, till one meets people who gaze with puzzled eyes at the countryside and prate of “rural problems”.<sup>126</sup>

Pan’s invasion of the countryside is thus more of a homecoming, the spirit of nature returning to its native land, a land which in this case is England but equally representative of rural Ireland. As the novel continues, one by one the members of the village join the piper in the woods, even Elderick’s own wife. This insidious power of Pan recalls the sinister depiction of Pan in Arthur Machen’s *The Great God Pan* and Dunsany was certainly familiar with Machen’s work, later writing an introduction to *The Hill of Dreams*. Machen’s Pan however, is undeniably a force for evil in the novel, creating monstrous offspring and a general atmosphere of horror in the book, whereas Dunsany allows more ambiguity for his Pan, who works through the power of music rather than physical action. Pan may then be seen not as an external force invading the human population, as in

---

<sup>126</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Patches of Sunlight* (London: Heinemann, 1938), p. 14.

Stephens' *The Crock of Gold* or Machen's novel, but rather as something from within, an aspect of human nature that it is dangerous to deny. The music therefore that so entices Elderick's congregation is freeing an internal connection to our own nature, one that has been suppressed in our everyday lives.

Elderick's eventual conversion to paganism comes through ritual in a direct and cutting parody of Church ceremony. First, he gathers everyone to church and sermonizes in the hope of one last chance to return them to their senses:

And always he turned back to the bygone years; for the faith and the ancient ways were one to him, and were like a garden glowing in soft light, safely fenced from all the cares that perplex our days. He never can have reflected that it was out of those bygone years that the rites of Pan had reached them as well as the Faith, going down time together, as butterfly and pursuing bird go down the same wind. (p. 232)

Again, at this point in the novel, although we sympathize with Elderick's dilemma, the reader is made aware of the inadequacy of his understanding of history which neglects to acknowledge that paganism is as legitimate a form of faith as Christianity. The vicar's efforts finally prove to be in vain. With everyone but him leaving the church to follow the pipes, he feels a strange impulse to make an axe and head for the woods. There, having finally realised that his church has failed him, he sacrifices a bull to Pan, cementing his conversion:

No one in Wolding had so much to bear, as the vicar during the months of his lonely fight: disappointments succeeding each other had made the fight harder and harder, until there were no more disappointments left to come, and he still fought on alone. Now the fight was over for him. Great dignitaries of the Church might take it up, and St. Ethelbruda might succour them. But it was over for him. And with his rest from that long struggle against his parishioners the great weight of his loneliness lifted. (pp. 270-1)

Elderick has merely returned to his congregation, albeit under a slightly different religious system. In fact, his role if anything has become more religious, as we are told at the end of the novel: 'To the village he remained the prophet or seer' (p. 282). His new role as a prophet recalls the pagan priests, the druids who interpreted the natural world for their followers. Prophets are generally satirized in Dunsany's work, yet Elderick has our understanding for finding a way of living out-with the problems of modern life. The nostalgic element of the novel comes to the fore where the town of Wolding regresses into a past state, a land untouched by machinery.

Dunsany demonstrates in this novel that faith is most important when it expresses a community. Elderick's conversion to paganism is the only way for him to fulfil his duties to his parish; rather than being an outcast he gains their acceptance. The novel is set in England, not Ireland, allowing Dunsany to comment with immunity on the role of faith in everyday life, something he would not find the courage to do directly in his fiction until the novels of the next decade. In the Ireland of the 1920s when Dunsany wrote this novel, there was a clear disjunction between the community and their faith, and the ending of *The Blessing of Pan* investigates what may be done to solve this disconnection. Irish Christianity (and its sects of Catholicism and Protestantism) rather than bringing people together is in fact divisive, a problem that would plague the country throughout the twentieth century.

## Conclusion

I hope that no suggestion of any strange land that may be conveyed by the title will scare readers away from this book; for, through some chapters do indeed tell of Elfland, in the greater part of them there is no more to be shown than the face of the fields we know, and ordinary English woods and a common village and valley, a good twenty or twenty-five miles from the border of Elfland.<sup>127</sup>

Lord Dunsany's preface to the second edition of *The King of Elfland's Daughter* is a gentle nudge at the reader who anticipates realism and is confronted by a fantasy. The preface reminds the reader not to misunderstand fairy-tales or the taste of the exotic; that in fact all fiction is really just telling us something about the fields we know. It is a warning to appreciate the importance of the ordinary even in locations as other as Elfland.

Similarly, this chapter has shown that the Irish context of these novels is as vital to understanding them as their other-worldly settings. In all the early novels the locations slip between different levels of reality; they may be set in medieval Spain, a kingdom that we know never existed, or a rural Kent that may be as fictional and idealised as any other setting. The fantastic or magical exists in our world, and Dunsany through his descriptions of the natural landscape reminds us to see these elements as an essential part of everyday

---

<sup>127</sup>Lord Dunsany, 'Preface', *The King of Elfland's Daughter* (London: G P Putnam's Sons, 1924), p. i.

reality. More than that, just as the wonder of Elfland is enhanced through being placed in proximity to our Earth, the fantastic tales are made more compelling by placing them within an Irish writing tradition. The locations for the novels are always more than they first appear and many of them provide a space for Dunsany to think about Irish concerns with a distance that allows him the freedom to explore them as fully and indeed humorously as he wishes.

*The Blessing of Pan* is typical of the novels that Dunsany writes during this period, with its focus on belief, the countryside and nostalgia for an imagined past. In this respect it, along with the other early novels, engages with an emerging canon of novelistic discourse in Ireland during this period. As we have noted, the novels of James Stephens are perhaps the most closely allied with Dunsany's early work, but many other Irish writers were debating the same themes in their fiction. In particular, the focus on paganism in *The Blessing of Pan* shows Dunsany's debt to the writers of the Irish Revival. The Revivalists all toyed with the qualities of paganism in their works as a way of embracing the figure of the Celt, and this notion will be examined in Chapter Four of this thesis. W.B. Yeats in particular placed the pre-Christian as central to his notions of Irish identity, which in part lead to his alienation from the Catholic majority in Ireland. In fact, it was the embracing of a pagan legacy that allowed Yeats to sidestep the sectarian conflicts that divided Ireland, and divided him from the Catholic majority of Irish society. Yeats however did not ignore Christian myth, rather he fused the Christian and the pagan, for example drawing comparisons between Cuchulain and Christ.<sup>128</sup> Like Elderick Anwrel who discovered in *The Blessing of Pan* that Christianity had not won the battle against paganism despite what history claimed, Dunsany challenges the use of both Christian and Pagan myths by the Revivalists.

The sectarianism in Ireland has naturally made paganism an appealing alternative belief system for writers for centuries. *The Blessing of Pan* is the culmination of Dunsany's musings on paganism that are found in the Spanish novels and in fact throughout the prose fiction at this time. In dealing directly with paganism in the present day, there is an immediacy to this novel lacking in the others, albeit continually countered with nostalgic elements.

---

<sup>128</sup> John W. Foster, *Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), p. 4.

Whereas, for James Stephens, Pan represents a sexual freedom lacking in an Ireland dominated by the Catholic Church, Dunsany's Pan is a figure of imaginative freedom who encourages a different mode of living outside society's norms. To that end Pan does not appear as a character in *The Blessing of Pan*, he is a spectral almost parasitic presence who acts through music and ideas.

A more palpable pagan element is the character of Lirazel in *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. With her struggle to exist between the older world of pagan magic from fairy tale and the Christian world she becomes a metaphor for Ireland in the twentieth century. Fintan Cullen traces the interest in depicting Ireland as a woman back to the figure of Hibernia in the seventeenth century. Hibernia was not a suitable image for nationalist Ireland however, as she was generally depicted as Britannia's younger sister.<sup>129</sup> Instead, writers such as Yeats and Gregory with figures like Cathleen Ni Houlihan came up with their own female image of Ireland. Yet whether embodying a province of Britain as Hibernia or nationalist ideals as Cathleen Ni Houlihan, each of these embodiments of Ireland are more simplistic and easily defined than Lirazel. Far from being a figure which presents a unified nation, Lirazel exposes the differences and hypocrisies in Irish culture. Caught between two worlds, she may be read as a metaphor for the Irish experience caught between British dominance and Home Rule.

As we have seen in these early novels, in Dunsany's fiction, just as in Ireland itself, identities slip and slide into one another, as is the experience of any nation with an imperial history. This recalls one of the strangest stories connecting Dunsany to Irish nationalism. As a result of Dunsany's capture during the Easter Rising the nationalist rebels took possession of his Sam Browne belt. When the great nationalist leader Michael Collins was killed a few years later the nationalists, presumably thinking it was a rather fine example, laid him out and buried him in it.<sup>130</sup> So Michael Collins, icon of Irish nationalism, is laid out with the British soldier Lord Dunsany's belt, yet another example of how party lines can be easily crossed in Ireland. The next chapter will continue to attempt to locate the shifting boundaries of Ireland and Irishness in Dunsany's later novels which deal with the country directly as a setting.

---

<sup>129</sup> Fintan Cullen, *Visual Politics: The Representation of Ireland 1750-1930* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), p. 153.

<sup>130</sup> Mark Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany* (London: Collins, 1972), p. 129.



## Chapter 3: The Later Novels

### Introduction

His hero is really the Irish bog itself, whose mournful charm permeates every page.<sup>131</sup>

We have noted in the previous chapter the importance of the natural world in the early novels and this is a central concern that continues into the later works. As the reviewer points out above in relation to *The Curse of the Wise Woman* (1933), the natural landscape of Ireland is so central to these novels that it takes on heroic qualities. The books of this period see Dunsany address landscape for the first time with specific reference to the Ireland. As mentioned previously, Dunsany's works revolve around repeated themes; as we have seen the early novels examine the connections between Christianity and Paganism, the legacy of conflict in Ireland and England, and the importance of the natural world and its relevance for artistic imagination, and these themes continue to evolve in his work of the 1930s. *The Blessing of Pan* was published in 1927 and there followed a six year gap before the publication of Dunsany's next novel, *The Curse of the Wise Woman*. Published in 1933, this text marks an important point of departure for Dunsany as it is his first major work to be set in Ireland. So significant was the novel's setting that his wife, Lady Dunsany, referred to *The Curse of the Wise Woman* as 'his Irish novel'<sup>132</sup>.

The impetus for Dunsany to write *The Curse of the Wise Woman* came from a series of events typical of his tumultuous relationship with the major figures of early twentieth-century Irish literature. In 1932, W.B. Yeats founded an Academy of Letters to 'encourage solidarity among living Irish writers and to fight the censorship'<sup>133</sup> (Irish writing during this period was often subjected to censorship from the highly conservative Free State government). Unfortunately, Yeats's intention to encourage solidarity would backfire spectacularly in the case of Dunsany. Yeats split the membership into two kinds, full membership (academicians) for those who were Irish and wrote on Irish subjects, and associate membership for those who were Irish but did not write on Ireland. Dunsany, presumably due to the absence of Ireland as a physical presence thus far in his works, was given an associate membership, and took the news as a personal slight. His relationship

---

<sup>131</sup> Henry Warren 'The Death of a World' *Fortnightly Review*, No. 135 (Feb. 1934), p. 255.

<sup>132</sup> Mark Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany* (London: Collins, 1972), p. 232.

<sup>133</sup> Terence Brown, *The Life of W.B. Yeats* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 338.

with Yeats never recovered. The result, however, was that Dunsany hit back at Yeats by writing one of his finest novels, set in Ireland.<sup>134</sup> This anecdote is reminiscent of Dunsany's composition of *The Glittering Gate*, also influenced by Yeats but in a less antagonistic fashion. Clearly Yeats remained a strong motivation to write throughout the Lord's lifetime.

Thus the creation of *The Curse of the Wise Woman* came as a reaction to Yeats and the Irish literary establishment, but also in response to events in post-Independence Ireland. In this novel, and in fact throughout his writings, Dunsany utilizes fantastic conventions to satirize the contemporary world, and modern Ireland in particular where the drive towards economic progress was seen by the author as at odds with the traditions of the countryside. The strength of the fantasy novel is its ambiguity of subjects; its ability to challenge the reader's expectations and make leaps of the imagination not possible in straightforward, domestic realist novels. The satire in *The Curse of the Wise Woman* is much more direct than in the earlier novels; the Irish setting means that Dunsany loses the critical distancing of Elfland or Golden Age Spain.

Anne Fogarty in *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel* notes that, 'Sean O'Faolain provocatively claims in his autobiography that "there is no such genre as the Irish Novel."' <sup>135</sup> O'Faolain was a nationalist contemporary of Dunsany's and wrote both short stories and novels. In his autobiography he outlines the opinion that, in the early twentieth century at least, the Irish novel does not figure as an important genre for Irish literary critics, who are more concerned with drama or poetry as being somehow more natural for expressing Irishness and Irish concerns. This seems a curious statement in view of the fact that the most famous early twentieth-century novel is James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Yet *Ulysses* is a novel that constantly strains against the boundaries of its form, pushing the parameters of the genre to its breaking point. Perhaps what O'Faolain is hinting at then is that there is no such genre as the Irish *realist* novel, at least for those who define the Irish canon. This can also be challenged, yet it is true that realism was not embraced in Ireland to the extent to which it was in England.<sup>136</sup> The absence of the realist

<sup>134</sup> See Amory's *Biography of Lord Dunsany*, pp. 230-232 for the extended version. Dunsany did finally gain Academician membership status in 1934.

<sup>135</sup> Anne Fogarty, 'Ireland and English fiction' in Robert L. Caserio, *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 102.

<sup>136</sup> The idea that Irish society was not suitable for the realist novel to the same degree as the English is a commonplace in literary criticism, particularly in relation to late nineteenth, early twentieth century authors. For example, Eagleton explains Joyce's refusal of the grand narrative of the English novel: 'That novel depended on a sense of continuity and evolution, on

novel in early twentieth-century Irish writing can be partly explained by its distance from the ideals of the Irish Literary Revival of which Dunsany was, to some extent at least, a disciple:

The revival, it transpired, was to be a revival neither of realism, opposed to the alleged patronizing unrealities of the ‘Anglo-Irish novel’, nor of Irish thought in the ordinary sense, opposed to the representation of the Irish as an emotional, unthinking people. Rather – and ironically – it was to be a revival primarily of folk-belief, folk-heroism, folk-myth, and ancient folk-courtesy: in other words, dignified and genuinely romantic versions of what had prompted English and Anglo-Irish condescension, but now tracked back to an impressive pre-Conquest Ireland that was to be resuscitated.<sup>137</sup>

For the revivalists, then, the rejection of realism was an act of nostalgia; the embrace of fantasy can be seen as a return to the heroic texts of pre-Conquest, pre-Colonial Ireland. This nostalgia was also reactionary: a deliberate attempt to find a form that expressed Irish identity that differed from the dominant forms of late Victorian Britain. In this respect then Lord Dunsany’s fantastic novels follow on from the Revival, embracing fantastic tropes in a literary form more associated with realism. Again, this chapter will challenge the common-held belief that Dunsany stands in opposition to nationalist writers as he will be shown in these novels to be in tune with Revival themes and forms.

It is notable, then, that the novels from *The Curse of the Wise Woman* onwards are less overtly fantastic than earlier works, becoming closer to standard mimetic realism. In this text and other works such as Dunsany’s next novel, *Up in the Hills*, the setting is a reasonably realistic depiction of Ireland – from Dunsany’s point of view at least – and the elements of the fantastic or the supernatural are either explained away or else it is left to the reader’s discretion whether they occurred or not.

Tzvetan Todorov’s definition of fantasy is useful here. Todorov explains that a work can be described as fantastic when it causes a moment of ‘prolonged hesitation’<sup>138</sup> for the reader between a realistic and a supernatural explanation of extraordinary occurrences. If this moment of hesitation may be explained away rationally (for example, in one of Dunsany’s late detective stories where a man is shot but no bullet is found, but it later transpires that the bullet was made of ice) then the story becomes an example of the

---

a belief in progress, balance and harmonious resolution [...] Little of this was available in Ireland.’ Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 286-7

<sup>137</sup> John Wilson Foster, *Irish Novels 1890-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 2.

<sup>138</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 95.

‘uncanny’<sup>139</sup>. If the moment is clearly supernatural (as is the case in any of the Pegana short stories which are set in a world deliberately removed from our own with supernatural events and figures) than the narrative is classified as ‘marvellous’<sup>140</sup>. The true fantasy text, according to Todorov, is one where there is the possibility of both the marvellous and uncanny explanations, and where a prolonged hesitation occurs between these two readings.

Whereas many of Dunsany’s early works would be classified as ‘marvellous’, i.e. involving clearly supernatural events and characters, novels such as *The Curse of the Wise Woman* – where we are never aware whether it is the wise woman’s curses or a geological phenomenon that moves the bog – feature this Todorovian hesitation. This sense of ambiguity is also a feature of the Irish novel in general. Anne Fogarty explains that, ‘The Irish novel is always at odds with itself, constantly pitted against the deficits and limitations of the formal structures with which it makes an uneasy compromise.’<sup>141</sup> Lord Dunsany’s novels set in Ireland thus make use of the fantastic in a way that challenges the novel’s central tenets, placing him in a pantheon of experimental Irish novelists including James Stephens and James Joyce, and continuing through to the absurd bleak humour of Samuel Beckett and Flann O’Brien.

In fact, despite claims that there are few Irish novel writers of note during the early twentieth century, those authors who do write novels tend to have a good deal in common with Lord Dunsany. This chapter will trace the influence of some of these novelists on specific texts, but it is worth considering them here for a moment. Although at the tail end of the period of Irish gothic writing, Dunsany’s first stories were published less than ten years later than the publication of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. Another text rooted in the Irish supernatural, Oscar Wilde’s *The Portrait of Dorian Grey*, was published during Dunsany’s childhood. The Irish supernatural tale therefore was still a publishing force at the beginning of the twentieth century, although it would soon begin to feature mainly in comic and parodic modes. Along with supernatural terror, the Irish novel also embraced the marvellous in the form of the hero tales and legendary stories of Irish myth. From Joyce’s citizen in *Ulysses* to Flann O’Brien’s Finn Mac Cool, Irish legend would be remodelled with a twentieth century satirical edge in many Irish novels. From the

---

<sup>139</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, ‘The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre’, David Sandner, *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader* (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004), p. 136.

<sup>140</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, ‘The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre’, p. 136.

imaginary Shee of *The Story of Mona Sheehy* to the mock-quest narrative of *Rory and Bran*, Dunsany's Irish novels have much in common with the ideas and approaches of his contemporaries. The first section of this chapter will show that Dunsany's novels contain themes that resonate with authors even today, in an examination of Seamus Heaney's reading of *The Curse of the Wise Woman*.

## Section 1: *The Curse of the Wise Woman*

The fact that Lady Dunsany described *The Curse of the Wise Woman* as Dunsany's 'Irish novel' suggests that she saw it as central to his position regarding Ireland and Irish affairs. We have already seen that the impulse to write the novel stemmed from a reaction to Yeats in particular and the Irish establishment in general. One suspects, then that in this, his most autobiographical fiction, Dunsany is setting the record straight, giving us – as the name of his more standard work of autobiography – *My Ireland*.

Although the Irish setting and local concerns mark *The Curse of the Wise Woman* as a departure from Dunsany's earlier works, the same themes as we observed in the early novels and plays re-occur in a more familiar setting. The focus on man's relationship with the natural world central to *The Blessing of Pan* is translated to Ireland, specifically to Meath, and the bogland that Dunsany knew and respected. It is through his knowledge of a specifically local landscape that Dunsany chose to engage with the national concerns of Ireland as a whole.

*The Curse of the Wise Woman* follows the story of a young man, Master Charles, whose father, the estate landlord, has been driven out of the family pile by rebel paramilitaries. Immediately this lends a sense of historical legitimacy to the novel, as Dunsany and his estate were under threat during the Civil War of the early twentieth century. Instead of being alarmed by this development, Charles revels in the freedom he gets from being left alone on the estate, and explores the Irish countryside and, in particular, the red bog. The bog is alluring and magical for Charles, as are Marlin and his mother, the wise woman of

---

<sup>141</sup> Anne Fogarty, 'Ireland and English fiction' in Robert L. Caserio, *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 103.

the title, who live on the edge of the bog. When the bog is threatened by a national company determined to dig it up with machines, the wise woman curses them and the bog ‘moves’ and overwhelms the syndicate trying to develop it. The land owning Charles, who oscillates between his estate and the wild, uncultivated bog, recalls Dunsany himself, the country Lord who spent much of his time hunting on the Irish bog. In *The Curse of the Wise Woman* the author mixes his own memories with a nation’s past, combining autobiography with a personal depiction of an imaginary Ireland.

The bog which is central to this novel has always been an important presence in Irish literature, and has been used by numerous writers before and since Lord Dunsany, perhaps most famously by Seamus Heaney:

Every layer they strip  
Seems camped on before.  
The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage.  
The wet centre is bottomless.<sup>142</sup>

Heaney’s ‘Bogland’ is a text in which the physical landscape of Ireland – and the Irish bog in particular – encapsulates the history of the country. Heaney’s fascination with Irish geography is shared by Dunsany whose love of the land comes across in all his Irish novels, but particularly in *The Curse of the Wise Woman*. Lord Dunsany and Seamus Heaney have a further connection, as Heaney wrote an essay on Dunsany and Francis Ledwidge (a young poet who was a protégé of Dunsany’s who died in the First World War) entitled ‘The Labourer and the Lord’. It is this essay which is perhaps most illuminating in regard to Dunsany’s place in Irish tradition, and it is one of the few recent engagements with his work by an Irish critic.

Heaney’s article, published in 1972, compares Dunsany’s *The Curse of the Wise Woman* with the nature poems of Ledwidge. Heaney revels in juxtaposing labourer and lord, aristocrat and pauper:

Francis Ledwidge and Lord Dunsany were both Meath men, much favoured in their birthplace, minor writers who had glimpses of the shaping of Ireland’s future when the mists on the Bog of Allen were occasionally troubled by rhetoric or explosions from Dublin or Westminster or Flanders. Ledwidge’s muse was the hearth-guardian of a labourer’s cottage, Dunsany’s a Gothic

---

<sup>142</sup> Seamus Heaney, ‘Bogland’ in Thomas Kinsella, ed., *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), p. 378.

beldame in the corridors of Dunsany Castle. A relationship developed between the cottage and the castle, the ganger of the roadworks team playing grateful poet to the noble lord's undoubtedly generous patronage.<sup>143</sup>

Heaney notes the rural locality of both writers, seeing their commitment to the local as one reason why both writers were only mildly troubled by the politics of the wider world. Part of the reason for Dunsany's rejection of Irish nationalism may be this sense of locality. Dublin, for Dunsany, is little different from London, but Meath is an Ireland he can understand. Dunsany and Ledwidge's positions as Meath writers binds them together, both in the sense that they came into contact in that county, and through the fascination with the Meath countryside that pervades both writers' oeuvres. Dunsany met Ledwidge in 1912 and nurtured his talents, introducing him to the major Irish writers of the period and facilitating the publication of his verse. Ledwidge's career was to prove short lived as he died in 1917 fighting in the Great War. Dunsany was devastated by the loss, and made sure that Ledwidge's poems outlived him by publishing them complete with enthusiastic introductions. Ensuring Ledwidge's legacy was part of Dunsany's abiding concern with critical recognition for the artist. Seamus Heaney points out that:

Both Ledwidge and Dunsany dreamt of fame. For Ledwidge it was the possible reward for service and labour in an art; for Dunsany it was a damned irritating quarry that seemed to rise for other chaps though never for him, but, by Gad, he gave it a run for its money. [...] he ended up congratulating himself that photographers and autograph-hunters sought him out on the American lecture circuit. (pp. 203-4)

In this passage Heaney plays with the stereotypical image of Dunsany the ageing army officer, giving him a dubious upper class English accent and working very hard to place him as other and opposite to the working class, nationalist and unmistakably Irish Ledwidge. Heaney sees in Dunsany's unionist politics and aristocratic background someone completely alien not just to Ledwidge's aesthetic but indeed to his own artistic sensibilities. Yet Dunsany and Ledwidge did share a genuine friendship, along with an enduring artistic bond in their reverence for the wonders of the natural landscape of rural Ireland.

Seamus Heaney's article is more than mere character assassination of Dunsany, and when he moves on to an analysis of the author's work it is clear that the reviewer and his subject have more in common than their politics might lead one to expect. It is unsurprising that the part of the novel that affects Heaney the most is Dunsany's depiction of the bog.

---

<sup>143</sup> Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations: selected prose 1968-1978* (London: Faber, 1980), p. 202.

Heaney sees Dunsany's portraits of the Irish landscape as encoded with the author's own ideology:

The hero's world is masculine and feudal, its spirit is the gun and the dog; the primeval landscape beyond the walls is feminine, its spirit is the wise woman. Both are threatened by the impersonal enterprise of the Peat Development (Ireland) Syndicate. While the characters are two dimensional and some of the dialogue a parody of stage Irish, these are the constituents of what might be a myth for the shaping of modern Ireland, and while the author balks it with a happy ending that is imaginatively unsatisfactory and geologically improbable (a tidal wave of bog engulfs the machines), the book contains many exhilarating sportsman's sketches, and there is a seam of memorable beauty running through the whole story, in the evocations of the mythopoeic bog. It is a pity Dunsany didn't spend more time and intellect exploring these peaty obsessions. (pp. 204-5)

Heaney may not have read many of Dunsany's works apart from *The Curse of the Wise Woman*, because bog settings and liminal, changing landscapes recur throughout his oeuvre. In the previous chapter we noted the mutability of boundaries and changeable borders in *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, and in this novel Dunsany transplants these concepts to his native soil. The Irish nation is represented by the bog precisely due to the mystery and inconsistency they share. Heaney's own obsession with bogs might give us a way of looking at, and decoding, Dunsany's greatest novel within an Irish literary tradition. Dianne Meredith in an article on Heaney's bog poems explains the significance of the bog in Heaney's oeuvre:

Heaney calls the bog a sort of Jungian as well as a geological memory-bank, a "dark casket where we have found many of the clues to our past and to our cultural identity" [...]. He sees the bog as a symbol of the Irish psyche, as contrasted to the American psyche which, in its pioneering spirit, looks "outwards and upwards, to fulfilment through movement, advance, exploration and openness" [...]. The Irish bog was the 'answering myth' to the frontier myth of the American consciousness.<sup>144</sup>

Thus the bog is a memory-bank, a preservation of the past, and this illuminates the nostalgic aspects of *The Curse of the Wise Woman*. The first striking thing about Dunsany's book is that it is a historical novel, written in the nineteen thirties but set in the late nineteenth century. It is set in the period of Dunsany's own childhood and thus, crucially for Dunsany, prior to Irish independence. Yet in setting the bulk of the novel before independence Dunsany does not idealize the Ireland of his youth. This vision of

---

<sup>144</sup> Dianne Meredith, 'Landscape or Mindscape? Seamus Heaney's Bogs', *Irish Geography*, Vol. 32, 2 (1999), p. 126.



rural Ireland is beautiful and compelling, yet by no means perfect, and the protagonist's father is murdered half way through the novel. In contrast with the turmoil of civil relations in this period of Ireland's history, the bog represents something eternal, and the threat to the bog is a threat to Ireland's identity. When the Peat Development Syndicate comes to Charles' land to develop the bog, he feels that:

it seemed like selling Ireland piecemeal, if they were going to cut the bog away. One did not feel like that about the turf-cutters, who all through the spring and summer had their long harvest of peat, that brought the benignant influence of the bog to a hundred hearths, and that filled the air all round the little villages with the odour that hangs in no other air that I know. Indeed the very land on which the Marlins' house was standing had been once about twenty feet higher, and had been brought to that level by ages of harvests of peat or turf as we call it. And the land that was left was still Ireland. But now it was to be cumbered with wheels and rails and machinery, and all the unnatural things that the factory was even then giving the world, as cities began to open that terrible box of Pandora.<sup>145</sup>

The bog and the natural landscape *is* Ireland. By identifying the nation with the physical land, Dunsany posits a definition of Irish identity that avoids the divisive categories of race or religion. The importance of the land was also identified by Dunsany's contemporary Daniel Corkery<sup>146</sup> as a mark of Irish writing, who states that there are: 'three great forces which, working for long in the Irish national being, have made it so different from the English national being: (1) The Religious Consciousness of the People; (2) Irish Nationalism; and (3) the Land.'<sup>147</sup> For Dunsany, unlike Corkery, the importance of nationalism and religion are necessarily fraught by his status as a Church of Ireland Unionist. Therefore Corkery's third category, the land itself, takes on additional significance in the formation of Irish identity. Dunsany also notes that the pre-industrial countryside manages to use the resources of the land while allowing it to remain 'Ireland', i.e. keep its national identity. It is the mechanization of the countryside that threatens Ireland's uniqueness, which is typified in the Irish bog. The theme of mechanisation destroying the rural idyll is one which is found throughout Dunsany's work, particularly in his later writings. Yet the bog, with its preservation of Ireland's past, is more than just another piece of countryside under threat. Mrs Marlin, the wise woman, tells Charles that the bog is, 'the heart of Ireland' (p. 297), and the narrator finds it more compelling than

<sup>145</sup> Lord Dunsany, *The Curse of the Wise Woman* (London: Heinemann, 1933), p. 211.

<sup>146</sup> Daniel Corkery was Professor of English at University College Cork in the 1930s and was influential in gaining recognition for neglected Catholic writers. In his works he suggests a move towards a more 'native' literature rather than those texts influenced by England.

<sup>147</sup> Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature: A Study* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1931), p. 14.

any other memory of his youth: ‘And it’s queer that what is luring my memory back to those days is not our house nor the woods nor clear landmarks, that would be such good guides for one’s fancy travelling into the past, but things that he [Marlin] used to tell me of those that haunted the bog.’ (p. 22).

Dunsany’s bog, then, is not just a link to Ireland’s social past in the sense of Heaney’s bog bodies; it is also a link to a spiritual past, to the pagan myths of ancient Ireland. Marlin, the wise woman’s son, has been going through a spiritual crisis, attempting to choose between the old and new belief systems. By the end of the novel he has chosen Tir-nan-Og over heaven and in so doing has condemned himself to damnation according to the Christian Church. Throughout the novel the narrator also oscillates between the mystical allure of the heathen beliefs and the rather shaky conviction that Christianity is the option he must take:

I seemed for a while to be hovering between two worlds, that both claimed the same area of Ireland. I see, now, that I was wrong, I see now that Tir-nan-Og is contrary to everything we have been taught, and I know that there are no spirits haunting the bog for any other purpose than to mislead us. [...] And yet when I look at the bog shining there in my memories I find it hard to remember the map and to say exactly where its boundaries go; rather I seem to see it crossing the sky-line and narrowing where roads and railways confine it, but a strip of it running on, till it comes to the very sand and shells of the ocean, and across that a little way westward, God help me, Tir-nan-Og. (pp. 57-8)

The older and wiser Charles has made the prudent choice, but the longing in his narrative make it clear where Dunsany’s romantic sympathies lie. In his descriptions of the bog we can see echoes of Dunsany’s earlier works such as *The King of Elfland’s Daughter*. The unknowable, ‘shining’ bog recalls the ‘wonders and splendours’<sup>148</sup> found in Elfland, and shares that land’s sense of mystery. In one passage the narrator consciously recalls the otherworldliness of Elfland in the Irish countryside:

From then on, as we neared the bog, the land changed rapidly: no actual details that I could give, and my memory is full of them, would convey the sense of that change. Little white cottages, much smaller than those behind us, with scarred deep thatches, poplars with queer arms clawing, strange willows, those little lanes that we call bohereens, rambling busily on and fading away into moss; none of these actual things convey the sense of it. I can only say that if you neared World’s End, and fairyland were close to you, some such appearance might be seen in the earth and the light, and the people you passed on the way. (pp. 24-5)

---

<sup>148</sup> Lord Dunsany, *The King of Elfland’s Daughter* (London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1924), p. 16.

The bog is a passageway to fairyland; the people living on it are from another world. Here Dunsany maps his own imaginative realms onto the landscape of Ireland, it becomes what Meredith calls a ‘mindscape’<sup>149</sup> where a landscape is imbued with symbolic meaning by the author.

The bog is familiar, emblematic of Ireland, yet unknowable and frightening: ‘Well, I’ve said enough to show you that, though I was only driving four miles, I was going to as strange a land as you might find in a long journey, a land as different from the fields we inhabit as the Sahara or Indian jungles.’ (p. 23). It is the bog’s wildness that makes it so unsettling: like the Sahara it is nature untamed and untameable by man. If the bog is the heart of Ireland then Ireland itself is a mystical space, one which is indefinable and strange.

In many of Dunsany’s later works, rural Ireland is analogous with the East,<sup>150</sup> and both share the qualities of unreality and mysticism. In *The Curse of the Wise Woman* the bog at first seems to represent both Ireland and Tir-nan-Og yet, as the novel progresses, a tension occurs between the real, physical country and the imagined mythical land. This clash emerges through the conflict between Marlin and his mother, the wise woman, as is seen in the following passage when they discuss for whom the moon shines:

“It’s for Ireland it shines,” said his mother. “No other lands have such light from it. Not even Tir-nan-Og. And when Ireland’s free we will build cities with golden spires that will flash back a light at which the moon will wonder.”

“Not all the gold of cities,” said Marlin, “nor the gold that is still in the earth, can equal the glow of the blossoms of Tir-nan-Og when the orchards answer the moonlight. It’s for the Land of the Young that it’s shining.”

“It’s for Ireland,” shouted his mother. (p. 161-2)

Marlin’s mother, the wise woman, is connected with the land so closely that she can cause the bog to move, yet it is her nationalism that is seen as being in opposition to Tir-nan-Og, a sleight of hand by Dunsany that suggests that nationalism and myth do not merge together as easily as the Irish revivalists might suggest. According to Irish mythology, Tir-nan-Og, which Dunsany translates as the ‘Land of the Young’ is where the Shée went to live after vacating Ireland, and it lies somewhere on an Island to the West of Ireland, cementing the importance of the West to Irish identity. Just as the myth of the hero Cuchulain was used as a call to arms by nationalists such as Padraic Pearse, Tir-nan-Og

<sup>149</sup> Dianne Meredith, ‘Landscape or Mindscape? Seamus Heaney’s Bogs’, *Irish Geography*, Vol. 32, 2 (1999), p. 126.

<sup>150</sup> See Chapter Five for more discussion of this trend.

attained political significance during the struggle for Home Rule. The suggestion was that Ireland itself was a kind of Tir-nan-Og, where the past was ever present and the nation always youthful. By opposing nationalism and myth in this passage where the old nationalist rejects Tir-nan-Og, Dunsany highlights the problem of politicising Irish history and Irish myth. Dunsany's wise woman is no Cathleen ni Houlihan; she is a poor old woman who weeps for the future of Ireland, not a fighter calling the young men of Ireland to arms. Yet she has one moment of power when she compels the bog to move against the development company, a victory that causes her death and the end of an era. The wise woman was a memory-bank of an Ireland now gone, holding onto the past just as the bog retains its buried bodies.

One more body is added to the bog when Marlin, the wise woman's son, decides to walk to Tir-nan-Og:

And then I knew that Marlin shared with the Pharaohs that strange eternity of the body that only Egypt and the Irish bog can give. Centuries hence, when we are all mouldered away, some turf-cutter will find Marlin there and will look on a face and a figure untouched by all those years, even as though the body had obeyed the dream after all. (p. 288)

In this passage we see the linking of West and East which is central to Dunsany's writings on Ireland, which is never a fixed place and which may just as easily be considered to be Eastern as Western.

As well as being linked through their interest in the Irish bog, Seamus Heaney and Lord Dunsany are two writers who drew inspiration from living through turbulent times in Ireland, troubles of different eras. Whereas Heaney finds in the bog a concrete past for Ireland, evidence of civilisation preserved for centuries, Dunsany finds the imaginative space to bring his fantasy writing to his home, where fairyland, Tir-nan-Og and the red bog can be one and the same.

Heaney and Dunsany are not the only Irish writers to make symbolic use of the Irish bog, as Bruce Stewart points out in 'The Old Bog Road: Expressions of Atavism in Irish Culture'. In this article Stewart traces a tradition of Irish writers featuring the bog in their works from the eighteenth century onwards, and notes its resonance as a symbol for Anglo-Irish writers in particular. For eighteenth century writers such as Maria Edgeworth, the bog was viewed as an inconvenience to land improvements, an area that could not be turned over to productive agriculture: 'For the Anglo-Irish the bogs of Ireland were

blemishes on the landscape rather than beauty spots'<sup>151</sup>. Dunsany then seems to be writing against this tradition in his Irish novel, as Stewart notes:

In his late novel *The Curse of the Wise Woman* (1933), Dunsany nevertheless scorned to use the trope of bog as an emblem for colonial guilt in the manner prescribed for Anglo-Irishmen by recent Irish commentators. What is more, he turned the tables on the new Irish state by casting its agents as the real enemies of native heath and bogland while casting his narrator – a loosely autobiographical persona – as the proper recipient of its mythical and mystical transmissions.<sup>152</sup>

This is an interesting argument, yet caution is advised as Master Charles in the end turns away from the wild bog and chooses a banal existence in civilisation instead. Could it really be that this novel which roots Dunsany in the Irish soil is just a sleight of hand for the Unionist to disparage the land development policies of the new Irish government? No doubt there is an implied criticism of the new Irish government, but Dunsany is making a more complex point about our responsibility and relationship with the land that goes beyond politics. Whoever may be in charge of the nation, it is the land itself that must endure, as it is the source of Irish identity, and this is what is shown to be under the most tangible threat in this novel.

Dunsany sets the novel during the time before Irish independence, at the close of the nineteenth century. As mentioned previously, the novel is a return to the time of Dunsany's childhood. Much has been made of *The Curse of the Wise Woman* as a piece of concealed autobiography, but there are some fascinating elements where the story diverges from reality. Perhaps the most curious is that Dunsany makes young Charles a Catholic. Dunsany, baptised Anglican but never confirmed, is generally categorized in the 'Protestant' pole of Irish writers. In Ireland, however, religion is never as simple as an either/or Protestant/Catholic dichotomy. As has been mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the Dunsanys were a Catholic family up until they conformed to the Church of Ireland in the eighteenth century as it was the only means of retaining their lands. The change of religion was thus a practical solution rather than a matter of faith. For Dunsany, religion is not absolute, one may slide from Catholic to Protestant identities, and this is part of his recognition that an Irish identity is always multiple and can never be reduced to one immutable absolute.

---

<sup>151</sup> Bruce Stewart, 'The Old Bog Road: Expressions of Atavism in Irish Culture' *Writing Ulster*, 6 (1999), p. 177.

In *The Curse of the Wise Woman*, by merging actual events from his childhood with an imagined religious persuasion, Dunsany creates a curious mix of the real and the unreal. For example, there is one section in the novel where Charles forces a group of paramilitaries to swear not to kill his father in front of a religious relic. The scene is of course fictional, although Dunsany had by this point had a few run-ins with armed men. However, the most Catholic element of this scene, the holy relic, is something that really existed. At Dunsany Castle were held several relics of St. Oliver Plunkett, a distant relative who had been canonized in the 1920s.<sup>153</sup> Those that would see early twentieth-century Ireland as a place of binary opposites such as protestant / catholic, unionist / nationalist need only look to Lord Dunsany's sainted ancestor, or his nationalist uncle, to see that these binaries simply do not hold up to scrutiny. In challenging the divisions between different sects of Christianity, Dunsany recalls his early writings where modern day religions are represented as inadequate and even dangerous, a theme to which he returns in his autobiography:

Let us go back to Tara, whither all the races came that conquered Ireland, and where their kings ruled, dynasty after dynasty, until they were driven thence by a strange thing, for neither the sword nor sickness, nor any material power, deprived the hill of its government: it was a curse of the priests that turned the halls of Tara into long mounds and that brought the grass up over all of them.<sup>154</sup>

These are unusually strong words for Dunsany who, as we have seen in the previous chapter, normally depicts priests as more ineffectual than damaging. In this work of autobiography however he cannot contain his anger at the priests for damaging the native beliefs. One might see this as a displacement of guilt: rather blame the priests than the colonisers among whom Dunsany's ancestors could be counted.

Christianity, in Dunsany's opinion, is merely a recent layer of religion placed over the basic faith in life and the natural world common to all people. It is the soil from which faith springs, not religion. Dunsany makes this point in *My Ireland* when he maintains that 'of soil and climate are made the principle growing tools that shape the spirits of nations.'<sup>155</sup> This quotation is fascinating as it is not just the origins of religion but nation

---

<sup>152</sup> Bruce Stewart, 'The Old Bog Road: Expressions of Atavism in Irish Culture' *Writing Ulster*, 6. (1999), p. 180.

<sup>153</sup> Mark Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany* (London: Collins, 1972), p. 170.

<sup>154</sup> Lord Dunsany, *My Ireland* (Plymouth: Mayflower Press Ltd., 1937), p. 19.

<sup>155</sup> Lord Dunsany, *My Ireland* (Plymouth: Mayflower Press Ltd., 1937), p. 272.

that Dunsany finds in the geological features of the country. Landscape shapes nation, and this allows for a concept of nationhood that avoids the political and sectarian divisions that exile Dunsany from mainstream Irish society. The possibility for spiritual and imaginative freedom found in the Irish landscape and the bog in particular is an allegory for a potential new nation of Ireland.

Standish O'Grady, one of the major figures of the Irish Revival also commented on the importance of the bog to the Irish imagination: 'On the whole, bogs are not popular, and yet sometimes at night, when stars fill the sky, bogs reflect their glory.'<sup>156</sup> The bog represents the real and the unreal, and may contain within in it all the possibilities of past and future Ireland. In *The Curse of the Wise Woman* Dunsany uses the bog to depict possible futures for Ireland, a land where the spiritual may be found in the everyday rather than the divisive institutional religions of the state.

## Section 2: *Up in the Hills* and *Rory and Bran*

The limits of possibility stretch further in Ireland than in any other country I know.<sup>157</sup>

*The Curse of the Wise Woman* examines the possibilities of the Irish landscape, and the land also figures centrally in two more novels of this period, *Up in the Hills* (1935) and *Rory and Bran* (1936). These texts foreground landscape in very different ways, and both are strange and unsettling works to fit into Dunsany's oeuvre. Perhaps the strangest of all Dunsany's novels – indeed, of all his fiction – is *Up in the Hills* which due to its eccentricity and variance from the rest of Dunsany's works has received negligible critical attention thus far.

*Up in the Hills* is set in the early years of the Irish Free State, unusual in itself as Dunsany tends to set his Irish novels prior to independence. The novel thus confronts contemporary Ireland in a way that is not found in any other text of this period. It is therefore vital to consider it as a new representation of Ireland in Dunsany's fiction. As the reviewer for *The Times* states: 'His new novel of the Irish "troubles," far from being grim, is written in

---

<sup>156</sup> Standish O'Grady, 'The Bog of Stars' in George Birmingham, ed., *Irish Short Stories* (London: Faber, 1932), p. 61

<sup>157</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Up in the Hills* (London: Heinemann, 1935), pp. 206-7

a mood of sheer “divilmint.””<sup>158</sup> This novel then is not the usual Dunsany nostalgia for an Ireland lost: rather it is a satirical swipe at the Ireland created by independence. This Ireland had already been identified with the term ‘troubles’, an impression that would continue to be affixed to the country’s name even up until the civil strife in Northern Ireland at the end of the twentieth century. The nation itself was troubled from the first, so it is no wonder that it is a troubling setting for Dunsany’s works of the 1930s.

The central character of *Up in the Hills*, young Mickey, is a teenage boy living in a small town in rural Ireland. The town is disturbed by the arrival of a group of archaeologists from the country of Liberissima, a newly independent African country, who are intent on digging up some bog burials. The old women in the village are concerned that the visitors are desecrating graves and start cursing the foreigners. In order to escape the old women’s curses Mickey and his friends take to the hills. Once there they decide to have a battle to occupy themselves, a game that nonetheless involves real weapons and ends with the death of one character. Amory notes of the novel that, ‘Death must not stop the fun,’<sup>159</sup> and part of the novel’s unsettling effect on the reader is due to the narrative’s irreverence for matters of life and death. On a basic level the plot is a parody of the fight for independence and resulting civil war, with soldiers in the Irish hills represented as young boys playing games. Yet the novel is not so simplistic in its politics, and it presents more subtly disturbing scenes of Irish life and culture than just an anti-Home Rule tract.

The conflict in the novel arises from the arrival of African archaeologists from the newly created country of Liberissima. Dunsany’s depiction of these characters involves a good deal of racial stereotyping, but what is more significant is that he also uses the Africans as a metaphor for the naivety of the new Irish state: ‘They were dressed in frock-coats and tall hats, meaning to give importance to their new State, but importance in dress is a narrow and slippery ridge, and it’s easy to fall over on to the other side.’ (p. 7). The Africans’ dress points to an element of posturing that Dunsany detected in the government of the new Irish Free State. Those in charge in the Ireland of the 1920s and 30s, scarred by the brutality of a highly damaging civil war<sup>160</sup>, wished to shake off past conflict and stand as a

---

<sup>158</sup> Anonymous, ‘Review’ of *Up in the Hills*, *The Times* 15<sup>th</sup> October 1935

<sup>159</sup> Mark Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany* (London: Collins, 1972), p. 236.

<sup>160</sup> The legacy of the civil war in politics and society in the early years of the independent nation cannot be underestimated. Declan Kiberd notes that the public despair at the pointlessness of the Civil War led to the ‘importance of respectability in thought and action’ for the new government, which impressed that ‘Irish people must by their discipline show themselves worthy of the new freedom.’ Declan Kiberd *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000), p. 483.



new modern nation, justifying its claim to independence by the dignity and intelligence of its representatives. Yet the legitimacy of this claim was threatened by a long legacy of violence, and by the physical reminder of internal division, the Partition. Similarly the people of Liberissima are shackled by a literal reminder of their violent past which prevents them from becoming modern:

And there was a peculiar difficulty about the appearance they wished to present, a difficulty that had haunted Mr. Washington, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Japhet and every other elder of the church in that party since first there had insisted on accompanying them a certain Umbolulu, an African whose dress above the waist was nothing more than a necklace of copious bones, and who was never without his drum. It had been impossible to leave him behind, because of the important part he had played when they broke away from Liberia; some revolutionaries soon kill such men, others attempt to civilize them, while others put up with them as these were doing. The first and the third course are the only possible ones. (p. 7)

The westernized Africans, Mr Washington and company, are forced to bring with them Umbolulu, who wears native dress and continually beats an African drum. He is viewed by the others as a relic, an embarrassing reminder of an uncivilized past. The echoes of the new Irish State are clear, with the wish to appear modern combined with older irrational belief systems that the government would love to suppress. The censorship and intolerance of the new Irish government is here shown to repress the everyday people who have in fact stayed true to their own identity. Declan Kiberd notes that the former rebels who became the new independent government in Ireland were seen as ‘the most conservative revolutionaries in history.’<sup>161</sup> This gives a source for Dunsany’s Africans who are terrified of appearing uncivilized, and are intolerant of any digressions in their own society. The 1930s were particularly difficult for writers in Ireland who were subject to severe censorship from this conservative leadership. One of the reasons for the conservative nature of the new Ireland was the power of the Catholic Church.

The role of the Catholic Church that was so central to the new Ireland is shown as a repressive force in *Up in the Hills*, but one which will ultimately fail to stop the peasant’s underlying beliefs and superstitions. Umbolulu is reminiscent of the Irish peasantry as portrayed by the Revivalists, a literal link to a primitive, natural state of being. The comparison between the pagan backgrounds of the Irish natives and the natives of Liberissima is particularly incisive when young Mickey mistakes an ancient Irish artefact which was dug up from the bog for an African idol:

at that moment Mickey caught sight of a wooden idol set upon a mound of earth, put there in a place of honour as the principle find of the day, a find of inestimable value to science; but to Mickey the squat and obese figure of wood, with a leer that seemed right and left to threaten salvation, was the idol of these men's heathen religion that they had specially brought from Africa to practise their pagan rites and insult the dead. (pp. 171-2)

Pagan, or rural Irish, superstitions are shown to be indistinguishable from the African idols. The link that Dunsany finds here between colonized African countries and Ireland is one which would be exploited to great extent by late twentieth century postcolonial criticism. Edward Said is one critic who states that Ireland has much in common with colonized countries from regions such as Africa: 'Now it is true that the connections are closer between England and Ireland, than between England and India, or France and Senegal. But the imperialist relationship is there in all cases.'<sup>162</sup> Ireland may not be technically a colony, but the relationship between England and Ireland is based on imperial power dynamics. Like the citizens of *Liberissima* in this novel, the Irish of the 1930s were a new race battling with a post-imperial legacy, searching for ways to express an emerging national identity.

The pagan background of the Africans, embodied by the figure of Umbolulu, is so frightening to the Irish villagers precisely because it exposes the deeper pagan beliefs that have been disguised by a veil of Christianity in Irish society. In an attempt to civilize the pagan elements in the Africans they are all encouraged to convert to Christianity by the vicar's wife, but unfortunately this does them no favours with the locals:

They began to feel the suspicion that was all round them, and somehow thought that this would be abated when they went to church on Sunday, as they all did, except Umbolulu, nearly doubling the number of the congregation. But this had no effect on the public opinion of Cranogue. It was to the protestant church that they went. (p. 18)

There is characteristic dark humour in this episode where the Africans try to ingratiate themselves by relinquishing their pagan beliefs for Christianity, only to naively believe that it makes no difference which church they join. Becoming Protestants exiles the Africans from the community of which they wished to be a part, and the Irish so famed for their hospitality are shown to be singularly inhospitable to outsiders, eventually refusing to feed them so that they begin to starve.

---

<sup>161</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 263.

<sup>162</sup> Edward Said, 'Yeats and Decolonization' Terry Eagleton, ed., *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 81.

By featuring an archaeological dig in this novel, Dunsany has an opportune moment to give his own insights on Irish history:

Danes came and Normans came, and many another folk, and blended to make what we call the Irish race, in which perhaps survives some trace of those earlier men that dwelt in the marshy islands; or perhaps so many conquests were too heavy for them, and they survive only in legends of little people hiding themselves away over the marshes. (pp. 3-4)

Here Dunsany neatly sidesteps the opposition of colonizer and colonized in Ireland by suggesting that the original Irish race may exist only in myths and legends. There is a scepticism here of the claims of racial purity of the Irish that echoes James Joyce's 1907 essay 'Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages'. In this work Joyce criticised the racial element to Irish nationalism, and notes that the nation of Ireland is populated by a mix of peoples, not just one. Joyce explains that the present Irish race is 'made up of old Celtic stock and the Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon and Norman races.'<sup>163</sup> He goes on to note that 'in the present nation, it would be impossible to exclude all those who are descended from foreign families. To deny the name of patriot to all those not of Irish stock would be to deny it to almost all the heroes of the modern movement.'<sup>164</sup> Joyce notes the hypocrisy of the cult of the Celt that means the nationalists would exclude figures such as Wolf Tone and Parnell as being racially un-Irish.

*Up in the Hills* does not end on a particularly happy note for either the Irish or the Africans. The Irish are so horrified by the desecration of the graves that they refuse to even feed the foreigners. Starving, Umbolulu reverts to a more primitive state and finally renounces his new teaching in favour of a more brutal pagan past when he eats a human being, thankfully a rather unlikeable local politician. The Africans are sent home and the boys in the hills return safe and sound, yet their little squabbles in the hills have led to at least one death. Dunsany saves his most wicked swipe at the nationalists when Mickey, forced to leave Ireland under a death sentence for fighting in the hills, ends the novel by enlisting in the British army.

The new Ireland is shown to be one of hypocrisy and self-contradictions. The figure of Umbolulu haunts the novel as the recent past haunts the Irish Free State. In *Ulysses*,

---

<sup>163</sup> James Joyce, 'Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages', *Occasional, Critical and Political Writing* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 114.

<sup>164</sup> James Joyce, 'Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages', p. 115.

Stephen Dedalus states that history is a ‘nightmare from which I am trying to awake’<sup>165</sup>. For Irish literature, the past is always a contested battleground, and even the science of archaeology may be fallible as is shown by the misunderstanding surrounding the dig in *Up in the Hills*. In *Up in the Hills* the past may be literally dug up to confront the present, in an Ireland which is yet to awake from its nightmarish history.

It is curious that just after this bleak, dark little story Lord Dunsany would write one of his most nostalgic and delicate Irish novels, *Rory and Bran* (1936). *Rory and Bran* was published one year after *Up in the Hills*, although the two are very different in tone and content. The location is similar, rural Ireland, although Dunsany in this novel has returned to his nostalgic comfort zone and set the majority of the action before independence in 1922. Rory, the hero of the novel, is a nineteen year old ‘innocent’; a young man seen by others in the community as lacking intelligence but who we quickly learn just has a fanciful rather than practical nature. His companion Bran, although described in terms of the human throughout the novel is a dog, and the reader is quickly in on the joke: ‘And Bran was delighted to see Rory and came up to him all merry with greetings’<sup>166</sup>. The characterisation of Bran as both human and animal is an early indication of the contrast between reality and illusion that is the key to the novel.

Rory spends most of his time reading in his room of heroic tales and battles from literature featuring grand figures such as Charlemagne and Roland. When his parents send him to drive the cattle to market he confuses these heroic sources with everyday reality. Like the author, Rory finds that stories of heroism and fantasy are much more compelling than any factual text:

He was not ungrateful for the novels and histories and primers that were offered him, but he was sorry for the people that wrote them and those that read them, in fact for the whole world of which they told; and why spend arduous hours in reading of such involved unhappy things, while Grimm’s Fairy Tales lay on the table, and there at his elbow lay the tale of the world as it should be? [...] there were no trains in all Grimm (p. 3)

Fantasy in the form of fairy-tale is here enticing for Rory for a number of reasons. It presents an ideal world, removed from the unhappiness of daily life; so it conforms to the classic definition of fantasy as escapism. It is also a form of nostalgia: there are no trains

---

<sup>165</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 42.

<sup>166</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Rory and Bran* (London: Heinemann, 1936), p. 10

in Grimm, just as there are no trains or any trappings of modernity in the Ireland of this nostalgic novel.

The world of the imagination and the world of mundane reality are often juxtaposed in Dunsany's works, but rarely in such a sustained analysis of the psyche of one individual. The novel begins in the same vein as many of Dunsany's previous works where the imaginative is given equal status with the everyday: 'And since dreams and fancies lead us as much as ponderable things, I shall not attempt to understand which were the worthier of our passing interest, Rory or Rory's dreams.' (p. 124). For the narrator, the most important aspect of a man's character is his imagination and his dreams. Rory's dreams construct the way he sees the world, so that, for example, a jockey on a horse becomes a knightly figure from legend. Ireland, with its mythical past, lends an abundance of material to Rory's dreams: 'Roland, Don Quixote and many an Irish king walked in those valleys, too far for Rory to hear their voices, but clear and vivid to that inner eye that was so bright in him' (p. 32). Rory's imagination, however, can lead him into trouble, such as when he puts his faith in characters who claim nobility but actually turn out to be con artists. The references to *Don Quixote* are a clue for the reader as to Dunsany's intentions, as well as linking the novel to his Spanish novels *The Chronicles of Rodriguez* and *The Charwoman's Shadow*. Like Quixote, Rory's imaginative progression is reflected in his actual journey, and he appears mad to his fellow men. This is explicitly highlighted in one passage:

Don Quixote too, a fine fellow, what effect had time had on him one way or the other? And from thinking of time he turned, as he always did whenever he thought of Don Quixote, to some feeling of indignation, at the jeers that had accompanied that great knight all down the ages; when men spoke of Quixotic they meant something slightly ridiculous; even his own historian seemed not to understand him; the one man in all Rory's reading that had ever challenged a lion to single combat with a bare sword; and the lion had turned tail: this was clearly recorded: who dare laugh at Don Quixote after that? (p. 14)

The incident with the lion refers to the second volume of *Don Quixote* when Quixote, gripped by grandiose delusions, demands to fight a lion. He is warned that this will be dangerous but, 'being always persuaded and convinced that all that happened to him must be adventures and still more adventures'<sup>167</sup> he approaches the lion. The caged beast, when it sees Quixote, merely yawns and turns its back. The lion-tamer then reports that the lion was scared by the sight of Quixote, thus confirming the fantasy. What Rory states is true: the lion turned its tail, whatever the reason for that fact may be. Rory is defending Quixote

---

<sup>167</sup> Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (Digireads.com 2009), p. 370.

just as Dunsany's novel begins with a defence of the Quixotic imagination. But this defence is qualified, shown as the story continues when Rory falls in love with Oriana, another 'innocent', and is forced back down to earth. Like Quixote, who at the end of the novel sees that his fantasies were just that, Rory learns to accept the real world, although his acceptance is much more positive than Quixote's who dies from depression at the reality of life.

The figure of Don Quixote is part of a deputation of mythic and legendary figures that people Rory's imagination from the books he reads. In an echo of *King Argimēnēs and the Unknown Warrior* discussed in Chapter One, one of the symbols which Rory picks up on as embodying the heroic is the sword:

And he thought of a legend there was of so bright a sword that it was called the Sword of Light. The age of the legend may have been only a century or so, from a day when some peasants had seen an officer's sword, perhaps on manoeuvres; or it may have been as old as when the Irish first saw the Normans; or it may have been older still; it may have come from the last of the men of the bronze age, who blinked their eyes as they saw a drawn sword's sudden flash, which might have told them that the power of bronze was over, but which actually brought them no more than the hint of a passing fear, like a chill breeze touching the campfire, that something threatened their age. And Rory thought he would buy a sword like that. (p. 76)

What begins as a description of the ideal sword quickly changes into a meditation on the creation of legend and myth. Dunsany slyly suggests that one origin for the Irish myth may be the appearance of the colonizers, Dunsany's own Norman ancestors. Yet Dunsany makes a serious point here, which is that no one can truly know the origins of these early myths – or the national boundaries they have traversed.

The most interesting figure of legend that Rory encounters in his dreams is Finn, the figure from Irish legend. Finn McCool or Fionn mac Cumhaill is one of the best known Irish heroes. He is also one of the Irish mythic figures most subject to parody, as in Flann O'Brien's comic novel *At Swim-Two-Birds*:

Finn Mac Cool was a legendary hero of old Ireland. Though not mentally robust, he was a man of superb physique and development. Each of his thighs was as thick as a horse's belly, narrowing to a calf as thick as the belly of a foal. Three fifties of fosterlings could engage with handball against the

wideness of his backside, which was large enough to halt the march of men through a mountain-pass.<sup>168</sup>

O'Brien's exaggerated phrases mimic the tales in their earlier forms, where a hero's attributes were always superhuman and larger than life. Dunsany's Finn is altogether more serene when he appears to Rory. When Rory is sleeping in a campsite for men of the roads he sees a vision of the drovers taking off their disguises and revealing themselves to be legendary heroes including Charlemagne, Arthur and Finn:

And Finn appeared, who had known demi-gods; and said: 'I am Finn.' And Rory recognized him before he spoke, as he stood before him holding a great spear that awhile ago was a blackthorn. And Finn spoke to him and said: 'I have known greater magic than this; that we, who are what you see, are by day drovers. But now you have seen us as we truly are, and henceforth you will know us always. We have many disguises, but you will often see us. For, night and day, we are on the Irish roads.' (p. 172)

In this passage Finn is just one hero available in Ireland, and not all Irish heroes need be native. The image of kings disguised as ordinary Irish citizens recalls Andrew E. Malone's assertion of the aristocracy believed to be latent in the Irish population. Rory taps into this shared delusion of the Irish people, a delusion which, one could argue, Dunsany shared with the associations of his family with sainthood, and indeed the implications of his own name (after all, he never published anything under the name Edward Plunkett after he inherited his title). This passage also suggests that the true Irish heroes may be found on the Irish roads. In an extension of Dunsany's urging to the reader to find magic in the everyday world, the passage encourages us to find the heroic in the people we meet, no matter how it is disguised.

One of the most fascinating examples of the hero-in-disguise is the figure of O'Harrigan. When Rory is driving his cattle to market O'Harrigan, a dishevelled man of the roads, announces that he is the future king of Ireland and as such compels Rory by the chivalric code to give him his cattle. At this point the stranger is presented as little more than a conman. However, when Rory's true love is threatened with being committed in an asylum, it is O'Harrigan, and Rory's other travelling companion, the tinker, that come to the rescue. Compelled by the story of a damsel in distress O'Harrigan lives up to his heroic claims, yet again eroding the boundary between the imagined and the real.

---

<sup>168</sup> Flann O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (London: Penguin, 1990) first published 1939, p. 5.

The tinker (named Ship-in-the-bottle after his trade which is to exhibit a model ship around the countryside) is another improbably heroic figure in the novel who turns out to be much more than he seems. Tinkers, tramps and other nomads are often valorised in Dunsany's works, particularly as we shall see in the next section of this chapter with the central role of the tinkers in *The Story of Mona Sheehy*. One of the reasons that tinkers are presented so positively in Dunsany's works – something one might consider unusual for a private landlord – is their closeness to nature. The travellers literally have the earth for their homes, and although their life is probably highly idealised in these novels, their knowledge of the land is part of the reason for their attraction for Dunsany. In Dunsany's works at least, these nomadic people are generally uninterested in politics, being more concerned with basic human needs such as food and shelter, and this makes them inherently appealing for an author who felt alienated from the political majority in his country.

Land and landscape form as much a part of *Rory and Bran* as they do in all the Dunsany novels of this decade set in Ireland. The bog, so central to *The Curse of the Wise Woman* makes several appearances, and is presented as otherworldly and sublime: 'And surely that was where the angels would come if they came near earth at all; surely those ruby and emerald mosses shining in placid water, ringed round with the calm small hills, were homesick so far away from Heaven.' (p. 15). Despite the mention of heaven here there is not as much concern with religion and religious conflict in *Rory and Bran* as there is in the other novels considered in this chapter, although strong beliefs still feature, albeit with less emphasis on institutions. The tinker is always a link to folk belief in Dunsany's novels, and this is especially true of *Rory and Bran*. Like Perkins in *The Blessing of Pan*, the tinker Ship-in-the-bottle is a mad man whose madness gives him privileged access to life's truths. At the end of the novel he has the misfortune to turn sane:

Sane. Sane under the full moon. It was the same last month; and now again. I am her viceroy no longer. No more her vicar on earth. The Queen of the Faries [sic] will not bow to me now; no spirits of night will salute me. Sane, and cast out by the moon! An ordinary tinker. (pp. 310-1)

Ship-in-the-bottle, having lost his connection to the world of imagination, abdicates his position in favour of Rory, who still has the power to dream. When he hears of the tinker's sanity O'Harrigan also relinquishes his dreams and abandons his imagined position as High King of Ireland, stating that 'The world is going away from the great men [...] Let others rule it' (p. 315). Just as in the early novels, there is a sense here of the ending of a Golden Age of the imagination, although it is curious that Dunsany proclaims the end of a



Golden Age throughout the five decades of his writing career. In an unusual metafictional moment, the voice of the author enters *Rory and Bran* to comment on the loss of fantasy in the novel:

Nowhere, as I look among my characters, who have become by now to me as neighbourly as living men and women, can I find anything now but sanity. The fine fancies that raged when the full moon struck the tinker, the gorgeous claims and pretensions of the O'Harrigan, even the knights that rode for Rory; all these seem deserting me; and the glades seem narrowing now in Oriana's fairyland, and their foliage fading and their great trees dwindling away. It is time that I dropped my pen. (p. 316)

Bleak as this sentiment may be, the epilogue tells us that in Ireland at least there will always be a place for the fantastic. This final chapter narrates the story of Rory's son who goes into politics. During a debate on the protection of birds Rory's son explains that they have neglected the most important Irish species: 'That the phoenix was put upon the protected list was entirely due to the brilliancy of this speech, without which the most national of Irish birds would be unprotected by Irish law' (p. 321). The phoenix (which also appears in the title of Dunsany's *The Man who Ate the Phoenix*, one of the late short story collections dealt with in Chapter Five) is itself a metaphor for the heroic and imaginative spirit from ancient times that may be reborn in the Irish people and, for Dunsany, is hiding just below the mediocrity of the new Irish state. The juxtaposition of *Up in the Hills* and *Rory and Bran*, depicting such different images of Ireland yet published only a year apart, shows Dunsany's idea of Ireland oscillating between extremes. At first glance they have little in common: *Up in the Hills* is a biting satire of the present day nation whereas *Rory and Bran* is a nostalgic elegy for a past where the imagination was still central to the Irish character. Yet both novels see the author trying to locate an Ireland that has changed and become almost unrecognisable in a few decades, and what this change means for Irish identities. The next section will examine how modern Ireland impacts upon the psyche of the individual in *The Story of Mona Sheehy*.

### **Section 3: *The Story of Mona Sheehy***

By 1939 when *The Story of Mona Sheehy* was published Lord Dunsany had been writing for four decades, and had been published for almost as long. It should therefore come as no surprise that this novel is a good humoured self-parody, a fantasy story exposed as no

fantasy at all. It is therefore a pivotal text in the Dunsany canon, a parody of the past and an intimation of the thematic concerns central to future texts. It is also the culmination of his decade of Irish novels, a text which builds on what has gone before but in innovative and challenging ways.

The central conceit of the novel is that a young man from a rural Irish village sleeps with a woman he believes to be the Queen of the Shee. The woman is actually an Irish aristocrat named Lady Guthrie who gives birth following the affair. The child, left on her father's door step, is brought up to believe that her mother was the Queen of the Shee and that she is heir to the throne of the fairy folk. The novel then follows Mona's life in the village and the effect that the power of illusion has on the community.

The narrator defends the novel's rather far-fetched premise by noting the innate Irish propensity for fantasy:

Lady Gutrim knew at once what Dennis O'Flanagan thought, though his stutterings were scarcely intelligible; but she caught the one word Queen, and knew that he thought that she was the Queen of the Shee; nor did his mistake appear to her particularly odd: she was the daughter of a squireen in lonely hills in Kilkenny, and had never quite made out, from the various tales of her childhood, what actually haunted the hills and what did not. And they danced together there in the night.<sup>169</sup>

Dunsany is not averse to humorously criticising his own class background. He presents Lady Gutrim as a member of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy who is willing to believe it would be natural for a working class man to assume that she could be Queen of the Shee. The narrator manages to represent both sides, giving Lady Gutrim's perspective at the beginning of the novel then following the effects of this event on the villagers. There is an element of the autobiographical in Dunsany's claim that Lady Gutrim, although divided from the villagers by class and background, is a member of the community in her willingness to believe in the haunting of the hills. Belief in Irish myth and legend is here shown as something that can unite all classes and races in a single national identity.

Mona therefore spends her childhood earnestly believing that she is a child of the Shee, and the rest of the town encourage this belief. As Dunsany's narrator ironically notes: 'whole armies for instance believed in Joan of Arc's voices; only, I suppose, because she

---

<sup>169</sup> Lord Dunsany, *The Story of Mona Sheehy* (London: Heinemann, 1939), p. 5.

believed in them so entirely herself' (p. 20). With its emphasis on the power of belief, this novel harks back to the dreamers and prophets of the Pegāna stories, Dunsany's first works, as well as his many Quixotic protagonists. As in *King Argimēnēs and the Unknown Warrior* when Argimēnēs rises to kingship on the belief of the slaves, in this novel the villagers' superstitions shape Mona's identity. The novel has much in common with earlier works, yet Mona is one of Dunsany's few female main characters, and in this novel her battle against different belief systems and her preference for the rural over the urban make her an allegory for a contested Ireland, like Dunsany's other strong female lead, Lirazel in *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. In the novels from the 1930s Dunsany for the first time directly makes his views on Ireland clear; in *The Story of Mona Sheehy* he reveals an intimacy with the people of the countryside, and in particular the aspiring middle class, that has been previously lacking in his fiction. This intimacy allows him to fully express his ideas about Irish character and identity.

One striking element of Dunsany's intimate engagement with Ireland in *The Story of Mona Sheehy* is his treatment of the travelling family, the Joyces, who take Mona in when she runs away from home. Initially the tinkers seem to be mere stereotypes, with Mrs Joyce claiming in full Irish brogue 'Sure, all tinkers are called Joyce' (p. 128). The Joyces however soon turn out to be the heroes of the novel, despite their inclinations towards petty crime and fake shillings. This may seem a curious attitude from Dunsany, but, as we have seen in *Rory and Bran*, it is explained by the tinkers' connection to nature: 'Instead of windows there were the stars; instead of curtains the wind wandering by, as free as the tinkers, instead of the fireside the open fire, where folk could sit facing each other warming their hands.' (pp. 132-3). Although there is an element of romanticising the tinkers, particularly the Joyces, traveller society is presented as brutal and primitive as well as in harmony with nature when one of the young men is killed in a fight over who gets to have Mona. The tinkers then are both heroes and villains, but they also perform an important role for Ireland as the keepers of oral history:

Yet there was nothing incompatible with that rather absurd pride, in taking up with the tinkers as she had done; because the Joyces were wild and free and roving, like the winds that ran through the night hinting of legends to Mona, or the clouds over Slieve-na-mona which stood in the midst of those legends. [...] And just so, as generations passed and policies failed and ambitions were forgotten, the tales of the Shee grew more real to that people that had had these tales told them at evening by the firesides of fifty generations. (p. 149)

The use of tinkers to represent an essential Irish character is another tendency that Dunsany borrowed from the Celtic Revival. Jane Helleiner notes that while in England the tinkers in the early twentieth century were generally racialized and vilified, in Ireland they were co-opted in a narrative of cultural nationalism.<sup>170</sup> The best known of the Revival depictions of tinkers is J.M. Synge's play *The Tinker's Wedding* (1904) and in general the Revivalists allotted the tinkers a similar position to the rural peasant as being embodiments of a pre-modern, unspoiled past.

Of all the people of Ireland it is the tinkers that are closest to a heroic Irish past, which is contrasted sharply with the failed politics of modern Ireland. *The Story of Mona Sheehy* is a novel which revels in its own whimsical nostalgia, and in fact the narrator wilfully disavows history in favour of storytelling and fantasy:

This being no history of the greater world, whose faith is in phosgene, but only of the folk of Athroonagh, whose belief was more in the fairies, I have made no mention of those events that to everyone outside Athroonagh appeared more important than the head of Slieve-na-mona, brooding under the storms of the stars, and conjectures as to what that old head saw when the nights were troubled with tempest and there were strange shapes in the sky and cries in the darkness, even shrilling under the doors and into the very cottages. (p. 83)

For the inhabitants of Athroonagh it is fairies not phosgene that inhabit their reality. This also suggests an innocence in the folk of Athroonagh as phosgene would have been best known to Dunsany as a chemical weapon used during the First World War. The primitivism of the rural peasantry allows them to escape the horrors of modern civilisation. As the narrator states in the short story 'The Bride of the Man-Horse' (1912): 'Not all of us have sat at historian's feet, but all have learned fable and myth at their mothers' knees'<sup>171</sup>. Even the most important of historical events, the Great War, barely touches the rural Ireland of Mona Sheehy's neighbourhood:

The Great War had raged for more than four of these years and had come to an end with a treaty, a treaty that was a far more serious matter than old men's tales of the Shee, and yet to be treated by a more sophisticated age with no more respect than what it shows for these tales. Some say it is motors that have brought the change. Of this I know nothing: I only recollect that men used to keep treaties and many in Ireland used to believe in the Shee, but now this is all altered. (pp. 83-4)

---

<sup>170</sup> Jane Helleiner, *Irish Travellers: Racism and the Politics of Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 40.

<sup>171</sup> Lord Dunsany, *The Book of Wonder* (London: Heinemann, 1912), p. 4.

This is probably the greatest act of nostalgia in the novel, for Dunsany would have been well aware of the number of lives lost by the Irish in this war, and it is no more than wishful thinking that the countryside would have been barely touched by it except in terms of beliefs and superstitions. The publication date of this novel, 1939, may partly explain Dunsany's concern with the breaking of treaties, as the Second World War was just beginning, and the Civil War had been raging for three years in Spain. Lord Dunsany's plaintive narrator laments an Ireland lost, and it is this nostalgic aspect of his work which places him most strongly in an Irish context. Lord Dunsany's nostalgia in *The Story of Mona Sheehy* is not for a different political or religious situation, but for a pre-Industrial past, a return to an untouched, natural world. The continued conflict following the First World War is merely symptomatic of man's disconnection from the natural world. The treatment of Mona by the locals who, fearing she will bring the Shee to their small town, turn against her and force her onto the roads however shows that while Dunsany may valorise nature he is not idealizing rural Ireland.

When Mona is made aware of her mother's true identity and is forced to accept that she is mortal, she finds that the loss of her lifelong fantasy is not necessarily to be mourned. Unfortunately she accepts the wonders of her ordinary life just as she is told she has inherited her real mother's fortune which has once again separated her from her community:

She saw now too late that a house on Harahanstown estate, by the side of the big woods, with the people of Athroonagh round about her, and the sounds and the sights she knew, were better than the court of a dynasty that had forgotten her, on the cold slopes of a mountain, or in any unfulfilled dream; better too than that to which she had fallen, while trying to climb to the clouds, that rode all heedless of her over Slieve-na-mona. (pp. 246-7)

Mona recognizes that living in rural Ireland as an active member of the community would be preferable to living with only her pride in her fairy heritage. Unlike the romantic delusions of the young Rory, Mona's illusions are ultimately shown to be more destructive than positive. In *Rory and Bran* belief in myth and legend is seen as desirable, and something that links Rory to the people he meets on the road. In *The Story of Mona Sheehy* Mona's belief in her fairy origins isolate her rather than bind her to the community. The novel makes clear that the renunciation of fantastic belief is actually a way to appreciate the fantastic and the glory in the natural world, a theme that recalls the notion of the native magic of the fields we know being just as glorious as the wonders of Elfland in

*The King of Elfland's Daughter*. Dunsany goes even further, and explains that nature itself is the origin of all man's fantasies:

And all the way sang the birds, as though they recognized in the girl with the bundle of tins, a daughter of the Queen of that people that was nearer to them than man; so much nearer that the story of many a fairy, many an elf, is probably but the history of small things dwelling in woods, altered a little by the eye of man, for he saw them in dim light, altered again by his mind as he tried to explain them, and altered again by frailties of his memory, when he tried for his children's sake to remember the stories that his grandmother told him. (p. 178)

This passage is indicative of the move away from 'imaginary world' fantasy in Dunsany's later novels where instead of presenting supernatural events and characters from other worlds, the fantasy is relocated in the everyday. The importance of fantasy never disappears in Dunsany's work but it appears in a different form in the later fiction, typified by the tall tales of Mr. Jorkens which were written around the same period as this novel, and will be dealt with in the last chapter of this thesis.

Once Mona is known to be Lady Gutrim's daughter, the novel takes a more satirical turn. The locals, although willing to accept Mona into the community now that she has been proven mortal, are just as prejudiced against her for being rich and upper class as when they thought her a fairy, and refuse to let her marry her local sweetheart:

Just as the only barrier between her and Peter had broken down, just as she had abdicated any royal pretensions that she might have to the clouds above Slieve-na-mona, and any service that might be due to her from the curlews in the Shee's Court of the mists when they lay on the mountain, just as her foolish pride drifted away with all her crazy day-dreams, at that moment there must rise up a dream of the world, as crazy as any dream old women had in Athroonagh, which said she must needs be unhappy because she was rich. (pp. 314-5)

In this way Dunsany exposes how modern society finds itself in the grip of fantasies and delusions as absurd as any folk belief or pagan legend. Mona is sent to the city to experience a life more fitting to her newly moneyed state, but London depresses her and she longs for her rural home. One of the most interesting episodes in the novel is when Mona is taken to see a Greek play:

The gorgeous thoughts they uttered, their nearness to gods of whom Mona knew nothing, but yet recognized as being dimly akin to all other eternal verities, the grandeur of their dooms and their splendid defiance of them, seemed all to be worthy of the people that Mona knew, people with whom her

mind was filled, men of whom her own friends talked, men who may or may not have existed, but who were very real to Athroonagh. (p. 241)

The heroic figures of Greek drama parallel the tales of Irish legend that Mona grew up with. The tales of heroism and grand dooms on stage are connected in her mind with the tales of rural Ireland, stories where a young girl may be the daughter of the Shee, and a man may become a hero for killing his father as in *The Playboy of the Western World*. We are reminded here too (as was noted of the Abbey audience for *King Argimēnēs*) of the enduring sense that the rural Irish are connected to an ancient line, and that the blood of fallen kings of legend still runs in their veins: 'like many an Irish mind, hers was stored with legends of kings at the head of the table in the long hall at Tara, which with her were as good as memories.' (p. 235). Legend and myth become racial traits in this passage, even though the events they relate may never have actually occurred. Mona's immortal background may turn out never to have existed, but the power of belief is more important to the villagers than any banal reality. Even though by the end of the novel the villagers know that she is not a daughter of the Shee she still retains an air of mystery as the character from that legendary story.

Lord Dunsany notes the importance of belief to Irish national identity in his autobiography:

And as for our ancient kings and the gods of old and the demi-gods, to them our allegiance goes out; and we are less likely to forsake one of them for anything modern, than for the discovery of some still older Irish demi-god. If a man's family has fought for James II, that stumps him politically; yet if he wishes to be taken seriously he must have some older leanings than that, and show an interest in kings and heroes who have need of his interest, because, except for our singing of them and dreaming of them and arguing about them, they were never really there.<sup>172</sup>

This statement echoes a particularly Revivalist view of culture where myth and legend are more important to a man's position than any historical facts. Dunsany however is aware of the problem with this approach; however necessary myths and legends may be to society they are still illusions, and as we see in *The Story of Mona Sheehy* they have the power to transform the lives of individuals, and not always for the better. It is hard not to think of figures like Yeats and Gregory in this passage, showing an interest in ancient 'kings and heroes' to ensure that they will be taken seriously by the Irish public. Richard Kearney explains that Yeats and company were seen as outsiders by many of the nationalists, particularly those involved in the Gaelic League. Their appropriation of peasant culture

---

<sup>172</sup> Lord Dunsany, *My Ireland* (Plymouth: Mayflower Press Ltd., 1937), p. 269.

through anthropology and linguistic study enabled them to present a closeness with the majority: 'The recourse by Yeats and Lady Gregory to the legendary images of Celtic mythology may thus be read as an attempt to make peace between the opposing interests of class, creed and language.'<sup>173</sup> In *The Story of Mona Sheehy* Dunsany points out the necessity of this veneration of myth to the Irish psyche, while noting the dangers for present day man when mythic ideals are applied to everyday life. This novel is written after the statue of Cuchulain was erected in the Post Office in Dublin to commemorate the Easter Rising, a fulfilment of the nationalists' desire to be thought of in mythic terms. Dunsany, who supported the army in the Rising and was wounded in the fighting, presents in *The Story of Mona Sheehy* an example of the power of belief, and of the necessity of treating myth and legend with an appropriate level of scepticism.

## Conclusion

[I]n Ireland left is often right and *vicē* is *versa*<sup>174</sup>

Dunsany's pithy statement on the paradoxical nature of Ireland is more than just the typical view of the irrationality of the Irish Paddy. The Ireland of these novels of the 1930s is in constant flux and seems to inhabit the oppositions of Christian/Pagan, modern/ancient, past/present simultaneously. Accordingly the novels themselves oscillate between different representations of Ireland, and multiple Irish identities. The novels are linked by thematic concerns, but even these undergo significant shifts between each text. For example, belief and myth are major concerns throughout Dunsany's works, but in these novels there is a radical transformation in the treatment of these themes. Belief, particularly in the pagan world of Tir-nan-Og, in *The Curse of the Wise Woman* is shown as alluring, a possibility that allows the Irish to reconnect with nature, both their own identities and the natural world. In *Rory and Bran* belief and the capacity for dreams and the imagination is still celebrated, but is also depicted as disappearing, as something from a lost age. *The Story of Mona Sheehy* presents a different and more cynical representation of belief where the misuse of myth becomes both dangerous and destructive for the rural Irish

---

<sup>173</sup> Richard Kearney, *Postnational Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 92.



community. The shift in the depiction of belief and the imagination throughout these novels is reflected in Dunsany's change of form, where the later works become more concerned with our everyday world than the world of the supernatural and the fantastic. This progression throughout the novels allows Dunsany to move his considerations of the importance of dreams and fantasies from imaginary settings to a rural Ireland that is familiar to the author. In these late novels Dunsany considers the function of fantasies and illusions in modern day Ireland, and exposes the myth-making strategies of his contemporaries.

Having noted the resemblance of *The Story of Mona Sheehy* to the earlier works, one may also argue that an analysis of the novel shows the essential differences between Dunsany's early and late novels. The conflict between Christian and pagan belief found in *The King of Elfland's Daughter* is given more weight by relocating it within the fields we know, in the Irish landscape that Dunsany called home. By locating the late novels in Ireland, Dunsany can expand on the depiction of beliefs in the early novels to examine how Irish identity is intricately bound up with the fantasies of a mythic, legendary Ireland. For the Irish people of *Mona Sheehy* or *Up in the Hills* belief in the supernatural and superstitions are not just a way of life, they are central to life itself. There is an inherent contradiction here: Dunsany's novels of this period increasingly warn that the imaginative and mythic can be dangerous when applied to the real people of Ireland, yet at the same time he notes that it is this very capacity for mythologizing and superstition that characterizes the Irish psyche.

It is the physical Ireland that appears most strongly in these novels, however, rather than an in-depth examination of Irish society. The focus on the physical landscape allows Dunsany to present an Ireland that is an unchanging presence, rather than an unstable idea or state that can be changed and politicized by different groups. The most prominent Irish landscape in these works is the Irish bog, which becomes the most memorable feature of *The Curse of the Wise Woman*. The bog is a culturally significant feature for Irish writers. Denis Donoghue in his work on Seamus Heaney notes that 'The word "bog" [...] is one of the few English borrowings from the Irish language.'<sup>175</sup> Even the etymology of bog therefore is relevant to Imperial relations between Ireland and England. The emphasis on the natural landscape as an Ireland that may be relied upon is qualified by the nature of the

---

<sup>174</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Up in the Hills* (London: Heinemann, 1935), p. 55.

<sup>175</sup> Denis Donoghue, *We Irish: Essays on Irish Literature and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) p. 189.

bog itself which is mysterious and unknowable, and as we see in *The Curse of the Wise Woman* may even move where it wishes. If, for Dunsany, the bog is Ireland, than that country is both ancient and unchanging, while paradoxically unstable and unreliable.

The nostalgia for rural Ireland found in these novels stems from another trend that Dunsany inherited from the Irish Revival. As Joep Leerssen notes, at the end of the nineteenth century, ‘the high culture of the Anglo-Irish elite seeks to rejuvenate and energize itself through an osmosis with the unspoilt, primitive energy and ebullience of native low culture.’<sup>176</sup> Evoking links with the peasantry whether in plays like *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* or Lady Wilde’s folk tales was a way of reviving Irish culture through a people that were somehow more in touch with the past than educated city-dwellers. To enable this view of the peasantry as the true seat of Irish culture, they had to be decontextualised, removed from historical specificity:

the penchant for tales and stories did much to de-historicize and de-politicize the image of the Irish peasantry. The peasantry is not a social group whose lives and actions, sympathies and aspirations take shape in a politically or historically distinct moment, but rather the timeless repository of a primeval, timeless life, primitive in the root sense of that term, aboriginal and untouched by modernizing influences from outside. (p. 163)

For Dunsany there is an element of this de-historicizing of the peasantry: there is, for example, little mention of famine in his Irish novels. Yet, unlike Yeats and his fellow Revivalists, Dunsany remained a rural author throughout his life; he was always a Meath man, not a Dublin boy. Unlike the Revivalists who, through their writings, claimed a closeness with the Irish peasantry, Dunsany had a genuine familiarity with the people of the countryside, even if he was a class outsider.

Nostalgia as a more general term is particularly relevant to these novels. Janelle L. Wilson explains that in etymological terms ‘nostalgia literally means “homesickness.”’<sup>177</sup> To be homesick, one would imagine that one would have to be away from home. Nostalgia is therefore understandable in the narratives of exile of a Beckett or a Joyce, but how does it apply to Lord Dunsany, who went on living in Ireland? Dunsany was in fact a native exile, homesick for a country he still lived in, yet which had nevertheless all but disappeared, and probably never really existed. Another interesting aspect of nostalgia is

---

<sup>176</sup> Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 160.

<sup>177</sup> Janelle L. Wilson, *Nostalgia: sanctuary of meaning* (Cranbury NJ: Rosemont Publishing, 2005), p. 21.

that is concerned with something more than place; it also considers time. Wilson quotes Svetlana Boym who states that: ‘At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time – the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress.’<sup>178</sup> It is not just his own childhood that Dunsany longs for, but what might be called a collective dream, the childhood of Ireland itself. In these novels the narratives often feature the loss of the innocence of childhood, particular with the figures of Rory and Oriana in *Rory and Bran*. According to Dunsany, in Ireland this innocence is quickly being replaced by the experience of modernity, a process that is more damaging than beneficial to the land and the nation.

Finally, this chapter has explored Dunsany’s interest in collective mythmaking, where a community is united by its willingness to believe in a myth, be it the legend of the Shee as in *Mona Sheehy* or the myth of a unified nation and national identity that the nationalists claimed for Ireland. This anticipates Benedict Anderson’s comment on the concept of nation, which he suggests is ‘an imagined political community. All communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact [...] are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished [...] by the style in which they are imagined.’<sup>179</sup> In this chapter Dunsany has been shown to have challenged the notion of a unified Irish national character, and to have shown the transient yet potent nature of communal myths. In the next chapter we will return to the beginning of Dunsany’s writing career where he indulges his own need for myth-making in his first short stories, tracing the continuing engagement with nation and belief in the short stories that we have noted in his novels.

---

<sup>178</sup> Svetlana Boym qtd. in Janelle L. Wilson, *Nostalgia: sanctuary of meaning* (Cranbury NJ: Rosemont Publishing, 2005), p. 22.

<sup>179</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 6.

## Chapter 4: The Early Short Stories

### Introduction: Publishing an Irish Short Story

Let's away to Pegana.<sup>180</sup>

BEFORE there stood gods upon Olympus or ever Allah was Allah, had wrought and rested MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI.<sup>181</sup>

The naming of Olympus and Allah at the beginning of Dunsany's most other-worldly fiction is a warning to the reader not to view the stories as abstract fantasies completely unconnected to the everyday world. In many respects, the early short stories are the most strikingly original of Dunsany's entire oeuvre; in his first two collections of stories Dunsany creates not just the world of Pegāna but an entire cosmology of that land. This chapter will examine the stories written up until the First World War and locate them within an Irish short story tradition. As we have previously seen with the novels, the exoticism of the worlds Dunsany creates can be tamed by understanding the tales as belonging within a tradition of Irish writing, illuminating the author's obsessions with dreams and heroes, gods and narrators.

The publication of the *Field Day Anthology* in 1990 and the growth of interest in Irish studies in general over the last few decades have meant that there has been, whether consciously or subconsciously, a move towards creating a definitive Irish canon. While this thesis will challenge Dunsany's omission from this canon, the anthologies and critical works on the Irish short story can provide a useful resource when looking for points of intersection between Dunsany's writings and those of his contemporaries. Anthologies such as George Birmingham's *Irish Short Stories* (1932) placed Lord Dunsany's works within the same context as many Irish writers from a variety of backgrounds and literary approaches, including Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, Frank O'Connor and Mary Lavin. These names, which might form the beginnings of a canon of short story writing, nevertheless do not sit comfortably together, given the vast range of themes and forms they encompass. In considering the variety of the Irish canon W.J. McCormack suggests that:

---

<sup>180</sup> So says Aleister Crowley, the occultist and Dunsany enthusiast, in a letter to the author, feeling the pull of Dunsany's fantastic lands against the reality of the First World War. Aleister Crowley, Unpublished letter to Lord Dunsany, Undated (but from its content written during WWI), (Dunsany Archive)

<sup>181</sup> Lord Dunsany, *The Gods of Pegāna* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1905), p. 1.

If we think spatially about Anglo-Irish literature as the meeting ground of various directions and forces – Greek culture and Celticism, English romanticism and revolutionary alarm, bourgeois compensation and subversive allegory – we should consider tradition historically as the (sometimes contradictory and violent) convergence of readings, not of texts.<sup>182</sup>

By stressing readings not texts, McCormack notes the importance of textual influence for the Irish writer who must choose which traditions to ally himself with. One might however expand McCormack's focus as the combination of allegory and alarm is just as present in the short fiction of Mary Lavin, Frank O'Connor and James Joyce as it is in the work of those like Dunsany who are often placed under the heading of Anglo-Irish. Lord Dunsany in particular embraces many of these traits for which we may substitute Irish rather than Anglo-Irish, and the links with O'Connor, Lavin and Joyce will be explored both in this chapter and in the next which looks at Dunsany's later stories. McCormack's last point encourages the critic to look at the tradition of which Dunsany is – despite his complaints to the contrary – a part as a convergence and a conflict of different readings. In Dunsany's early short stories we may read many of the forces McCormack identifies – the meeting of Greek culture and Celticism in particular, and the use of subversive allegory – but rather these traits will be shown to link him to Irish writers of all ethnic and religious backgrounds.

However, bringing Lord Dunsany into a canon of Irish short story writers leads to its own problems of terminology. Declan Kiberd notes that in the early twentieth century the short story form in Ireland tends to be associated more with middle class Catholics than the aristocracy:

Whereas the great Anglo-Irish writers of the Literary Revival, such as Yeats and Synge, excelled in poetry and drama, the short story has been mainly pioneered by the 'risen people' - the O'Kellys, O'Flahertys, O'Faolains and O'Connors. The genre had a particular appeal for the writers of the emerging Catholic bourgeoisie who hailed from regional towns.<sup>183</sup>

Kiberd's stress on regionality here is interesting, and as we have seen in the obsession with the Meath bogland in the Irish novels it is something that Dunsany shares with the writers listed. Despite his use of exotic settings in the early short stories, Dunsany's works of any period are constantly concerned with a sense of place. Part of Dunsany's reluctance to

<sup>182</sup> W. J. McCormack, *From Burke to Beckett: Ascendancy, Tradition and Betrayal in Literary History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994), p. 12.

<sup>183</sup> Declan Kiberd, 'Story-telling: The Gaelic Tradition' in Patrick Rafriodi and Terence Brown, *The Irish Short Story* (Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Lt., 1979), pp. 14-15.

engage with national concerns is his attention to the local, and this regionalism is something found in the fiction of writers like Sean O’Faolain and Mary Lavin. It becomes clear when one considers the modes of fiction written in this period that the difference between the classes that Kiberd identifies is not so much that the new bourgeoisie use the short fiction form and those writing under the influence of the Revivalists do not; rather it is a question of the difference between writing mimetic realism and fantasy. Many writers typically categorized as Anglo-Irish or aristocratic, including Oscar Wilde and Dunsany himself, wrote short fiction but generally in a fantastic mode. Does this mean then that they were doing something completely different with the short story than realist writers such as O’Connor and O’Faolain? A comparison of the fiction of middle class, Catholic writers with some of Dunsany’s early stories in this chapter and the next complicates this opposition of realism/fantasy, bourgeoisie/aristocracy.

One of the ways in which Dunsany’s works differ from those of many writers of the Irish middle classes is the author’s tendency to look back to more fantastic modes, whether the ancient Greek and Celtic heroic tales, or stories in the Irish gothic tradition. At first glance at least, Dunsany’s early short story collections certainly have more in common with the supernatural tales of Sheridan Le Fanu and Charles Maturin than the obsessions with minutiae and stasis that we find in the archetypal modernist short story collection, Joyce’s *Dubliners*. However, the perceived divisions between the modernists and other writers who utilize earlier forms are always being blurred. James Kilroy highlights the fascination with the fantastic in the early Irish masters of the short story:

Coinciding with the extension of a reading public receptive to short fiction, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries’ interest in folktales, a taste for rural subjects, and a fascination with fear and other sublime effects nurtured the growth of the new genre of the short story. In fact, such elements are seen in the works that various critics have proposed as the first short stories [...]. In the many stories of William Carleton may be found extended descriptions of rural scenery, reproductions of dialect, and a fascination with discord and revolution; in James Clarence Mangan’s few tales, a Poe-like obsession with exotic settings and mysterious events; and in the Gothic tales of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and Charles Robert Maturin, even more vivid expressions of mystery and horror.<sup>184</sup>

Many of these themes resonate with Lord Dunsany’s short fiction, particularly the obsession with the exotic in Mangan’s fiction and the mystery and horror of the works of Le Fanu and Maturin. This chapter will seek to examine the relevance of locating Dunsany

---

<sup>184</sup> James F. Kilroy, *The Irish Short Story: A Critical History* (Boson: Twayne Publishers, 1982), p. 3.

alongside earlier Irish gothic writers in addition to the canonical Irish short fiction authors of the twentieth century. The fantastic is integral to the beginnings of the short story, so rather than seeing Dunsany as opposed to the mimesis of the modernist short story writers we can view him as remaining true to the early Irish tradition of short fiction. In fact, in analysing Dunsany's work alongside writers such as Mary Lavin, Irish fiction in the first half of the twentieth century will be shown to combine fantasy and gothic with its own particular strand of modernism. Another aspect that Dunsany shares with the writers of the short story in the early twentieth century is a tendency to avoid the use of Irish mythology in their fiction, in direct contrast with the poets and playwrights of the Irish Revival. Jacqueline Fulmer notes that Mary Lavin rejects Celtic myth in favour of 'real' women in her stories<sup>185</sup> and Frank O'Connor famously criticised the 'backward look' of modern Irish literature, which continually tries to reinvigorate the present with the mythic past.<sup>186</sup> Dunsany may be regarded as part of the tradition that authors such as Lavin and O'Connor were reacting against, but he also shares many of their obsessions.

This chapter will open the analysis of Dunsany's early novels by examining the importance of the term 'Celt' to Irish literature in the twentieth century. It will show that by linking the stories to a tradition of Celticism, one both embraced and attacked by writers of this period, we may better understand their relevance to Irish writing. Even from his earliest tales Dunsany is engaging with the ideologies of the Revival authors, and the narratives that shaped early twentieth century Irish art and society.

## Section 1: Fighting Celts and Ancient Heroes

For good or for bad, the Celtic genius is more airy and unsubstantial, goes less near the ground, than the German.<sup>187</sup>

---

<sup>185</sup> Jacqueline Fulmer, *Folk Women and Indirection in Morrison, Ni Dhuibhne, Hurston, and Lavin* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 69.

<sup>186</sup> See Frank O'Connor, *A Backward Look: A Short History of Irish Literature* (New York: Capricorn, 1968) *passim* but particularly the chapters on Joyce and Yeats.

<sup>187</sup> Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1867), p. 102.

Lord Dunsany's early fantasies, with their airy subjects of gods and dreamers, prophets and heroes, certainly seem to have much in common with Matthew Arnold's definition of the Celt. It is interesting when considering the ideological differences between him and the cultural nationalists of the Irish Revival, who embraced the term Celt, that Dunsany is often described as a Celtic writer by contemporary critics:

Dunsany seems, to the superficial glance, to be outside the so-called Irish "school", — that popular fiction. He chose Pegāna, and the fabulous cities of Babbulkund and Perdonaris, instead of Celtic Ireland and its heroic figures, but his adventures are as stirring to the imagination as any recounted by Gaelic legend. His work, both drama and narrative prose, is part of that rekindling of the flame which has invested the Irish world with the glow of Celtic vision. The marvels he describes are often but the simplest natural phenomena seen through the eyes of a poet, and they take on the glamour and mystery which the Celt has at all times descried in nature.<sup>188</sup>

Ernest Boyd in a study of Dunsany's plays identifies in the author a 'Celtic vision' held in common with the writers of the Irish revival. Yet, as will be argued in this chapter, Dunsany often embraces the tropes of Celticism in order to expose them through parody, again showing his distrust in any absolutist version of Irish identity. Aaron Kelly situates the concept of the Celt embraced by Yeats and others in the Irish Revival as a reaction to Matthew Arnold's formulation of the Celt as opposed to the Anglo-Saxon at the close of the nineteenth century:

Arnold reiterates these terms and regards the Celts as spiritual, emotional and poetic but his apparent praise has an ulterior purpose. He felt that his own Victorian English society had become too materialistic and philistine. So the Celts could be offered as an antidote to this spiritual lack, but not on their own terms, for they were to be annexed into a fully integrated Britain. And while the spiritual, emotional, feminine Celts provide the local colouring and poetry, they cannot be entrusted to undertake any of the governing of this united Britain.<sup>189</sup>

The Celt is thus immediately located within a colonial dichotomy linking English/Irish and Anglo-Saxon/Celt. Yeats takes Arnold's version of the Celt's weakness compared to his Anglo-Saxon conquerors as his strength, claiming that it is precisely these differences that mean that Ireland is incompatible with Britain and should self-govern. For Yeats, the Celt, or the ancient Irishman, may provide the nation with the legends for its renewal, the basis for a new national culture. One explanation of Lord Dunsany's reluctance to use Irish

---

<sup>188</sup> E.A. Boyd, *The Contemporary Drama of Ireland* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1918), pp. 162-3.

<sup>189</sup> Aaron Kelly, *Twentieth-Century Irish Literature* (Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p. 7.



mythological figures directly in his early fiction, instead using entirely imaginary places and personae, relates to this appropriation of Irish legend for the nationalist cause.

The use of Irish myth for political and ideological ends was particularly prevalent during the fight for Irish independence. Patrick Pearse, a poet who was one of the leaders of the nationalists involved in the Easter Rising invoked the heroic image of Cuchulain to lend weight to his nationalist cause. Pearse was a schoolteacher, and when he founded a school for boys in 1908, just three years after the publication of Dunsany's first collection of short stories, he hung Cuchulain's motto in the hall of the school: 'I care not if I were to live but one night and one day if only my fame and my deeds live after me.'<sup>190</sup> The notion of the importance fame extolled by Pearse is one which Dunsany interrogates in his early stories, as is shown by the tale 'A Mistaken Identity' (1915), one of the author's shortest pieces, printed in its entirety below:

Fame as she walked at evening in a city saw the painted face of Notoriety  
flaunting beneath a gas-lamp, and many kneeled unto her in the dirt of the road.

"Who are you?" Fame said to her.

"I am Fame," said Notoriety.

Then Fame stole softly away so that no one knew she had gone.

And Notoriety presently went forth and all her worshippers rose and followed  
after, and she led them, as was most meet, to her native Pit.<sup>191</sup>

Cuchulain's motto suggests that fame makes death irrelevant, but in this short tale Dunsany suggests that fame may well be indistinguishable from notoriety, a far less welcome honour. As we have already seen in *The Story of Mona Sheehy*, Dunsany's fiction exposes the dangers of applying mythic ideals to everyday reality.

Ernest Boyd's descriptions of Dunsany as Celtic are thus compromised by the political implications of the word. Yet the term Celtic as used by the Revivalists provides a useful roadmap to Dunsany's fiction. The Celtic imagination is pre-modern, pre-Christian, rural not urban, imaginative rather than rational. The ancient Celt is found most clearly in depictions of legendary heroes, the stories of whom would be endlessly remade by writers during the Irish Revival. Throughout his early texts Dunsany's ironic portrayals of the heroic show the dangers of following Pearse's example and adopting ancient ideals and

---

<sup>190</sup> Martin Williams, 'Ancient Mythology and Revolutionary Ideology in Ireland, 1878-1916' *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 26, 2 (1983), pp. 307-328.

<sup>191</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Fifty-One Tales* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1915), p. 67.

using them uncritically. As early as 1906 Dunsany publishes a story called 'For the Honour of the Gods' which features a civilisation enticed to fight for warring gods:

And from one of the isles all the folk came forth in ships to battle for gods that strode through the isle like kings. And from another they came to fight for gods that walked like humble men upon the earth in beggars' rags; and the people of the other isle fought for the honour of gods that were clothed in hair like beasts; and had many gleaming eyes and claws upon their foreheads. But of how these people fought till the isles grew desolate but very glorious, and all for the fame of the gods, are many histories writ.<sup>192</sup>

In this passage the heroes may have achieved fame for their gods, but the islands themselves have been left empty and desolate. This passage, written before Irish independence, shows Dunsany's fear that heroism and the quest for fame, are merely illusory states, and that the fight for a new government ignores the needs of the people of Ireland.

Of all the Revival figures W.B. Yeats had perhaps the greatest ability to combine ancient legend and contemporary politics and he is much more self-aware than Pearse. When all his poetic images desert him in 'The Tower' Yeats clings to his hero Red Hanrahan who featured in his early poetry: 'Go therefore; but leave Hanrahan, / For I need all his mighty memories.' ('The Tower,' II, ll. 87-88).<sup>193</sup> The poet admits that Hanrahan is just another created symbol that has no power to comfort one in one's old age, but cleaves to him nonetheless, recognising that mythic ideals are necessary for the soul even if they may be no longer relevant to modern society. This recalls Dunsany's Quixotic narratives where the necessity of maintaining illusions is stressed precisely because they bear little relation to reality. The 'mighty memories' of Hanrahan are in fact no more real than any other fictional figure that inhabits Yeats's works. In later years, Yeats became concerned with using ancient ideals of the heroic in modern, real situations and even commented on Pearse's appropriation of the mythic: 'When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side, / What stalked through the Post Office?' ('The Statues', ll. 25-26).<sup>194</sup> The hero borrowed by the Revivalists as a model for modern rebellion has become a rough beast, an uncontrollable metaphor made real with troubling consequences.

---

<sup>192</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Time and the Gods* (London: Heinemann, 1906), p. 76.

<sup>193</sup> W.B. Yeats, 'The Tower' *The Poems* (London: Everyman, 2004), p. 243.

<sup>194</sup> W.B. Yeats, 'The Statues' *The Poems* (London: Everyman, 2004), p. 384.

If Celtic mythology itself is off limits for a writer like Dunsany due to its nationalist connotations, the process of myth-making and the possibilities of the mythic narrative still have their attractions. Jarleth Killeen notes the connection between the use of myth by the nationalists and the fantastic nature of other writers' work, in this case that of Oscar Wilde:

In Ireland, the use of myth during the period called the Celtic Revival worked in exactly this way in that the patterns of the Fianna and Cuchulain myths were seen, not as a way of closing off history and bringing interpretation to an end, but of opening up new hope and possibility in an historical situation that seemed full of doubt and despair (especially after the death of the great nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell). Fairy tales work like this too.<sup>195</sup>

The link between the use of the fairy-tale and the mythic in the work of writers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries seems relevant as much to the short fiction of Lord Dunsany as it is to the earlier work of Oscar Wilde. The mythic Irish tales that are used to signal new hope and possibilities for Yeats and the Revivalists for Dunsany become the subjects of parody and irony. Dunsany, as we shall see in the following section, through his creation of a fictional mythology that is unstable and self-destructive, suggests that the mythic foundations upon which the Revival based its renewal of Irish culture should not be taken for granted.

One aspect of the Celt that Dunsany engages with throughout his writings is the figure of the hero or warrior. Stories of the (anti)heroic similar to the play *King Argimēnēs and the Unknown Warrior* are found throughout the early tales, and these owe much to the texts of the Irish Revival. One of the first writers to exploit the tradition of the Irish hero was Standish O'Grady, a scholar of antiquarian literature at the close of the nineteenth century who specialised in the translation of ancient Irish sagas. O'Grady's translations brought his version of ancient Ireland to a non-Gaelic speaking audience. Particularly attractive for Lord Dunsany would have been O'Grady's association of heroism with aristocracy. It is just this notion that has led to criticism of O'Grady's translations as being merely a means of valorising the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, as Seamus Deane notes: 'O'Grady has one story to tell – the standard nineteenth-century story of degeneration from a heroic past to a wretched present, a degeneration that is coincident with the decline in power of an aristocratic, landowning class and the rise of democracy and socialism.'<sup>196</sup> Deane's comment has some validity, no doubt, as O'Grady's stories do seem to articulate a desire to keep political power in the hands of the aristocracy, yet it is worth noting that the

<sup>195</sup> Jarleth Killeen, *The Fairytales of Oscar Wilde* (London: Ashgate, 2007), p. 13.

<sup>196</sup> Seamus Deane, *Strange Country* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 83.

tales are praising a native, not a foreign (English) aristocracy, a class of which Lord Dunsany was very much a part. Yeats, and other cultural nationalists at the turn of the century, embraced O'Grady's texts to reinforce their notion of the heroic Celt. An examination of the texts themselves shows their intentions for creating a notionally factual ancient history for Ireland that simultaneously imbues the reader with a conviction of the greatness of the Irish people. A brief example from O'Grady's writings, in this case *The Coming of Cuculain*, shows how ripe these works were for parody:

The eyes of the heroes sparkled, and their faces, white and ruddy, beamed with festal mirth and mutual affection. Their yellow hair shone. Their banquetting attire, white and scarlet, glowed against the outer gloom. Their round brooches and mantle-pins of gold, or silver, or golden bronze, their drinking vessels and instruments of festivity, flashed and glittered in the light. They rejoiced in their glory and their might, and in the inviolable amity in which they were knit together, a host of comrades, a knot of heroic valour and affection which no strength or cunning, and no power, seen or unseen, could ever relax or untie.<sup>197</sup>

This description of King Concobar's men illustrates the larger than life heroes of the Irish epics, along with stressing the chivalric codes that fit O'Grady's aristocratic agenda. O'Grady's heroes combine the hyperreal qualities of the original texts with a genteel Victorian need to censor the more racy elements in the tales.<sup>198</sup> An inspiration for O'Grady's text which was written by his cousin, Standish Hayes O'Grady, gives an illustration of how much hyperbole and exaggeration plays a part in the Irish hero:

Warrior better than Finn never struck his hand into a chief's: inasmuch as for service he was a soldier, a hospitaller for hospitality, and in heroism a hero; in fighting functions he was a fighting man, and in strength he was a champion worthy of king; so that ever since, and from that time until this day, it is with Finn that every such is co-ordinated.<sup>199</sup>

This section of *Silva Gadelica* is an example of a literal translation of the Irish text which verges on the ridiculous: Hayes O'Grady's heroes are super-human, peerless fighting men, the ultimate masculine images. This passage just begs to be burlesqued, and it is against this backdrop that Dunsany writes his own tales of myths and legends, set in Pegāna or the lands of Wonder, but based in, and reacting to, a tradition firmly at the heart of Irish culture at the start of the twentieth century.

---

<sup>197</sup> Standish O'Grady, *The Coming of Cuculain* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1893), p. 3.

<sup>198</sup> One prominent example being O'Grady's 'feminizing' of the character of Queen Maeve, who in the original Irish texts is much less genteel than in the later author's version. See Richard Kearney, *Navigations: Collected Irish Essays, 1976-2006* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2006), p. 293.

One fascinating example of how Dunsany plays with the portrayal of ancient Irish heroism is found in 'In the Land of Time' published in *Time and the Gods* (1906). 'In the Land of Time' begins with the death of the King of Alatta who bequeaths his great armies to his son Karnith Zo. The dying king instructs his eldest son to triumph over all of his enemies and conquer neighbouring lands. But instead of setting out for war, the new king watches the flow of time over his neighbours' lands and declares:

I will not go down clad with murder to be King over other lands. I have seen the same morning arising on Istahn that also gladdened Alatta, and have heard Peace lowing among the flowers. I will not desolate homes to rule over an orphaned land and a land widowed.<sup>200</sup>

At first this seems to be a reversal of the fighting Irish hero found in O'Grady's epics, one who must conquer all others, but Karnith Zo is merely saving himself for a grander military project. He embarks on a quest to kill the ultimate foe, Time, but Time proves too strong for the king. When eventually the army reaches Time's own country, its ruler literally hurls years at the king and his men until they are too old to fight him and are forced to turn back. Crippled with age, the men return to their homeland, only to find that worse is yet to come:

And then they knew that while they searched for Time, Time had gone forth against their city and leaguered it with the years, and had taken it while they were far away and enslaved their women and children with the yoke of age. [...] this is all that may be told of those adventurous armies that went to war with Time to save their world and the gods, and were overwhelmed by the hours and the years. (p. 107)

What at first seems to be a parable about a hero in search of peace rather than war turns out to be a cunning little tale of a hero embarking on a courageous, well-meaning but utterly futile quest, reminiscent of Alveric's long quest to return to Elfland in *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, except that the latter is permitted to achieve an improbably happy outcome. The story recalls the legend of the Irish hero Cuchulain who, after killing his son, turns to madness and spends three days and nights fighting against the waves of the sea. Lord Dunsany then is not so much negating the form of heroism found in O'Grady as he is challenging the simplistic acceptance of notions of heroism in all its forms. Cuchulain, after all, chooses to fight the waves in a fit of madness; Karnith Zo chooses to

---

<sup>199</sup> Standish Hayes O'Grady, *Silva Gadelic: A Collection of Tales in Irish*, Vol. II. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1892), p. 98.

<sup>200</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Time and the Gods* (London: Heinemann, 1906), p. 100.

fight Time while apparently sane, and Dunsany here suggests that there may be a dangerous kind of madness found in living the heroic lifestyle.

As previously mentioned, it seems curious that heroic fantasy is regarded as opposed to mimetic fiction. L. Sprague de Camp, for example, asserts that: 'heroic fantasy is the purest escape fiction there is; the reader escapes clean out of the real world.'<sup>201</sup> At the time of the Irish revival however, it seems that Dunsany's playful heroic fiction could not be more relevant, as it is a direct parody of the dominant form of political engagement for Yeats and company.

Lady Gregory was another Revivalist who appropriated a heroic past to reinforce the notion of an Irish nation:

It was a common belief among the ancient peoples that each had a national genius or deity who presided over them, in whose all-embracing mind they were enclosed, and by whom their destinies were shaped. We can conceive of the national spirit in Ireland as first manifesting itself through individual heroes or kings; and, as the history of famous warriors laid hold upon the people, extending its influence through the sentiment engendered in the popular mind until it created therein the germs of a kindred nature.<sup>202</sup>

For Lady Gregory nationalism is more than an ideology; it is a spiritual manifestation which may be traced through a tradition of the warrior hero. This elitist view of nationalism appealed to the Revivalists who tended to invoke a national culture that was often at odds with the working class Catholic majority in Ireland. Lord Dunsany's writings are consistently much more sceptical, not just about nationalism but about the idea of national heroes. Dunsany is aware that propaganda plays a large part in constructions of the heroic, as can be seen in the following quotation from one of the early short stories:

Of the great wars of the Three Islands are many histories writ and of how the heroes of the olden time one by one were slain, but nought is told of the days before the olden time, or ever the people of the isles went forth to war, when each in his own land tended to cattle or sheep, and listless peace obscured those isles in the days before the olden time.<sup>203</sup>

---

<sup>201</sup> L. Sprague de Camp, *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers: The Makers of Heroic Fantasy* (Sauk City, Wisconsin: Arkham Publishers Inc., 1976), p. 5.

<sup>202</sup> AE, 'Nationalism and Imperialism', Lady Gregory (ed.) *Ideals in Ireland* (London: Unicorn Press, 1901), p. 15.

<sup>203</sup> Lord Dunsany, 'For the Honour of the Gods' *Time and the Gods* (London: Heinemann, 1906), p. 72.

The teller of tales may chose to focus on heroic battles rather than listless peace, framing the story to suit their own ends. Dunsany parodies the use of Irish legend for nationalist aims and therefore challenges the relationship between art and politics. The political element of the Irish heroic tale in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century consists in the transplantation of ancient concepts into a modern literary environment. In ancient times the bard may have relayed heroic tales in an impersonal fashion, repeating legends that were well known and passed down through generations. In the twentieth century however the literary author shapes and moulds the theme of heroism in his own fashion, as Patrick Rafriodi notes in 1979 in his work on the Irish short story:

Before becoming the subject matter of the short story the theme of heroism has to pass through an individual sensibility, and rather than the praise of high deeds, authors now prefer a scepticism prompted by the spirit of the age. Moreover, the anecdote itself, heroic or otherwise, cannot be the whole of the short story and, after the fictional discourse has abandoned the hearth or the camp fire and settled down in the printed page, exceptional destinies and protagonists fade into the background.<sup>204</sup>

The scepticism found in Lord Dunsany's tales is thus appropriate for the age in which he was writing, although he may have been less willing to relinquish the exceptional destinies of his characters than most other twentieth century writers. Not only is a sceptical outlook on the heroic appropriate for Dunsany, it was a necessary response to the usurpation of ancient myth and legend for the Irish national cause of which he was deeply suspicious. Dunsany however is not above using propaganda himself and he is equally fond of using the heroic tradition for his own effects. For Dunsany, as for Yeats and Lady Gregory, the modern landscape of Ireland is imbued with a heroic past, and it is the Ireland of myth and legend that appeals to the author in his autobiography:

Yet to tell of Ireland one must tell of Ireland in stone as well as Ireland in dreams, though it is right to put poetry first, for that is the dream in the raw, while towers and spires are but the casts of dreams preserved in material things, as long as material things are able to last.<sup>205</sup>

In this passage, written in the 1930s, Ireland is shaped by the dream of Ireland, but of course this depends upon who is doing the dreaming. For O'Grady, Yeats and Gregory the dream is steeped in ancient heroism, easily transported into a present day nationalist cause. For Lord Dunsany the dream may be found in ancient legend, poetry and art, but in the

---

<sup>204</sup> Patrick Rafriodi, *The Irish Short Story* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1979), p. 33.

<sup>205</sup> Lord Dunsany, *My Ireland* (Plymouth: Mayflower Press Ltd., 1937), p. 68.

material world it must only be received with an appropriate tone of scepticism. This tone comes through in every aspect of Dunsany's shorter fiction beginning with the first collection, *The Gods of Pegāna*. By considering Dunsany as writing in reaction to a specifically Revival identity, one which aimed to recreate the Celt in the present day Irishman, we may consider the writers own differing aspirations for his nation.

## Section 2: The Power of the Gods

The gods, although not merciful, are not ferocious gods. They are the destroyers of the Days that Were, but they set a glory about the Days to Be.<sup>206</sup>

When *The Gods of Pegāna* was published in 1905 Dunsany inaugurated a series of short fiction that would prove to be his most enduring works, along with *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. In an advertisement for the second edition of *The Gods of Pegāna* the short story collection is described as a 'Pagan Phantasmagoria'.<sup>207</sup> A phantasmagoria is a magic lantern show, a projection of frightening beings into a domestic setting.<sup>208</sup> Dunsany's stories in *The Gods of Pegāna* and its sister volume *Time and the Gods* are indeed reminiscent of a phantasmagorical production with gods and men both terrible and wondrous producing a powerful spectacle. The first part of the advertising phrase is just as relevant for Dunsany's work, as the pagan occupies a central place in all Dunsany's fiction, beginning with Pagan/Pegāna and, as we have seen in the previous chapters, forming a central concern of his novels. The attraction of the pagan for Dunsany is partly the same as what attracts many other writers in early twentieth century Ireland to concepts of the pagan and the primitive. A return to a religion free from sectarian difference, one which predates the divisions of Protestantism and Catholicism, nationalism and unionism, may provide a unifying history for a divided society. In these early stories Dunsany has not yet turned to pagan Ireland, but rather an imaginary pre-Christian world, where the possibilities of presenting a unified culture may be more viable than in the modern, factious country in which he was writing.

---

<sup>206</sup> Lord Dunsany, 'Yonath the Prophet' *The Gods of Pegāna* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1905), p. 51.

<sup>207</sup> This is how the second edition of *The Gods of Pegāna* is referred to in an advert at the start of Lord Dunsany, *Fifty-One Tales* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1915)

<sup>208</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the influence of phantasmagoria on Dunsany's fiction see Douglas Small, 'The Phantasmagorical Imagination: From Singular Perversion to Curious Celebration', *eSharp* 14 (2009), pp. 91-111.



Lord Dunsany's first two short story collections, *The Gods of Pegāna* and *Time and the Gods*, were published just a year apart, and both share the setting of Pegāna. Vernon Hyles notes that, 'The two books together might be thought of as a kind of bible since they pose a beginning and an apocalypse.'<sup>209</sup> This foregrounding of the religious elements in the book hints that this may be part of Dunsany's overall agenda for these stories. As suggested above, Dunsany may be writing these fantasy texts as a form of escape from the conflicts of religious difference; but rather than mere escapism, Dunsany's stories of gods and men deconstruct the concept of belief itself, examining where it comes from and what role faith plays in human existence. This links the stories with Dunsany's interrogation of belief in novels such as *The Story of Mona Sheehy*.

While the first two books of stories could be seen as forming one text, there is definite progression and change between the two volumes in terms of content, form and style. To illustrate the variations in theme and style between the two collections it is worth considering the specific example of a character who appears in both works. A sea-god called Slid appears in both 'The Sayings of Slid' from *The Gods of Pegāna* and 'The Coming of the Sea' from *Time and the Gods* and a comparison of these two stories provides an indication of how Dunsany's themes and style have progressed in the interim between the two volumes. The earlier story, 'The Sayings of Slid' in *The Gods of Pegāna* begins in a manner reminiscent of the bible and other religious texts where the words of a god are said to have been written down in a literal fashion: 'Much homage hath Slid among the cities of men and pleasant are the woodland paths and the paths of the plains, and pleasant the high valleys where he danceth in the hills; but Slid would be fettered neither by banks nor boundaries--so the soul of Slid is in the Sea.'<sup>210</sup> The narrator is in the privileged position of prophet or seer, privy to the thoughts of the gods. In fact, Dunsany often names the King James Bible as one of the major inspirations for his early prose. It is not just that stylistically Dunsany echoes the archaic word and sentence structure of the bible, it is that particularly in the early Pegāna stories the tales are very reminiscent of biblical injunctions. Slid in 'The Sayings of Slid' passes on instructions to his followers on how to worship: 'Let no man pray to MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI, for who shall trouble MANA with mortal woes or irk him with the sorrows of all the houses of Earth?' (p. 14). Here Dunsany uses biblical language to ironic effect, with the god calling for the cessation

---

<sup>209</sup> Vernon Hyles, 'Lord Dunsany: The Geography of the Gods', David E. Morse and Csilla Bertha (eds.) *More Real than Reality: The Fantastic in Irish Literature and the Arts* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), p. 213

<sup>210</sup> Lord Dunsany 'The Sayings of Slid' *The Gods of Pegāna* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1905), p. 15.

of prayer, not an increase in devotional practices. Whereas the first section of this story is told in the voice of Slid, the second returns to Dunsany's all-knowing narrator, disrupting and dispersing the power within the tale. 'The Sayings of Slid' is therefore not a short story in the sense that it follows a discernible plot or has a single, identifiable narrator: it resembles a mock-religious text or sermon. The challenge to the speaker's authority that occurs through the change in narrators has the effect of challenging religious absolutism, and suggests the danger in unquestioning acceptance of religious figures.

In contrast, the later story featuring Slid, 'The Coming of the Sea' in *Time and the Gods*, is much more dramatic and thematically expansive. Dunsany focuses on a specific instance of the god's power, a moment of action which enhances the intensity of the narrative:

Then Slid ceased from singing the song that lures the world, and gathered up his legions, and the rivers lifted up their heads with the waves, and all went marching on to assail the cliffs of the gods. And wherever the rivers had broken the ranks of the cliffs, Slid's armies went surging in and broke them up into islands and shattered the islands away. And the gods on Their hill-tops heard once more the voice of Slid exulting over Their cliffs.<sup>211</sup>

The above passage is in stark contrast to the sparse phrasing and overall brevity of the tales in *The Gods of Pegāna* and shows how Dunsany's style has evolved over the two volumes. The changes in the god Slid who, like his name, slips between differing selves in the stories is characteristic of all Dunsany's gods, whose are consistent only in their inconsistency. In contrast to the eternal changelessness claimed for gods by orthodox religion, the gods of Pegāna cannot be relied on. This divine inconstancy reflects Dunsany's continual interrogation of power structures. One might assume that as a Unionist Dunsany would be politically conservative and unlikely to question the legitimacy of authority, but his work belies this assumption. Writing on the mechanisms of power, Michel Foucault states that, 'those who are inserted in these relations of power, who are implicated therein, may, through their actions, their resistance, and rebellion, escape them, transform them – in short, no longer submit to them.'<sup>212</sup> It may seem curious to see Dunsany as a writer of resistance, but his works of this period certainly challenge received governmental and religious orthodoxies. In these stories, where ruling figures such as the gods constantly fail to live up to their responsibilities and power struggles are often unending and futile, the author questions the viability of any ultimate authority. It is

---

<sup>211</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Time and the Gods* (London: Heinemann, 1906), p. 9.

<sup>212</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Power/Knowledge' C. Gordon (ed.) *Selected Interviews & Other Writings* 1972-1977 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) p. 193.

the very uncertainty of the ultimate power of the institutions of authority in turn of the century Ireland, whether they be English or Irish, that allows Dunsany to challenge received ideology in his fiction.

Most of the stories in these early collections concern the relationship between man and the gods, whether considering this relationship directly or through an examination of the power of faith. Many of these tales feature the gods punishing or laughing at man, but one story suggests that there may be a way for man to punish the gods. In ‘The Relenting of Sarnidac’ from *Time and the Gods*, a rare reference to the modern world points out the precarious status of being a deity: ‘Heresy apace shoots her fierce glance over the world and men’s faith grows dim and the gods go. Men shall make iron gods and gods of steel when the wind and the ivy meet within the shrines of the temples of the gods of old.’ (p. 111). This reference to our mechanized age deliberately disrupts Dunsany’s fantasy, and reminds the reader of the temporary nature of all things, even omnipotent gods.

Man may challenge the ultimate authority, but the biggest threat faced by the Gods comes in the form of time. In the first story in *Time and the Gods*, which shares the collection’s title, the gods build a beautiful city called Sardathrion. They are proud of their perfect city, but it is not eternal and must bow to the dominion of time:

Surely we are the lords of Time and the gods of the worlds besides. [...] Rivers are lost in the sea and streams forsake the hills, but ever Sardathrion’s fountains arise in our dream city. As was Sardathrion when the gods were young, so are her streets today as a sign that we are the gods.

Suddenly the swart figure of Time stood up before the gods, with both hands dripping with blood and a red sword dangling idly from his fingers, and said:

“Sardathrion is gone! I have overthrown it!” (p. 4)

The gods learn a harsh lesson in pride, but it may not just be their city that is threatened: ‘Believe it not, Sardathrion, that ever thy gods sent this doom to thee; he that hath overthrown thee shall overthrow thy gods’ (p. 5). The gods are thus not immortal; they are subject to the sword of Time just as their city was. In *The King of Elfland’s Daughter* the land of Erl was praised for its impermanence, its ability to change compared with the static eternal world of the Elf King. Far from supporting the status quo, Dunsany’s novel suggests that everything changes, and that this process of change is in fact one of the most wonderful aspects of our world. The process of change is a focus in the early novels, but it appears to have a much less positive function in this short story, where the mutability of the gods makes life untenable for their mortal subjects.

The emphasis on time and the temporal in these stories recalls ‘The Story of Tuan Mac Cairill’ in James Stephens’s *Irish Fairy Tales* (1920). Stephens’s tales are imaginative retellings of Irish legends and folk tales, but unlike those of O’Grady and Gregory they combine a reverence for the traditional text with the manic humour characteristic of *The Crock of Gold*. ‘The Story of Tuan Mac Cairill’ tells how the Abbot Finnian discovers that there is a powerful man who refuses to submit to Christian doctrine. The Abbot is determined to convert this pagan figure and goes in search of him. When he meets the man, Tuan Mac Cairill, the Abbot discovers that he is incredibly wise and old and is actually a citizen of ancient Ireland. Tuan’s great age is presented as a heroic fearlessness in the face of time:

[H]e was the foster-brother of Time, and so disdainful of the bitter god that he did not even disdain him; he leaped over the scythe, he dodged under it, and the sole occasions on which Time laughs is when he chances on Tuan, the son of Cairill, the son of Muredac Red-neck.<sup>213</sup>

A precedent can be found therefore in Irish myth and legend for Dunsany’s stories which feature Time, as a foe if not to be conquered, then at least to be battled with. Stephen’s Time is capable of laughter however, in direct contrast to the Time of Dunsany’s tales who obliterates all, leading even to the obscurity of heroes.

As we have seen, whether it is Time or the Gods, there is a focus in Dunsany’s early works on power relations and authority. The Gods themselves seem very different from the distant gods of the drama which appear only as eerie moving statues or offstage laughter. In these stories the gods have personalities, and an individuality reminiscent of Greek or indeed Irish mythology.

In *The Gods of Pegāna* there is a strict hierarchy of power among the Gods themselves. First there is MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI who is the creator of all the other gods, and would therefore seem to be the most powerful, yet after this act of creation he falls asleep and takes no further interest in the world. After MANA the most powerful gods are Dorozhand, the god of destiny, and Mung, the god of death. Below these are the smaller gods, ranging from the powerful to the relatively ineffectual, as is explained in ‘Of Roon the God of Going’: ‘All these are gods so small that they be lesser than men, but pleasant gods to have beside the hearth’ (p. 30). There is little consistency in Dunsany’s depictions of the Gods, who may be detached and unknowable like MANA or domestic and homely

---

<sup>213</sup> James Stephens, *Irish Fairy Tales* (London: MacMillan, 1920), p. 3.

like the hearth gods. This seems to be a mixture of different religions, the all-powerful God of Christianity and the pre-Christian legends and folk stories of the gods of Ireland. The supernatural powers of the deity of Christianity are distant and unknowable, particularly those of the God of the Old Testament, but in Ireland where the Shéé allegedly live just under the ground, other-worldly powers are much more domesticated.

The arbitrary nature of the power of Dunsany's gods is called into question most clearly through their interaction with men. In 'The Vengeance of Men' from *Time and the Gods* there is a striking example of the capriciousness of the gods. The story tells of the men of Harza who, after years of terrible strife, find a place to live in safety and happiness. For some unexplained reason, however, the gods take issue with their happiness stating that 'Earth is no place for laughter' (p. 25). They visit pestilence on the men, despite their pleas for mercy:

Then did men pray in Harza to the gods, saying:

"High gods! Show clemency to Harza."

And the gods listened to their prayers, but as They listened They pointed with their fingers and cheered the Pestilence on. And the Pestilence grew bolder at his masters' voices and thrust his face close up before the eyes of men. (p. 26)

These Gods seem worse than those who do not listen to man's prayers; they listen yet spur on the devastation. The description of Pestilence is particularly chilling:

the Pestilence crept into the city, and stealing into the houses one by one, peered into the people's eyes, looking even through their eyelids, so that when morning came men stared before them crying out that they saw the Pestilence whom others saw not, and thereafter died, because the green eyes of the Pestilence had looked into their souls. Chill and damp was he, yet there came heat from his eyes that parched the souls of men. (p. 25)

This terrifying figure is frightening because it is a manifestation of reality, and this passage shows Dunsany examining how myths are formed out of real life tragedies such as plagues. The description of the people dying in their homes is so vivid that it may be based on narratives of the Irish Famine. The Famine, the great nineteenth century tragedy which led to the death of a quarter of the Irish population, is never directly referred to in Dunsany's fiction. In this way his writings justify Terry Eagleton's criticism of the absence of the famine in Irish literature: 'Where is the Famine in the literature of the Revival? Where is it in Joyce?'<sup>214</sup> Like the other writers of his generation, Dunsany seems reluctant to tackle the

---

<sup>214</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 13.

enormity of that cataclysm in his writings. When the Famine does appear in ‘The Vengeance of Men’ it is presented as an act of irresponsible gods, not mismanagement by the landowning class, and this could be seen as Dunsany’s reluctance to identify the role of his own class in the tragedy. The High Prophet in Harza becomes so incensed by the Gods ignoring his cries for mercy that he decides to take action: ‘All the gods have mocked at prayer. This sin must now be punished by the vengeance of men.’ (p. 28). He curses the Gods, telling them that one day there will be an end, and the gods will be no more. The reader’s privileged position means that he is aware that the Gods of Pegāna are no more, so man may in the end conquer the Gods:

Long since the High Prophet is dead and his words are forgotten by men, but the gods know not yet whether it be true that THE END is waiting for the gods, and him who might have told Them They have slain. And the Gods of Pegāna are fearing the fear that hath fallen upon the gods because of the vengeance of men, for They know not when THE END shall be, or whether it shall come.’(p. 28)

In this passage the power relationship between men and the gods is reversed, and humans hold god-like authority. The refusal to allow man to be belittled by religion may be Dunsany’s reaction to the power of Christianity in Ireland, which for all its claims to bring beneficent authority creates division not harmony.

It is not just religious authority that is challenged in the early tales; any institutions that claim power over men are liable to exposure in these fictions. In a story from a slightly later collection authority is again challenged, this time by just one man. ‘How the Enemy came to Thlunrana’ (1915) tells how it is prophecied that the temple of Thlunrana, a ‘chief cathedral of wizardry’<sup>215</sup>, will be destroyed by a terrible doom. A man from a nearby cottage goes to the temple as he wishes to see it before it is destroyed. He enters the secret cathedral and sees the secret mystery of Thlunrana:

When the awful stillness of the mystery was more than he could bear the man from the black-thatched cottage by the five pine-trees went up to the silk pavilion, and with a bold and nervous clutch of the hand drew one of the curtains aside, and saw the inner mystery, and laughed. And the prophecy was fulfilled, and Thlunrana was never more a terror to the valley, but the magicians passed away from their terrific halls and fled through the open fields wailing and beating their breasts, for laughter was the enemy that was doomed to come against Thlunrana through her southward gate (that was named the Gate of the Doom), and it is of the gods but dwells with man. (p. 85)

---

<sup>215</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Fifty-One Tales* (London: Elkin Matthews, 1915), p. 84.

Dunsany's use of laughter in this passage anticipates Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of laughter as an agent of rebellion. Bakhtin states that 'Laughter lifts the barriers and opens the way to freedom'<sup>216</sup>. In this story Dunsany literally uses laughter to free man from imposed authority, including the authority of conventional narrative. The ending of the story is a direct reversal of Dunsany's first play *The Glittering Gate* which ends with the laughter of the gods. Instead, laughter in 'How the Enemy came to Thlunrana' is a human rebellion over the supernatural, the personal triumphing over the impersonal. In the next section of this chapter we will see that when the power and authority of Godhead is challenged in these tales, it is the power of the narrator that steps into the vacated position of authority.

### Section 3: Narrators, storytellers and dreamers

There be islands in the Central Sea, whose waters are bounded by no shore and where no ships come – this is the faith of their people.<sup>217</sup>

James Kilroy categorizes the role of the narrator in the Irish short story as being one of its most distinctive traits: 'in Irish short stories the most evocative and ironic effects come from the manoeuvres of narrators or of implied authorial presences.'<sup>218</sup> It is through the role of the narrator that Dunsany's early tales may be most clearly positioned within the tradition of the Irish short story. The opening of *The Gods of Pegāna*, Dunsany's first volume of short stories, is characteristic of the power of the narrator in his early work. The narrator is in a privileged position of authority, capable of relating to the readers the faith of these unknown people. Yet this authority itself is presented in an ironic fashion as the narrator is recounting the story of a long dead people who only exist in his memories. The narrator of *The Gods of Pegāna* and *Time and the Gods*, begins with a detached unbiased tone – 'this is the faith of their people' – and the reader has no knowledge of the legitimacy which allows this speaker to relate the deeds of the gods. By the second volume however,

---

<sup>216</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin qtd. in David Patterson, *Literature and Spirit: Essays on Bakhtin and his Contemporaries* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), p. 6.

<sup>217</sup> Lord Dunsany, *The Gods of Pegāna* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1905), preface, p. v.

<sup>218</sup> Kilroy, James F., *The Irish Short Story: A Critical History* (Boston MA: Twayne Publishers, 1982), p. 4.

we get a greater sense of the narrator as a distinct persona. In the first story in this volume, simply entitled ‘Time and the Gods’, the narrator speaks for the first time directly to the reader when relating a story of a beautiful city: ‘It stands a city aloof. There hath been no rumour of it – I alone have dreamed of it, and I may not be sure that my dreams are true.’<sup>219</sup> There is thus a curious dichotomy between the all-knowing narrator who is privy even to the lives of gods, and the dreamer-narrator who may not even be sure that his dreams are true. Unlike the Irish bard, and his latter day imitators, Dunsany’s narrator is constantly undercut by his own melancholic status which is constantly self-questioning.

Dreams in the early stories can be many things – they can be fallible, prophetic, expressions of the imagination, outlets for the fantastic – but they are always powerful. ‘Night and Morning’ from *Time and the Gods* demonstrates the power of dreams:

And Night told how Sindana the beggar had dreamed that he was a King, and Morning told how she had seen Sindana find suddenly an army in the plain, and how he had gone to it still thinking he was King and the army had believed him, and Sindana now ruled over Marthis and Targadrides, Dynath, Zahn and Tueneide. (p. 77)

In dreams the beggar may become a King, but add the power of belief and that dream can become reality, as is demonstrated in works like *King Argimēnēs and the Unknown Warrior* and the transformation of beggars into gods in *The Gods of the Mountain*. The narrator’s own belief in dreams is crucial for the reader of the early short stories to find credibility in the dreamer-narrator. The dreamer-narrator appears again in the title story from *The Sword of Welleran*, Dunsany’s third short story collection. The story begins with the narrator as a dreamer rather than a physical observer of the city of Merimna: ‘I have never seen a city in the world so beautiful as Merimna seemed to me when I first dreamed of it.’<sup>220</sup> Here, as in many of Dunsany’s works, the real world is always inferior to the imagined poetic dream world. The dreamer becomes more firmly fixed as a character when he introduces the story’s protagonist: ‘Now there was a little boy in Merimna named Rold. I saw him first, I, the dreamer, that sit before my fire asleep, I saw him first as his mother led him through the great hall where stand the trophies of Merimna’s heroes.’ (p. 12). This section introduces a domestic setting; the dreamer asleep in front of his fire, which neatly contrasts with the exotic locations of the early tales. The storyteller is not

---

<sup>219</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Time and the Gods* (London: William Heinemann, 1906), p. 3.

<sup>220</sup> Lord Dunsany, *The Sword of Welleran* (London: George Allen and Sons, 1908), p. 3.



involved in the story: he is detached from the tale he is telling by distance and by domesticity.

The dreamer-narrator is a literary device that has its roots in ancient culture and stems from the dream vision narratives of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It is famously prominent in William Langland's *Piers Plowman* and also features in many of Chaucer's poems. For these early writers the dream narrative allowed for a kind of spiritual vision and a movement beyond the material world.<sup>221</sup> For a twentieth century author like Lord Dunsany, however, the dreamer-narrator provides different attractions. The position of the dreamer oscillates between the fantastic mode of the tales and the locating of the dreamer in the factual present; we need not believe their stories as they are only dreams, yet it is their dream-state that makes belief in the dreams possible.

The story that follows 'The Sword of Welleran' is 'The Fall of Babbulkund', which is among the earliest of Dunsany's stories to contain a first person narration of events which, it is claimed, actually happened to the narrator: 'So we took ship and travelled over the lifting sea, and remembered not things done in the towns we knew, but laid away the thoughts of them like soiled linen and put them by, and dreamed of Babbulkund.' (p. 42). Although there is still an emphasis on dreams, the narrator in this story is physically present as events unfold, much more like a conventional first person narrator. Yet what seems at first a straightforward first person narrative is complicated during the story where the travellers encounter a series of storytellers narrating different tales of the city of Babbulkund. The first storyteller makes Babbulkund's imaginative status clear: 'Hearken, and I will tell you of Babbulkund, City of Marvel. Babbulkund stands just below the meeting of the rivers, where Oonrana, River of Myth, flows into the Waters of Fable, even the old stream Plegáthanees' (p. 43). Babbulkund is built of marvel, myth and fable; it represents the imagination and the dream. When the travellers finally reach the site of Babbulkund they discover it has been destroyed, 'leaving no memorial in stone to show that she had been, but remembered with an abiding love, in spite of the anger of God, by all that knew her beauty, whereof still they sing' (p. 72). The perceived reality of the city is replaced by the interweaving and conflicting stories of the storytellers/narrators; a literal Babel. This simultaneously reinforces the importance of the short story narrator while challenging his ultimate authority over his imaginative world. It also anticipates the

---

<sup>221</sup> Kevin Marti, 'Dream Vision' Laura C. Lambdin (ed.) *A Companion to Old and Middle English Literature* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002) p. 185.

necessity of romance in *The Chronicles of Rodriguez*; the concept that imagination and dreams are useless and unfactual but nevertheless without them the world is nothing.

Lord Dunsany's oscillation between detached narrators and adventurer storytellers relating their own tales can be partly explained by the commemorative presence of oral narrative in the Irish short story. Declan Kiberd in an essay on the Irish short story explains the importance of bardic tradition to Irish literary tales:

In Ireland, the same distinction holds good and a discrimination is made between two types of story teller. The <<sgéalaí>> enjoys higher status as the narrator of the <<sean-sgéal>> or international tale, while the <<seanchaí>> narrates local tales and lore concerning familiar places, family genealogies, fairies and ghosts. The <<sgéalaí>> was always a man but the <<seanchaí>> could be male or female. The tales told by the <<sgéalaí>> were long and difficult to remember, filled with amazing adventures and remote wonders narrated neutrally in the third person. The <<seanchaí>> told his story as if he himself had witnessed it. These stories were sometimes translated into English, but the versions in the native language were far superior, as J.M. Synge discovered on the Aran Islands.<sup>222</sup>

Kiberd's history of the Irish travelling storytellers has fascinating echoes in Lord Dunsany's work. In the early short stories, Dunsany's narrators seem to embody both sgéalaí and seanchaí, switching between first and third person narrative, telling long adventure stories and short tales of wonder. Nothing, it seems, is beyond the scope of his imagination. The dreamer-narrator from the first two volumes finds its ultimate expression in Dunsany's fourth collection of short stories which is aptly titled *A Dreamer's Tales* (1910). This collection includes a variety of tales, many very brief, some set in lands reminiscent of Pegāna, some much closer to home. One of the most memorable stories in this volume is 'Blagdaross' whose setting is far from the glorious lands of dream; it is set in a waste dump. The story gives voices to everyday objects that have been thrown away. An old cork tells how it was once a glorious tree in Andalucía, a match which was never struck claims kinship with volcanoes and the fires of the sun, but the most compelling tale is that of Blagdaross himself:

I am Blagdaross. Woe is me that I should lie now an outcast among these worthy but little people. Alas! for the days that are gathered, and alas for the Great One that was a master and a soul to me, whose spirit is now shrunken and can never know me again, and no more ride abroad on knightly quests. I was Bucephalus when he was Alexander, and carried him victorious as far as

---

<sup>222</sup> Declan Kiberd, 'Story-telling: The Gaelic Tradition' in Patrick Rafriodi and Terence Brown, *The Irish Short Story* (Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Lt., 1979), p. 15/16.

Ind. I encountered dragons with him when he was St. George, I was the horse of Roland fighting for Christendom, and was often Rosinante. I fought in tourneys and went errant upon quests, and met Ulysses and the heroes and the fairies.<sup>223</sup>

Blagdaross is a rocking horse, made into a heroic steed by the dreams of his young owner. This passage is reminiscent of *Rory and Bran* where the Quixotic Rory becomes a hero through his belief in dreams. Blagdaross does not have to lament his position on the dump for long as he is discovered by two young boys:

Then he mounted the rocking-horse, and drawing forth the broomstick, which was sharp and spiky at the end, said, "Saladin is in this desert with all his paynims, and I am Coeur de Lion." After a while the other boy said: "Now let me kill Saladin too." But Blagdaross in his wooden heart, that exulted with thoughts of battle, said: "I am Blagdaross yet!" (p. 42)

This tale of the dreams of an obsolete rocking horse is one of the most moving in all Dunsany's works. It picks up the examination of the heroic in the early tales, proving that heroism is merely a state of mind and can exist in the most humble of places. It also highlights the power of dreams, which are often stronger than material reality. In the next section we will see what happens when the dreamer dreams of Ireland.

## Section 4: Glimpses of Ireland

And I told how I came from Ireland<sup>224</sup>

In the short story collections following the Pegāna tales there can be found the odd glimpse of Ireland. Although Ireland does not often appear as a setting or central concern in these tales, it haunts the stories, and references to the country are often particularly fascinating because it is seen in this way, through a glass darkly. One of the earliest stories to mention Ireland is 'In the Twilight', published in *The Sword of Welleran* in 1908. This collection, which follows the two volumes of Pegāna stories, features fantasies set in our world, as well as in the lands of dreams. 'In the Twilight' is set in the real world – or at least a

---

<sup>223</sup> Lord Dunsany, *A Dreamer's Tales* (London: George Allen, 1910), p. 39.

<sup>224</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Tales of Three Hemispheres* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1920), p. 72.

world indistinguishable from the one we inhabit. It tells of a man who falls from a boat and begins to drown. The drowning man sees visions of his past as he slowly drifts towards death; and in the process Lord Dunsany expresses true Unionism by allowing images of both England and Ireland to appear in the man's afterlife.

Early on in the story the drowning man has a vision of the hills of England, the land where he spent many happy times, and of which he has only good memories: 'Then the hills spoke, all the great chalk hills that I loved, and with a deep and solemn voice they said, "We have come to you to say Goodbye."' <sup>225</sup> The landscape itself has a voice, and although the dying man does see people in his visions it is the land that is given imaginative prominence. These stories see the beginning of Dunsany's obsession with landscape that finds full expression in the late novels set in Ireland – such as *The Curse of the Wise Woman* – which were analysed in the previous chapter. 'In the Twilight' continues to develop the significance of the land for its protagonist when he next sees a vision of his childhood in Ireland. The descriptions of Ireland, which may well be largely autobiographical, are once again dominated by the bogland which, I have argued, Dunsany values above any other Irish landscape:

I was back on the Bog of Allen again after many years, and it was just the same as ever, though I had heard that they were draining it. I was with an old friend whom I was glad to see again, for they had told me that he died some years ago. He seemed strangely young, but what surprised me most was that he stood upon a piece of bright green moss which I had always learned to think would never bear. (p. 132-3)

The narrator's dead companion seems to embody the features of Tir nan Og, the Irish other world where a man may stay forever young. The young man has, in his death, become one with nature, inhabiting the Irish landscape to the extent that he need not fear the deadly aspects of the bog. Although the short story ends with the protagonist recovering from his near death experience, the happy ending is preceded by a curious section where the natural landscape of Ireland bids him farewell:

I looked long at that untroubled world of heather, and then I looked at the white cottages on the hill, and saw the grey smoke curling from their chimneys and knew that they burned turf there, and longed for the smell of burning turf again. And far away there arose and came nearer the weird cry of wild and happy voices, and a flock of geese appeared that was coming from the northward. Then their cries blended into one great voice of exultation, the voice of freedom, the voice of Ireland, the voice of the Waste; and the voice said

---

<sup>225</sup> Lord Dunsany, *The Sword of Welleran* (London: George Allen & Sons, 1908), p. 132.

‘Goodbye to you. Goodbye!’ and passed away into the distance; and as it passed, the tame geese on the farms cried out to their brothers up above them that they were free. Then the hills went away, and the bog and the sky went with them and I was alone again, as lost souls are alone. (p. 133-4)

It is interesting to note that when Dunsany was writing this in 1908 the voice of Ireland could be at one with the voices of exultation, freedom and the waste. It is an Ireland lost and longed for, one which embodies the past, not the future. It is also a dangerous place, liminal and changing, and decidedly unreal. Yet here the landscape and its natural features, not the people, are the country’s voice: it is the geese not any human beings that call to the narrator. This story demonstrates that even from the first few years of his short story writing Dunsany is struggling to locate and represent an Ireland which haunts every aspect of his prose.

Another early glimpse of Ireland can be found in ‘Idle Days on the Yann’, written in 1908 and published in *A Dreamer’s Tales* in 1910. When the story was published as ‘Beyond the Fields we Know’ in *The Irish Review* in 1911 it was followed by two sequels, ‘A Shop in Go-by Street’ and ‘The Avenger of Perdondaris’ and all three were later reprinted in *Tales of Three Hemispheres* (1919).<sup>226</sup> The context of publication in *The Irish Review* is notable as it locates the ‘fields we know’ in this instance as being in the country of Ireland.

These stories are some of the most popular of all Dunsany’s works and are some of the most beautifully written pieces in his entire opus. The stories feature a narrator who moves from our world into the world of dreams, straddling the real and the unreal. In the publisher’s note to *Tales of Three Hemispheres* the narrator of these stories is explicitly identified as Dunsany: ‘Twice of late has Lord Dunsany entered that door in Go-by Street and returned to the Valley of the Yann and each time come back with a tale’<sup>227</sup> As in the stories themselves the boundaries between fact and fiction, real and unreal are blurred in these introductory lines where author and narrator become indistinguishable. This is an extension of the concept of the dreamer-narrator who has become the author-dreamer.

‘Idle Days on the Yann’ sees the narrator travelling through fantastic lands aboard the ship *The Bird of the River*. On board this ship the sailors and the narrator swap stories of their native lands. After hearing about the exotic homelands of the sailors the narrator provides his own tale:

And I told how I came from Ireland, which is of Europe, whereat the captain and all the sailors laughed, for they said, 'There are no such places in all the land of dreams.' When they had ceased to mock me, I explained that my fancy mostly dwelt in the desert of Cuppar-Nombo, about a beautiful city called Golthoth the Damned [...] When I said this they complimented me upon the abode of my fancy, saying that, though they had never seen these cities, such places might well be imagined. (p. 72)

At this point in Dunsany's writings the message seems to be very clear: Ireland has no place in the land of dreams and is an inferior subject for the imagination when compared with exotic, imaginary countries. Although Ireland will continue to appear in Dunsany's fiction, it never loses this haunting, unstable quality. Yet it is Ireland not any other country that Dunsany names in this passage, perhaps suggesting that of all the real countries of our world Ireland is the closest to the lands of dreams. After travelling along the river and visiting various wonders, the narrator returns to our reality:

And the time has come when the captain and I must part, he to go back again to his fair Belzoond in sight of the distant peaks of the Hian Min, and I to find my way by strange means back to those hazy fields that all poets know, wherein stand small mysterious cottages through whose windows, looking westwards, you may see the fields of men, and looking eastwards see glittering elfin mountains, tipped with snow, going range on range into the region of Myth, and beyond it into the kingdom of Fantasy, which pertain to the Lands of Dream. (p. 103)

The narrator's return to the fields we know is via mysterious cottages that recall the whitewashed cottages of rural Ireland and the Dunsany estate in Meath. These cottages sit between East and West, simultaneously looking out on the imaginative realm of the East and the world inhabited by poets, the West. This complicates the location of Ireland as it is positioned between the material reality of London and the fantastical reality of the Yann. Ireland itself becomes a borderland, located between the mundane and the spiritual.

The second story in this sequence, 'A Shop in Go-by Street', sees the narrator return to the river Yann but his attitude has completely altered:

For I thought never again to see the tide of Yann, but when I gave up politics not long ago the wings of my fancy strengthened, though they had erstwhile drooped, and I had hopes of coming behind the East once more where Yann like a proud white war-horse goes through the Lands of Dream. (p. 104/5)

---

<sup>226</sup> Dates of composition taken from Darrell Schweitzer, *Pathways to Elfland* (Philadelphia: Owlswick Press, 1989), p. 34.

<sup>227</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Tales of Three Hemispheres* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1920), p. 70.

This time the narrator is palpably more world weary, and he seems to have lost the imaginative enthusiasm found in the first tale. It is only when he gives up ‘politics’ and focuses on the imaginative arts, that his fancy can return to the lands of dream. This story was written just a few years after ‘Idle Days on the Yann’, yet it tells of a world of imagination that has been ravaged and left bereft by time: ‘And then I knew that, while in Ireland and London two years had barely passed over my head, ages had gone over the region of Yann and wrecked and rotted that once familiar ship’ (p. 117). It is strange to consider that in this story, only a few years into his writing career, Dunsany is exhibiting such a powerful sense of imaginative loss; he is grieving for his dream lands. Saddened to find his dream world was lost centuries ago, the protagonist of ‘A Shop in Go-by Street’ returns to the cottages that mark the boundaries between our world and the lands of dream. In one of them he encounters a witch who is a sort of foster mother for disaffected poets found lost in the land of fancy: ‘All was still in the room where the poets slept when I came quietly down. The old witch sat by a table with a lamp, knitting a splendid cloak of gold and green for a king that had been dead a thousand years’ (p. 111-2). The witch making her cloak for a long dead king recalls the Irish poets of Dunsany’s era, who persisted in cloaking their dead kings in green and gold: the green of nationalism and the gold of the aristocratic nature which, as we have seen, was used in Irish heroic fiction during the Revival to cloak dead Irish figures so they can be used for modern allegorical aims. These stories tell us that even the mightiest of heroes fade away in the course of time, and warn of the dangers of reviving them. The ending of the story sees the narrator ask the witch about the relationship between the land of dreams and the real life. After agreeing that the lands of dream are an illusion the witch tells the narrator:

“And do you know,” she said, “that Life is illusion?”

“Of course it is not,” I said. “Life is real, Life is earnest –”

At that the witch and her cat (who had not moved from her old place by the hearth) burst into laughter. I stayed some time, for there was much that I wished to ask, but when I saw that the laughter would not stop I turned and went away. (p. 119)

The true danger of the lands of dream is apparent; we may discover that our own world is equally unreal. It may be that this concept is actually liberating however; if our world is not real then we can change it into anything we wish. The final story in this sequence, ‘The Avenger of Perdondaris’, sees the narrator return for a last visit to the lands of dream. The witch from the previous stories seems unsurprised to see the traveller once more, noting that, ‘London’s a fine place but one wants to see the elfin mountains sometimes’ (p.

123). Just as the narrator cannot ignore the attractions of the fantasy world, Dunsany even in his most rooted writings always has one eye on the elfin mountains.

The narrator meets the hero Singanee, the Avenger of the title, but in a neat exposure of the artist/subject relationship Singanee's heroism is negated by his own fame:

And when we asked him if Singanee had told him of the struggle he said that that proud hunter would say no word about it and that therefore his mighty deed was given to the poets and become their trust forever, and he struck again his instrument of strings and sang on. (p. 134)

It is the poets who have the rights to heroic deeds, not the hero himself. This reinforces Dunsany's observations in his early plays that heroes are cloaked with whatever ideology they are chosen to represent: Cuchulain may come to embody Irish nationalism as he does not have ownership of his own story. It also recalls the double-sided nature of fame, which as demonstrated in 'A Mistaken Identity' might just as easily be confused with notoriety. After dancing with a beautiful princess the narrator turns for home, but he is so unhappy to be leaving Perdonaris that he loses his way. In his confusion he returns to London but it is a London of the future which has somehow regressed into a more primitive state.

I went down to the river to see if my boat was there and at the very spot where I had left it, in the mud (for the tide was low) I saw a half-buried piece of blackened wood that might have been part of a boat, but I could not tell. I began to feel that I had missed the world. It would be a strange thing to travel from far away to see London and not be able to find it among all the roads that lead there, but I seemed to have travelled in Time and to have missed it among the centuries. (p. 141)

In this story the land itself has become unstable, liable to vanish or appear in a completely different guise. The future London has mud huts instead of grand stone architecture, but Dunsany's narrator is cheered to discover that the denizens of this future world speak the Cockney dialect:

I knew that that very language that was carried to distant lands by the old, triumphant cockney was spoken still in his birthplace and that neither his politics nor his enemies had destroyed him after all these thousand years. I had always disliked the Cockney dialect—and with the arrogance of the Irishman who hears from rich and poor the English of the splendour of Elizabeth; and yet when I heard those words my eyes felt sore as with impending tears--it should be remembered how far away I was. (p. 143)



The Cockney dialect is a bittersweet reminder of home for the narrator who eventually does manage to return to his own time. The off-hand reference to Irish English is fascinating when taken in the context of a story about time. The Irishman with his language redolent of the splendors of Elizabethan English is out of time, anachronistic in the same way as Dunsany's futuristic Cockneys. For Dunsany's writing in this period, Ireland, like the London of this story, is always out of time, asynchronous, pre-modern and pre-industrial, with more in common with ancient myth and legend than contemporary beliefs.

## Conclusion

Nothing to make a song about but kings,  
Helmets, and swords, and half-forgotten things<sup>228</sup>

Yeats's 'Reconciliation' (1910) is addressed to Maud Gonne, his muse and his most problematic connection with Irish nationalism. In the poem he attempts to reconcile not only his different reactions to Gonne, but his own position as a writer whose muse has abandoned him, leaving him with only half-forgotten things. Yet kings, helmets and swords in the form of heroic literature were vital to the Revival period, and this chapter has argued that they are as central to the early fiction of Lord Dunsany as they are to Yeats's own works, even if Dunsany parodies their use by the Revivalists.

As Dunsany's first published works, the Pegāna stories play an important part in the narrative of his development as a writer. They also, to a great extent, have set the precedent for how Dunsany has been judged by the critical community. S.T. Joshi states that 'in some ways Dunsany never excelled *The Gods of Pegāna* and *Time and the Gods*.'<sup>229</sup> As we have already seen in the previous chapters, Dunsany's later work is in fact just as interesting as these early stories, yet it is undeniable that, along with *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, they are still the most popular of his works today. One wonders why

---

<sup>228</sup> W.B. Yeats, 'Reconciliation' *The Poems* (London: Everyman, 2004), p. 243. ll. 5/6.

<sup>229</sup> S. T. Joshi, *Lord Dunsany: Master of the Anglo-Irish Imagination* (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), p. 28.

these tales have endured so well, and are still reprinted to this day, while other stories and novels by Dunsany have almost disappeared altogether. In part this may be explained by the literary marketplace at present where the fantasy section of any bookshop is flooded with sword and sorcery novels. Dunsany's work often suffers rather than benefits from these comparisons and, as has been demonstrated in this chapter, his writing is often much more complex and ironical than anything by his present day imitators. Another reason for their enduring popularity may be their perceived otherness to the politics of their day, their eternal qualities that mean they can be read by readers today as easily as when they were written. Yet, when contextualised by their relation to Revival themes Dunsany's early stories are located as much in the Ireland of their composition as any exotic lands of dreams.

It is its ironic portrayal of the heroic and the knowing use of tropes of power that mark out Dunsany's early fiction as belonging to the Irish literary canon. Dunsany's examination of the heroic links him not just to the Revivalists of his own era, it also anticipates later Irish writers. The ironic portrayal of the heroic mode found in Dunsany's early tales emerges as a major theme in the works of Flann O'Brien and James Joyce who also play with the tradition of Yeats and O'Grady. In fact, whether it is the Quixotic Rory of *Rory and Bran* or the Eastern heroes of the early short stories each portrayal of heroism in Dunsany's oeuvre is an examination of what it is to be a hero, and how heroes are created in order to fulfil a particular society's needs. This pre-empt's Flann O'Brien use of the Irish hero in *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939). While O'Brien is willing to parody the excess of the Irish sagas, he also notes that there is something more subtle going on with Irish heroism:

I am an Ulsterman, a Connachtman, a Greek, said Finn,  
I am Cuchulainn, I am Patrick  
I am Carbery-Cathead, I am Goll.  
I am my own father and my son.  
I am every hero from the crack of time.<sup>230</sup>

Irish heroism in this extract becomes one with Greek myth, eliding difference between Cuchulain, St. Patrick and Odysseus. The pagan and the Christian combine, making the heroic something eternal and negating individualism.

---

<sup>230</sup> Flann O'Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 16.

The heroic is just one mythic commonplace that is examined throughout Dunsany's novels. One fascinating early short story examines the notions of fantasy and myth making. 'Miss Cubbidge and the Dragon of Romance' from *The Book of Wonder* (1912) provides a key to comprehending some of the main concerns of the fantastic stories. The story opens with a parody of the epigraphs of which Dunsany was so fond in *The Gods of Pegāna* and *Time and the Gods*: 'This tale is told in the balconies of Belgrave Square and among the towers of Pont Street; men sing it at evening in the Brompton Road.'<sup>231</sup> Dunsany's tales after *The Gods of Pegāna* are set in London as often as in the lands of dreams, allowing him to interweave the real and the unreal, dreams and the waking world. Here, instead of the balconies and towers of fantastic cities, we have a city we know, yet one which is made strange by the presence of men singing tales and dragons of romance.

Frank O'Connor in his introduction to an anthology of Irish short stories published in 1957 suggests that 'It was O'Casey and the Civil War [...] which finally exploded the romantic myth of Yeats.'<sup>232</sup> O'Connor is here tracing the dwindling of romance or mythic subjects in Irish writing to a historical cause as well as a literary one. The combination of the tragedy of the Civil War and the exposure of 'real' Ireland in O'Casey's writings brought about an end to the romance of the Revival. Dunsany's own move away from the lofty heights of the Pegāna stories pre-empts this trend, but may have the same causes. James Joyce wrote in 1900 that, 'Life we must accept as we see it before our eyes, men and women as we meet them in the real world, not as we apprehend them in the world of faery.'<sup>233</sup> For Dunsany the short stories may feature the world of faery but that does not mean that they tell us nothing of men and women in the real world. On the contrary, his stories are rooted in modern human experience.

'Miss Cubbidge and the Dragon of Romance' is not just a story about the loss of romance, it is also a social commentary. Miss Cubbidge is a young, attractive middle class lady, the daughter of a politician and exceedingly respectable. When a dragon arrives, unannounced, and steals her away, she is naturally surprised: 'She screamed, but to no knight, nor knew what knight to call on, nor guessed where were the dragons' overthrowers of far, romantic days, nor what mightier game they chased, or what wars they

---

<sup>231</sup> Lord Dunsany, 'Miss Cubbidge and the Dragon of Romance' *The Book of Wonder* (London: Heinemann, 1912), p. 41.

<sup>232</sup> Frank O'Connor, 'Introduction' *Classic Irish Short Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. xi

<sup>233</sup> James Joyce, *Critical Writings*, p. 45. qtd. in Aaron Kelly, *Twentieth-Century Irish Literature* (Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p. 27.

waged; perchance they were busy even then arming for Armageddon.' (p. 42). When the dragon of romance reappears in London it simultaneously proclaims the end of romance with the loss of heroes to pointless wars connected with Armageddon. Published in 1908 this passage seems prophetic of men arming for war not just in London, but in Ireland, where civil strife would soon break out. Dunsany again here notes the juxtaposition between narratives of the romantic hero, and the horrors of modern warfare, a precursor to *The Chronicles of Rodriguez*. Once the dragon has captured Miss Cubbidge they leave the world of the familiar for the world of romance, an early version of the Elfland of *The King of Elfland's Daughter*. The material world is shown to be merely a transient fashion, while the land of romance is eternal:

And partly she still lived, and partly she was one with long-ago and with those sacred tales that nurses tell, when all their children are good, and evening has come, and the fire is burning well, and the soft pat-pat of the snowflakes on the pane is like the furtive tread of fearful things in old, enchanted woods. (p. 43)

Stories of romance are immortal and elemental, appealing most to the frightened child within us. So far the story reinforces the concept found in much of Dunsany's oeuvre that the material world is inferior to the world of imagination. The whimsical tone of the story is undercut by a magnificent moment of bathos in the story's final lines when Miss Cubbidge's life in the world of dream is interrupted by a letter from the real world:

And only once did there ever come to her a message from the world that of old she knew. It came in a pearly ship across the mystical sea; it was from an old schoolfriend that she had had in Putney, merely a note, no more, in a little, neat, round hand: it said, 'It is not Proper for you to be there alone.' (p. 45)

With characteristic dark humour Dunsany juxtaposes the sublime descriptions of the world of romance with the ridiculous, peevish voice of genteel London society. 'Miss Cubbidge and the Dragon of Romance' serves as a microcosm of Dunsany's early stories featuring self-parody, the realm of the imagination, the real versus the unreal and the questioning of heroism that is central to so many of the early works.

As we have seen in this chapter there are direct mentions of Ireland in these early stories, glimpses and apparitions that sometimes strike a jarring note with the otherworldliness of the early tales. In some respects this will prove to be preparation for the later stories where Ireland looms large, a troublesome and troubling imaginative presence.

## Chapter 5: The Late Short Stories

### Introduction

That is no country for old men<sup>234</sup>

Old age must end all quests<sup>235</sup>

Yeats's poetic voice in 'Sailing to Byzantium' (1926), is world-weary and disaffected, as if uttered by an ageing patriot exhausted by the current state of his nation. As Dunsany tells us as early as 1906, old age ends all quests, and youth's optimism is replaced by old age's cynicism. Is it necessary then to view Dunsany's later writings as the fictions of an old, disaffected Unionist left bereft of the country that he loved? Certainly that is how his late writings are traditionally viewed. Even his contemporaries tended not to take account of his later stories; the reviews tailed off and, as S.T. Joshi states: 'Many who had been entranced by *The Gods of Pegāna* or *The Queen's Enemies* in the early decades of the century probably thought he had died long before he actually did in 1957.'<sup>236</sup> If the later tales received less notice at the time from his contemporaries than his earlier successes, they remain a surprisingly neglected section of Dunsany's oeuvre. The late tales are in fact particularly relevant to this study as they demonstrate his changing relationship with the newly independent Ireland, which was almost unrecognisable from the country in which Dunsany grew up. These late stories see him reshaping the modern world: they are less an abandonment of the earlier fantastic modes than an attempt to transplant his ideas into new forms and deal with the changes to Irish life following independence.

If the early short stories are peopled by gods and heroes, Dunsany's stories after the First World War are inhabited by much more mundane figures. The prophets and warriors of the Pegāna stories are replaced by detectives, clubmen and relish salesmen. This does not necessarily mean that Dunsany has abandoned the central concerns of his earlier fantastic writings; rather, he is exploring similar themes through new, more modern forms. These forms were partly dictated by the literary marketplace. Like many aristocratic families of early twentieth century, the Dunsanys were constantly concerned with making money, and

---

<sup>234</sup> W.B. Yeats, 'Sailing to Byzantium' *The Poems* (London: Everyman, 2004), p. 239.

<sup>235</sup> Lord Dunsany, 'The Sorrow of Search' in *Time and the Gods* (London: Heinemann, 1906), p. 60.

<sup>236</sup> S.T. Joshi, *Lord Dunsany: Master of the Anglo-Irish Imagination* (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), p. 13.

the later works were often written for financial as well as artistic reasons. The prominence of periodicals such as *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* meant that publishers looked for specifically genre fiction, which Dunsany duly produced, although always with hints of his own creativity challenging generic conventions.

At first glance, Dunsany's use of forms such as the detective story seems to contradict the ethos of the early tales such as those in *The Gods of Pegāna*: in the detective story the entire point is to explain the unexplained, rather than to celebrate the unknown or retain an air of mystery. However, a closer look at Dunsany's detective tales shows that they often feature criminals who get away with murder, and fantastic crimes that border on the unbelievable, linking them to his overall literary aims. Most of Dunsany's detective stories are collected in the volume *The Little Tales of Smethers*, published in 1952. What makes these tales characteristic of Dunsany's writings and different from the standard detective tale is the refusal of closure for the reader. George N. Dove notes that the basic popular detective story can be summarized as follows: 'In the formula story, there is no such thing as an unresolved mystery or a conflict without an ending.'<sup>237</sup> In Dunsany's detective stories, however, there is a distinct lack of closure. For example, many of the tales related by Smethers, the relish salesman, end in the suspect getting away with murder, as he commits the crime in such a way as to avoid capture. Far from presenting a reassuring world where the guilty party is punished, the world of Dunsany's detective stories is deeply unsettling and this tests the supremacy of the authorities and institutions of society. For example, in 'The New Master' (1952) a man builds a robot to play chess with, but the machine soon grows jealous of the attention that his master pays to the wireless set and promptly kills him. Like many of Dunsany's tales this story emphasises the dangers of going against nature, of playing god, and warns of the power of the machine. At the end, however, the truth is hidden as the narrator explains: 'I was the last man that saw him alive, and so I must attend the inquest. [...] Is it any use my telling this story in court? Will the coroner or the jury believe that the machine was jealous of the interest in another machine [...] I think not.'<sup>238</sup> The public never discovers the true cause of the murder, and the tendency of the narrative to withhold closure is found throughout the late tales.

These later stories also find Dunsany using Ireland as a setting for the first time in his short fiction. As we have seen with the plays and the novels, Dunsany tends to begin a form by

---

<sup>237</sup> George N. Dove, *Suspense in the Formula Story* (Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1989), p. 6.

<sup>238</sup> Lord Dunsany, *The Little Tales of Smethers* (London: Jarrolds, 1952), p. 148.

writing exotic, purely fantastic texts, then later turns to real life settings, typified by the locating of the stories in Ireland or elsewhere in the West. But the Ireland of the later short stories is very different from the Ireland that Dunsany grew up in, and the late tales see him attempt to locate this new, mutable land that he has found himself having to call home.

The changing Ireland may explain the shift of focus between the short story collections written before and after the First World War and the simultaneous Easter Uprising. Firstly, there is a gap in the publication of short story collections between *Tales of Three Hemispheres* in 1919 and the next collection, *The Travel Tales of Mr. Joseph Jorkens*, which was not published until 1931. In this interval Dunsany wrote his first four novels and continued to write poetry and plays, but his short fiction undergoes a seismic shift in form and content. If Dunsany had already begun to move away from the high mythic fantasies of Pegana before the First World War, this change was to become absolute by the 1920s. Part of this change, along with the different needs of the short story marketplace, is a change in Dunsany's perceived audience for his tales.

As was noted in the previous chapter, the early stories often featured in Irish literary periodicals such as *The Shenachie*, so it could be claimed that Dunsany intended to address an Irish as well as a British readership. With the advent of the Free State, however, Dunsany became more and more disaffected with what he called the 'disunited kingdom'<sup>239</sup> and his tales rarely appear in Irish periodicals, tending to feature more prominently in English and American magazines. This change in readership becomes particularly relevant when considering Dunsany's late novels and stories that have an explicitly Irish content. For example, the Irish peasantry described in the late short story collection *The Man who Ate the Phoenix* (1949) are much more open to accusations of stage Irishry, which might be explained by the fact that they were meant for an English, not an Irish, readership.

The short stories published after the First World War remain as varied as the early collections, but a common strand may be found by locating them in an Irish context. In this case that means not only placing the tales within the context of Irish history and literature of the period, but also examining them with reference to current critical discourse in Irish studies. Declan Kiberd's seminal work *Inventing Ireland*, and its successors, for instance, have considered the relevance of postcolonial discourse in an Irish context. This

---

<sup>239</sup> S.T. Joshi, *Lord Dunsany: Master of the Anglo-Irish Imagination* (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), p. 201.

approach seems particularly illuminating when applied to the writings of Lord Dunsany, a writer constantly examining notions of East and West. Irish postcolonial discourse sheds new light on the Jorkens tales in particular, which feature not only imperial and colonial elements, but also use Ireland as a destination for the colonial traveller. This chapter will thus examine the later tales through the lens of current thinking on Ireland in relation to postcolonialism, while still demonstrating the relationship of the texts with Dunsany's earlier writings.

## **Section 1: *The Man who Ate the Phoenix* and other Irish tall tales**

The publication date of *The Man who Ate the Phoenix* is significant, as although many of the stories were written before the war, by 1949 Lord Dunsany had left Ireland for good, handing over control of the estate in Meath to his son. Although the Dunsanys would often return to Ireland after this date, on trips from their home in Kent, this move meant that for the first time Dunsany writes as an exile, a visitor not an inhabitant of Ireland. It is perhaps then puzzling that it is during this period that Dunsany would write his largest collection of short stories set in Ireland, the group that forms the first ten tales in *The Man who Ate the Phoenix*. Paradoxically it may be precisely this distance that allows Dunsany to engage in a prolonged and varied consideration of the nature of the Ireland of his later years.

The first ten stories in the volume form a short story sequence with the same name. They are set in a rural Irish village and each story is a tale of an encounter with creatures from Irish folk belief, beginning with the phoenix. The narrator mirrors Dunsany's own position with regard to the rural peasantry in Ireland. He is both an insider, a local privy to the folk tales of the natives, and a curious outsider, as in the first lines of the first story:

One of these tales I got direct from the man who ate the phoenix, others I got from men with whom he had talked, while others are the common knowledge of the folk that live round about him; but all of these tales hang as it were in our air, brooding over our fields and lanes, as familiar to us as the mist that floats up from the bog, because the man who ate the phoenix dwells in our midst. It is to his influence that these tales are due, it is the magic of his presence amongst us that has attracted all queer things, and so on the cover of this book I give the credit to him. (p. 9)



The narrator learns his story from the residents of rural Ireland, but it is once again the landscape itself that is most significant and is permeated with the folktales and legends. This seems to be an extension of the trend found in the novels considered in Chapter Three; Dunsany's tendency to separate the physical, eternal Ireland from its changeable people, so that the tradition of oral narrative becomes part of the landscape rather than attributable to any individual person. The opening passage is particularly significant in its resemblance to the opening of Yeats's *Celtic Twilight*:

Many of the tales in this book were told to me by one Paddy Flynn, a little bright-eyed old man, who lived in a leaky and one-roomed cabin in the village of Ballisodare, which is, he was wont to say, 'the most gentle' – whereby he meant faery – 'place in the whole of County Sligo.'<sup>240</sup>

Yeats's book, first published in 1893, sees the poet venturing into the field of folklorism which was a hobby of Irish writers throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries including Lady Wilde, Yeats and Synge. Lord Dunsany's narrator in *The Man who ate the Phoenix* shares Yeats's position as a collector of folklore from the mouths of the peasants themselves. The one difference between the two is however a crucial one: Yeats claims an authenticity as a scientific folklorist, whereas Dunsany's narrator is clearly fictional. Dunsany's tales, coming half a century after Yeats's, therefore take up a position of parody, suggesting the author's scepticism of the original Irish anthropologists and their claims to accessing a peasant belief system. Dunsany is playing on the late nineteenth century tradition of the Irish sophisticate borrowing authenticity by claiming to faithfully write down the oral culture of the peasantry, a trend found not just in Yeats's work but in the writings of other Irish writers such as Lady Gregory and in Lady Wilde's *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland* (1883) mentioned in Chapter Two. Dunsany's parody anticipates Flann O'Brien's satire of the folklorists in *The Poor Mouth* (1941). In this novel the villagers receive a visit from an anthropologist who, seeing a large figure in the dark, proceeds to record his speech:

It was said later in the area that the gentleman was highly praised for the lore which he had stored away in the hearing-machine that night. [...] I do not know whether it was Gaelic or English or a strange irregular dialect which was in the old speech which the gentleman collected from among us here in

---

<sup>240</sup> W.B. Yeats, *Celtic Twilight* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1893), p. 3

Corkadoragha but it is certain that whatever word was uttered that night came from our rambling pig.<sup>241</sup>

The authenticity of the narratives of the Revival anthropologists is exposed in this novel where they become little more than posturing academics who cannot tell a peasant from a pig. Just like O'Brien, Dunsany challenges the right of the outsider to possession of rural culture by exposing them to humour and ridicule. However, unlike O'Brien Dunsany also parodies the peasants themselves; by showing them telling tall tales that have little basis in reality he suggests that they are complicit with their observers, and both archivist and peasant are seen to enact a suspension of disbelief that allows the fragile folk religion to remain alive.

Lord Dunsany often uses parody to good effect throughout his oeuvre, whether in the self-parody of his own early tales of gods and men or in these late tales where he parodies the tropes of Irish literature. The introduction of the parody of historical occurrences such as the anthropologic visits to the countryside gives a fixed context to these fantasy stories of ghosts and magical creatures, which are continually undercut by the position of the reader as the sceptic. From the first story we know that the phoenix is actually a golden pheasant, and that the man who ate the phoenix, Paddy O'Hone, has visions that are brought on by his consumption of cooking sherry. As in *The Story of Mona Sheehy*, the reader is placed in a position of knowledge that not only undercuts the narrative but also questions the nature of human belief and the transformative power of faith.

The beliefs and superstitions of the peasantry play an important part in many writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century period in Ireland. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Joep Leerssen has noted the attraction of folk belief for writers from the landed classes, which provides a 'timeless repository of a primeval, timeless life [...] aboriginal and untouched by modernizing influences from outside.'<sup>242</sup> The oral repository of the peasants was often plundered by the Revival authors who used peasant tales to rebuild Irish culture, transforming the stories into literary forms. The timelessness of the peasantry may hold the key to their attraction as subjects for Dunsany's fiction. Their perceived status as unchanging, eternal and therefore de-historicized and de-politicized makes them understandably attractive for an author out of step with Irish political life. Dunsany was certainly not alone among Irish artists in his belief that the Free State had brought in many

<sup>241</sup> Flann O'Brien, *The Poor Mouth* (London: Flamingo, 1993), pp. 44-5. First published in Gaelic in 1941.

<sup>242</sup> Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 163

changes for the worse in Ireland. Even many of the supporters of Home Rule were horrified by the new political establishment, particularly those who were concerned with the levels of control wielded by the Catholic Church. As a recent work on Irish literature notes:

In the year that ‘Sailing to Byzantium’ was written (1926), it must have seemed to Yeats that a quasi-mythical world of wonderful promise had been fully superseded by profiteering gombeens at their greasy till, whose rise he had deplored in ‘September 1913’, where he famously stated “Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone”.<sup>243</sup>

Romantic Ireland may have appeared dead and gone to Yeats’s and Dunsany’s generation, but there was still the possibility of resurrecting it through the Irish peasantry. Along with the power of the Church, the economic modernism of the new Ireland was particularly problematic for Lord Dunsany who resented any increase in industrialization and the effects this might have on the Irish landscape. The timelessness, which Leerssen identifies as a feature of literary depictions of the peasantry, would, for Dunsany, allow him to recreate an Ireland purified of the smog of twentieth century capitalism.

As in the novels of the 1930s, the role of the Catholic Church in Ireland comes under scrutiny in *The Man who Ate the Phoenix*. The title story of Paddy O’Hone’s encounter with the phoenix sees the local priest, Father Rourke, struggling against the pagan beliefs of his congregation, much like the vicar in *The Blessing of Pan* did earlier. The phoenix itself is an unwelcome reminder of a pre-Christian faith: ‘This strange immortal bird, however you looked at it, was pagan’ (p. 11). When Paddy brings the phoenix to the priest, Rourke is appalled even though he realises that the phoenix is merely a golden pheasant: ‘It was the last thing Father Rourke wanted. Everyone would know that the phoenix was in his house, and he wanted no magical reputation founded on pagan things: as well move the church on the hill from its limestone foundation and build it anew on the bog.’ (p. 15). In this passage Dunsany again stresses the natural qualities of magic and paganism which belong on the bog, as opposed to the constructed artificiality of a Christian faith which is founded on worked stone. Yet the irony in this passage is that the Father with his Catholic faith looks for the same strength of belief in the immaterial that enables his congregation to believe in the phoenix.

---

<sup>243</sup> Paddy Lyons and Alison O’Malley-Younger, eds., *No Country for Old Men* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 10-11

In another story in this sequence the narrator goes out to find another mythical Irish creature, the Jack O' Lantern. He asks Paddy O'Hone to tell him about the creatures:

“Why do they guide men to the deep parts of the bog?” I asked. For I wanted to get some understanding of the life of a jack-o'-lantern, and it is difficult to understand much of any creature unless you know its principle motive.

“Sure, they are jealous of the holy angels and all the blessed things,” said Paddy. ‘They don’t want them to be getting the souls of men, and they want to keep them for themselves.’ (p. 33)

This passage which suggests the jealous side of paganism is reminiscent of the trolls in *The King of Elfland's Daughter* who feared that they would be smacked by jealous angels; in this case the relationship is reversed, it is the pagan jack-o-lanterns that long for the power of the angels. Just as in *The Curse of the Wise Woman* where Marlin may achieve freedom through the pagan realm of Tir nan Og only at the cost of his soul, the closeness to nature represented by the bog is shown to be at the cost of Christian faith. There is a contradiction in all these stories between the two faiths that are constantly shown to be mutually exclusive, and the rural Irishman who persists in believing equally in both.

As we have seen, the rural peasantry are an attractive subject for Dunsany as they can be depicted as timeless and unchanging, and this means that he can to some extent avoid writing about contemporary Ireland. Yet this avoidance is not complete during this period, and there are hints even within these stories that the ancient world of rural Ireland is being challenged and cannot escape the changes to modern Ireland: ‘I was anxious to classify as many as possible of the fauna, if that be the word for them, that O'Hone had had the opportunity of observing, before such things had entirely passed out of memory, as they are fast doing in many counties of Ireland’ (p. 51). In this passage the folklorist is more like a museum curator, collecting dead specimens to put in on show rather than engaging with a living tradition. It is not just the mythic creatures that are disappearing; it is, for Dunsany, the Ireland of his dreams that is fading from memory. Yet this Ireland that is disappearing is one which never in fact existed, except in the imaginations of the Irish people.

The stories in *The Man who Ate the Phoenix* feature fantasies exposed, phoenixes that turn out to be pheasants, but they are all fables that illustrate the powers of the imagination. They are the fable brought up to date, providing no black and white moral message but instead telling us about human nature and our need to mythologize and fantasize our everyday existence. Another author to play with fable in a contemporary Irish setting is

Mary Lavin, who began her writing career as Lord Dunsany's protégé. Mary Lavin lived near Dunsany in Meath and approached the Lord for advice on publishing her work. Dunsany duly promoted Lavin's short fiction and wrote the introduction to her first collection of stories, *Tales from Bective Bridge* (1942).

Lavin's stories, although essentially set in the real world, are not without their fantastic moments. As in Dunsany's late tales, the supernatural elements come from people's imaginations rather than actual mythic figures or weird events. Seamus Deane notes that Lavin's characters are 'ethereal',<sup>244</sup> which seems curious when one considers the attention to physical and bodily matters in her stories, particularly in tales such as 'Lilacs' where the action centres on a dung heap. Deane is however correct to note the juxtaposition of the perfectly realised settings with the ethereal nature of many of Lavin's characters and there is an elemental quality to Lavin's writing that recalls the best of Dunsany's fiction. One such story is Lavin's 'The Green Grave and the Black Grave' first published in *Atlantic Monthly* in 1940. This story is set in one of the fishing communities in the West of Ireland, reminiscent of that in Synge's play *Riders to the Sea* (1904). Lavin's story describes the discovery of a dead fisherman by two of his friends:

"It was a shout all right."

"It was a boat all right."

"It was a body all right."

"But where is the black boat?" said Tadg Beag.

"It must be that the black boat capsized," said Tadg Mor, "and went down into the green sea."<sup>245</sup>

Such dialogue would be more at home in a mythic or fairy tale than in a modern short story; as Janet Dunleavy points out it is 'more chant than conversation'.<sup>246</sup> The oral narrative that is parodied in *The Man who Ate the Phoenix* is thus central to Lavin's work. The fishermen in this story enact their own myths; the legendary nature of their occupation turns them into a chorus from a mythic play.

At the beginning of the story the fisherman are glad that they have found the man's body, when so many men go down to a grave in the green sea and never get a chance at a

<sup>244</sup> Seamus Deane, 'Review' of Lavin's stories in *Irish University Review* Vol. 4, 2 (1974), p. 283.

<sup>245</sup> Mary Lavin, *Tales from Bective Bridge* (London: Readers Union, 1945), p. 33.

<sup>246</sup> Janet Egleson Dunleavy, 'The Fiction of Mary Lavin' *Irish University Review* Vol. 7, 2 (1977), p. 233.

Christian burial. When the fishermen go to tell the drowned man's wife that he is dead, they find that she is not at home. It emerges that she went out to sea with her husband so that if the boat sank they would lie together in a black sea grave. The men realise that they have erred by taking the body from the sea, but when they go to return him to his wife the body has already been washed away by the sea. Mary Lavin in this story combines a realistic description of rural Ireland with the grand theme of man's relationship with his Fate. This links her work thematically with all Dunsany's fiction, but the late tales in particular. The powerful depiction of Fate in this story is particularly reminiscent of Dunsany's stories, such as the early tale, 'The South Wind' (1906):

Two players sat down to play a game together to while eternity away, and they chose the gods as pieces wherewith to play their game, and for their board of playing they chose the sky from rim to rim, whereon lay a little dust; and every speck of dust was a world upon the board of playing. And the players were robed and their faces veiled, and the robes and the veils were alike, and their names were Fate and Chance.<sup>247</sup>

This story encapsulates Dunsany's fascination with unknowable forces and the idea of uncaring gods playing games with the lives of men. The passage suggests that man cannot understand the events in his life as both Fate and Chance wear the same robes and we may not tell them apart. This is a particularly bleak negation of the power of the Gods where Fate appears to be indistinguishable from Chance. The importance of fate and the possibility of confronting, or even defying, one's destiny continue to be present throughout Dunsany's later works although the epic quests of the early collections are replaced by the local setting of rural Ireland. Lavin takes on Dunsany's fascination with grand themes in her short fiction, as is seen in 'A Fable', one of her earliest stories. This tale is reminiscent of Dunsany's *The Story of Mona Sheehy* as it exposes how a particular community, in this case rural Ireland, shapes the world according to its own beliefs. The opening lines of the tale give some indication of Lavin's arresting prose style which echoes fairy-tales and fables:

She was the most beautiful woman they had ever seen and so they hated her. The women feared that she would dim their own glory, and the men disliked her because they felt she was inaccessible, even to the strongest and most fierce of them. [...] The men need not have disliked her because they could not possess her body, for had they been wiser men than they were they would have

---

<sup>247</sup> Dunsany, Lord, *Time and the Gods* (London: Heinemann, 1906), p. 92.

realized that a woman of such incandescent beauty belonged to every eye that looked on her.<sup>248</sup>

In this passage the woman becomes the property of the community; her beauty belongs to her observers and they hate her for it. The jealous folk are soon appeased when the woman has an accident which scars her face, leaving her beauty marred. In a particularly sardonic section of the narrative, the locals go as far as to befriend her, after all, ‘Were it not for the scar on her face, would she not be the most beautiful girl in all the land?’ (p. 139). When the girl’s beauty is restored through plastic surgery, the locals do not regain her hatred of her, reasoning that what was taken away once may be lost again. The community may keep hold of its beliefs while the girl herself is, literally, unscarred: ‘The gods were good to these stupid people, for some reason of their own, and permitted many of them before they died to have their vision without in any way spoiling the beauty of the beautiful woman.’ (p. 142). While Lavin’s story at times verges on contempt for the ignorant country folk, Dunsany’s late stories are much more indulgent, and he delights in the capacity for telling tall tales that he finds in the rural Irishman.

Another significant Irish story from the collection *The Man who Ate the Phoenix* is ‘An Old Man’s Tale’. This story sees the narrator encounter a man named O’Hanrahan. The name is evocative of Yeats’s Red Hanrahan, a figure from his early poetry whom Yeats creates in the tradition of the Irish hero. Yeats’s Hanrahan is a bard, but Dunsany’s O’Hanrahan is a more lowly figure, a poacher who begins the story by leading the narrator on a snipe shoot over the bog:

In fact it was O’Hanrahan who had asked me to shoot the bog in the first place: it did not actually belong to him, but he was a man of generous moods, and, if he had only offered the hospitality of the little field that he did own, his generosity would have fallen short of its natural boundaries by many miles. (p. 74)

As in the first stories of *The Man who Ate the Phoenix* the narrator both exposes the duplicitous nature of O’Hanrahan, yet retains affection for his ability to recreate the world according to his imagination. The O’Hanrahan warns the narrator not to step on a dangerous piece of ground, explaining what lies beneath: ‘you’d be in the elf-king’s palace. Did you ever hear tell of him? And there he’d be seated upon his throne of everlasting moss in his robes of twilight and you before him wondering at his splendour’ (p. 75). This section reminds the reader that in Ireland another world lurks just beneath the

---

<sup>248</sup> Mary Lavin, *Tales from Bective Bridge* (London: Readers Union, 1945), p. 132.

surface, the world of the Shee, or in this case the Elf King, and the realm of imagination. O'Hanrahan explains that in this other world one may lose hundreds of years as time moves differently than in the fields we know. The narrator then asks O'Hanrahan how he knows of this other land:

“Sure, I stepped on it once myself,” he said.

So solemnly did he say those words that I couldn't help blurting out some flippant remark about my being surprised that anyone who knew the bog as well as O'Hanrahan could ever make such a mistake, and ending up by saying: “How did you come to do it?”

I remember today the very words of his answer.

“Sure, I was fleeing from Oliver Cromwell.” (p. 75)

This little tale cleverly subverts the reader's expectations; what begins as a standard tale of the Irish countryside and the wily Irish peasant (it is significant that the story appeared in *Punch*) transforms into a much stranger narrative. The ending of the tale reminds the reader that the role of the Irish peasant has changed little over the centuries, even if he need no longer flee from the English. The story represents the best of Dunsany's late work, showing an intimacy with his Irish subject matter while remaining faithful to his fascination with concepts such as time and belief from the early collections. Just as the land of the Shee lurks underneath the turf of Ireland, even in his most conventional of tales Lord Dunsany challenges generic commonplaces.

## Section 2: Postcolonialism, Empire and Joseph Jorkens

Irish tall tales may have inspired the (even taller) tales of one of Lord Dunsany's most popular creations, Joseph Jorkens. The larger than life clubman first appeared in ‘The Tale of the Abu Laheeb’ which was published in *Atlantic Monthly* in 1926, beginning a series of over one hundred and fifty short stories. Jorkens proved to be one of Dunsany's most popular creations. He is essentially a nostalgic character, harking back to earlier adventure literature of the nineteenth century. The inspiration for Jorkens belongs to the zenith of the British Empire and therefore to the time prior to Irish independence. His closest relative in literature is Rider Haggard's adventurer Allan Quartermain, although Dunsany's own experiences of big game hunting and African travel also inform many of the stories. Like Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, the early Jorkens stories include tales of big game hunts



and hidden diamonds, but the short story form means that Dunsany can present more ethereal, vague locations rather than the – albeit highly fictionalised – real locations of Haggard's novels.

The reluctance on Dunsany's part to locate many of his settings more specifically than the East or Africa has been shown to be present in his work since the early stories and it is worth locating this tendency within a postcolonial and imperial framework. The Jorkens stories are just as important to the Irish context of Dunsany's writing as the tales that feature Ireland directly even though – and perhaps exactly because – they embrace a deliberately imperialist mindset. Imperialism in this case is found in Dunsany's engagement with the geographical boundaries of the British Empire, including many countries that he had visited while big game hunting. The support for British imperialism found in the Jorkens tales is one aspect of the investigation of East and West and the general fascination with the East that pervades all of Dunsany's writings.

Not only is the East a regular setting in the plays, novels and short stories even from his earliest writings, it becomes an imaginative framework used by Dunsany for different artistic effects, as we have seen most strongly in the play *If* examined in Chapter One. In the Jorkens tales, including the first story 'The Tale of Abu Laheeb', the narrator presents Jorkens as the typical colonial traveller and asserts the importance of Empire; as a friend states, 'he really had seen a good deal of the world'.<sup>249</sup> The position of the colonial traveller exploring exotic locales in these tales is open to criticism of racial stereotyping. In fact, some of Dunsany's works feature unsettling racist elements; the use of Arabian mystics in short stories such as those in *A Dreamer's Tales* written in the first decade of the twentieth century is perhaps understandable, and could even be regarded as appropriate, but the depiction of Africans as cannibals in *Up in the Hills* is more troubling given that it was written in 1935. Is there more than mere naivety at play in the use of the East in the later texts? In using recent postcolonial readings of Irish literature we may find some new possibilities emerging from Dunsany's late imperial tales that urge us not to dismiss the stories as racist tropes of Empire.

Lord Dunsany's position within a possible postcolonial Irish canon is complicated by his support for the Empire. Recent studies allying Irish literature to other postcolonial cultures depends upon authors identifying themselves with the oppressed, not the oppressor. For

---

<sup>249</sup> Lord Dunsany 'The Tale of Abu Laheeb' in *The Travel Tales of Mr. Jorkens* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), p. 5.

example, Jahan Ramazani in 'Is Yeats a Postcolonial Poet?' argues that Yeats deserves to be located within a canon of postcolonial writers due to his 'anticolonial resistance to British cultural domination.'<sup>250</sup> Ramazani locates Yeats as a writer of resistance to a dominant power, finding points of comparison with writers from more received postcolonial canons. Dunsany as a Unionist, in politics at least, does not fit comfortably into this narrative. Yet his position is not necessarily aligned with the imperial power either in this instance, with his support for the Irish Revival and interest in the National Theatre. Dunsany is the perfect example of Bhabha's hybrid as noted in Chapter Two, claiming affinity with both the country of dominance and the land of the dominated.

In his autobiographies Lord Dunsany gives his wholehearted support to the British Empire and tends to overlook colonial problems. In *If I Were a Dictator*, published in 1934, Dunsany gives some scathing remarks on colonies looking for independence:

The Grand Macaroni [Dunsany's dictator persona] pronounces that it is in accordance with the whole history of the human race, and indeed with all nature, that when any power is withdrawn another takes its place; and that, should the British Army leave India altogether, the decision as to who is to rule it will be all the more protracted from a vast population having grown and multiplied under British rule hitherto protected from war.<sup>251</sup>

It is easy to read an Irish context into this statement, coming as it does a decade after Irish independence. Dunsany was singularly unimpressed with the performance of the Irish Free State government following independence from Britain. From this passage we can deduce that Dunsany was not just a Unionist in regards to Ireland's relationship with England, he was also a committed supporter of the British Empire. Yet even this assertion of imperial dominance is not altogether transparent. By stating that 'when any power is withdrawn another takes its place' Dunsany repeats the notion of cyclical history which is enacted throughout his oeuvre. The Empire becomes just one more conquering power in a series of governments, and the suggestion is that nothing would change under self-government.

Nowhere is Dunsany's interest in Empire more clear than in the Jorkens stories. The preface to the first collection of Jorkens tales explains the purpose of these stories. It

---

<sup>250</sup> Jahan Ramazani, 'Is Yeats a postcolonial poet?' *Raritan* Vol. 13, 3 (1998), p. 64.

<sup>251</sup> Lord Dunsany, *If I Were a Dictator* (London: Methuen, 1934), p. 53. This curious volume is often given as an example of Dunsany's political arrogance: after all, who but a supreme egotist would publish a book with this title. In fact the title is the name of a series produced by Methuen

begins with the knowing yet sceptical narrative voice found in *The Man who Ate the Phoenix*:

In recording these tales that I have had from Mr. Jorkens, as nearly verbatim as I am able to remember them, I trust that I may have filled a gap here and there amongst the experience of travellers. I even hope for these tales that they may at certain points advance the progress of Science, and establish our knowledge upon a firmer basis; yet should they fail to do so, I feel that they may at least be so fortunate as to add something of strangeness to parts of our planet, just as it was tending to grow too familiar, and so help to put our knowledge back on to a foundation on which it rested once, so airily shaky as to possess some interest for all that find any charm in the queer and elusive. If I have at any time appeared to imply that Mr. Jorkens exaggerates, such implication is illusory, and I wish my readers to be most solemnly assured that I have nowhere intended to cast any aspersions at all upon his veracity, such being entirely remote from my intention.<sup>252</sup>

Familiar Dunsanian tropes of imagination, illusion and nostalgia are found in this preface where the author's ironic sense of humour comes to the fore. Dunsany also draws attention to one of the major concerns of his writing career; the strangeness of our world, the air of fantasy that transforms everyday life into something meaningful. The narrative brings to mind the Todorovian hesitation discussed in relation to *The Blessing of Pan* in Chapter Two. Here the oscillation between belief and disbelief is embodied in the narrator who simultaneously encourages belief in Jorkens tale while ironically disparaging such beliefs.

The first Jorkens story, 'The Tale of the Abu Laheeb', fulfils the remit of this preface, focussing on the blurring of the boundary between the real and the unreal. In this story the narrator – unnamed but presented as the author – encounters Jorkens for the first time when he joins his club. Jorkens, prompted by a glass of whiskey, tells the story of when he went in search of the Abu Laheeb, a rare animal found in Africa which he intended to shoot to make his fortune. However, when Jorkens encounters the creature he finds that it has built a fire, causing him to refuse to shoot it on the grounds that this makes it equal with man. This means that he could not bring back the creature's skin and so cannot prove his story; this lack of material evidence becomes a central feature of all the Jorkens tales. Yet the Abu Laheeb is more than a narrative trick. In being both human and animal, both real and unreal it represents the presence of the East or the 'other' in the later stories,

---

in the 1930s, and a variety of authors wrote their own tracts imagining dictatorship, including St. John Ervine and Lord Raglan.

<sup>252</sup> Lord Dunsany *The Travel Tales of Mr. Jorkens* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), Preface, p. v-vi.

something that cannot be pinned down and must remain forever mysterious. Jorkens stresses the importance of the setting of his tale:

At Kosti, more than twenty years ago, I first heard two men definitely speak of it, the abu laheeb they called it, and I think they both believed in it too; but Khartoum was only a hundred and fifty miles off, and they had evening clothes with them, and used to wear them at dinner, and they had china plates and silver forks, and ornaments on their mantelpiece, and one thing and another; and all these things seemed to appal their imagination, and they wouldn't honestly let themselves believe it.<sup>253</sup>

Western civilization, then, in the Jorkens tales is seen as a barrier to imagination, a concept that is found in novels such as *The Blessing of Pan* which was written around the same period. The exotic settings in the Jorkens tales allow for the real and unreal to collide, and for the privileging of rational over imaginative discourse to be challenged.

The possibility of fantasy becoming reality, the imagination becoming truth is apparent in another early Jorkens tale 'The King of Sarahb'. The setting is North Africa, 'in one of those towns in which East and West meet constantly, each at its very worst, each depraved by the other.'<sup>254</sup> This line sets up the East and West as being completely opposed, and suggests that integration between the two leads to depravity, yet the story itself will challenge this opposition, finding that East and West are connected. The Manichean dichotomy of East/West, Black/White is in fact continually challenged in these narratives where absolutes are often reversed. Nowhere is this more central to Dunsany's fiction than in 'The King of Sarahb' which sees Jorkens encounter a man who claims to be white, despite looking like one of the natives:

Yet this remark had astonished me; it was not merely his brown face that belied his statement, Africa can do that to any one; it was not merely his clothes; it was a curious, slow, listless way he had that suggested the child of the East: they seem in their long stay to have come to some arrangement with Fate; we don't know what it is, but belike will come by it some day; meanwhile we struggle frantically, despising the calm of the East, and the East looks on and thinks – no, I don't know what it thinks. But this man claimed to be white, and had no right to that calm. (p. 21)

Dunsany then sees the 'slow, listless way he had' as something racially innate, part of some kind of universal Eastern character. This stereotyping is reminiscent of the typical

---

<sup>253</sup> Lord Dunsany 'The Tale of Abu Laheeb' in *The Travel Tales of Mr. Jorkens* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), p. 8.

<sup>254</sup> Lord Dunsany 'The King of Sarahb' in *The Travel Tales of Mr. Jorkens* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), p. 21.

colonial attitude, yet the story challenges these stereotypes by insisting that a white man can become a child of the East. The man's story is that he came to Africa and got lost in the desert with no water. He starts hallucinating and begins to chase mirages. However, one of the mirages that he finds does not disappear and turns into a beautiful city. In a strange parody of stereotypical colonial relations, the natives of the mirage city, Sarahb, immediately crown this man their king. Unfortunately, the king drinks out of a forbidden lake and is immediately sent back to the desert with little to show for his adventure apart from the title the King of Sarahb. This story, then, interrogates racial identities, and shows how they are not absolutes and may be changed through colonial encounters. Identity here is not a simple case of the standard sense of the white norm and the black other, as Frantz Fanon states: 'one can have no further doubt that the real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the black man.'<sup>255</sup> By showing that these identities are not fixed and that white may become black through the power that turns the mirage into reality, this story becomes a powerful critique of racial discourse. In challenging the narrator's own stereotypes the story critiques the racist narratives of colonial adventure tales, creating a clever self-parody and elevating the tale from its unsubtle predecessors.

When Jorkens finishes relating this story a sceptical man at the club questions whether the king ever really entered the mirage:

"To no man capable of discerning the difference between reality and illusion," answered Jorkens, "was it possible to doubt it. The gulf between these two things is so profound that nothing and no one on one side can be confused with what's on the other. I have seen that man look at a motor, at a newspaper, at a hotel; I have heard him speak about our modern problems. I could not have been mistaken. All of these things were sheer illusion to him. He was away on the other side. That man had entered the mirage and had its point of view. To hold that that point of view is right is quite another matter. Well, well," he added, "I suppose we shall know some day."<sup>256</sup>

Here we have another example of Dunsany's concern with challenging the difference between reality and illusion, and the hierarchy of these narrative planes is turned upon its head by Jorkens to comic effect. In the Jorkens tales, as in *The Man who Ate the Phoenix*, reality and illusion may be separated by a 'profound gulf' but this gulf may be bridged by the imagination.

---

<sup>255</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p. 161. First published 1952.

<sup>256</sup> Lord Dunsany 'The King of Sarahb' in *The Travel Tales of Mr. Jorkens* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), p. 31.

Despite the exoticism of many of the Jorkens tales, Ireland quite often makes an appearance as a setting. In fact, given that the readership for these tales is largely American and British, it should come as no surprise if the Ireland depicted in them may be as exotic as the East. In 'Witch Wood', Jorkens relates the story of a visit to Ireland where he encounters a mysterious wood. This story borrows from the tradition of horror writing, and it is a deeply unsettling read despite containing nothing that cannot be found in an Irish wood, and only the slightest hint of the supernatural. The story opens with the line: 'I think there are more witches in Ireland than in any other land that I know' (p. 235). At the beginning of this story Ireland then, like the East, still has the possibility of an encounter with magic in the modern world. The wood of the title has been cursed by a witch, and the legend tells that if you try to walk through it at night it will take you until morning, despite its small size. Jorkens is sceptical and claims he will be able to walk through the wood in a few minutes. Night falls and Jorkens enters the wood, only to lose his way and end up walking for hours through dark, oppressive trees. In this story nature is shown as unknowable and frightening, an extension of the expression of the sublime that has been present in Dunsany's work from the earliest tales. In an echo of novels like *The Curse of the Wise Woman* it is the power of Christianity that challenges the pagan magic of the witch's wood:

And in a surprisingly short time I saw another light that was shining through the branches of the hazels before me, a pale golden light. It was the light of the priest's window shining over the fields. What it was doing at such an hour I could have no idea, but that of course was no affair of mine. There it shone and I walked through Witch Wood towards it, and soon was out in the field where the cattle were, still lying or standing motionless. (pp. 245-6)

As in many of the novels it is Christianity that challenges pagan magic. However, this section is unusual as the Priest is seen as a purely positive figure, undoing the bad magic of the witch. Once his ordeal is over Jorkens asks one of the locals if there are any other such mysterious places in Ireland. The local replies in the negative explaining: 'I don't know what's come over the country. The witches are no good any longer. The wickedness has gone out of them. I don't know what's wrong at all. But it's not like what it was in the old days' (p. 246). This is another element of nostalgia reminiscent of the novels that mourn the loss of 'magic' in our everyday world. Wicked or not the witches are emblematic of a lost Ireland that had imagination and superstition in place of industrialization and consumerism. Just as in the stories of *The Man who Ate the Phoenix* it does not seem to matter that this Ireland never existed; it is the loss of belief that is the tragedy of these tales.

### Section 3: Dunsany and Irish Orientalism

Two Chinamen, behind them a third,  
Are carved in Lapis Lazuli,  
Over them flies a long-legged bird,  
A symbol of longevity;  
The third, doubtless a serving-man,  
Carries a musical instrument.<sup>257</sup>

Yeats's 'Lapis Lazuli' is one of the most enduring of Irish oriental images. It was written in 1936, just before Yeats's death, during the period when Dunsany was rewriting his own version of the East in the Jorkens stories. In Yeats's poem the orient is an artefact, an object closely observed by the western eye. In both Yeats and Dunsany's texts the East is caught in a timeless moment, juxtaposed with the West's changing nature. Yeats's meditation on the Easter jade carving takes place in a domestic, Irish, setting. Lord Dunsany does something similar in *Patches of Sunlight*, his autobiography which was published in the same year as Yeats's poem, where he reflects on the oriental ornaments in his father's study:

there were in the room [...] things that loomed large in foreground, and that probably had their part in opening doorways through which my fancy roamed later in an eastern direction, in search of lands fantastic enough to be the homes of the gods and sages and demons whose carved shapes my father had brought.<sup>258</sup>

The East therefore played a part in Dunsany's imagination even before he became a writer, but it is very much the exotic placed within the familiar, the oriental which has been tamed by its occidental setting, just like Yeats's piece of carved jade. The passage in *Patches of Sunlight* continues to list the collection of Eastern artefacts at Dunsany Castle:

For there were in his study the carvings of two different gods of thunder [...] and there was a picture of a holy man of the east, with a toad sitting on his head, and a china figure of a diver caught by an octopus, and many more strange things with a kind of magic about them [...] I need not give an inventory of that room, but all the ornaments there had been bought for the sufficing reason that the owner had liked them, and not because they were of some so-called correct period, or for any other, or go to war with their oriental weapons, but all together reflected someone's fancy, and so established an

<sup>257</sup> W.B. Yeats, *The Poems* (London: Everyman, 2004), p. 341.

<sup>258</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Patches of Sunlight* (London: Heinemann, 1938), p. 16.

influence that was able to affect others. Whatever it be, that room hinted that, if there was not actually magic in the world, there were at any rate eerie things under the moon, and, far away, strange gods.<sup>259</sup>

Dunsany's first glimpse of the East was as a fixed ornament, a static object, eternal, ancient and changeless. These oriental ornaments from different times and places juxtaposed on his father's desk would inform all of Dunsany's fantastic fiction with eerily immobile, half-living things under the moon and with far away gods. As we have seen from the commentary on *If* in the first chapter of this thesis, the East is a permanent fixture in Dunsany's writing, distinctive because of its *impermanence*, its mutability.

Orientalism in literature was particularly in evidence during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when many of the oriental artefacts at Dunsany castle would have been collected. One famous example is Richard Burton's translations of the Arabian Nights, a text with which Dunsany would have been familiar as Burton was his mother's cousin. Burton's introduction to his translation calls to mind Dunsany's exotic tales: 'From my dull and commonplace and 'respectable' surroundings, the Jinn bore me at once to the land of my pre-direction, Arabia, a region so familiar to my mind that even at first sight, it seemed a reminiscence of some bygone metem-psychic life in the distant Past.'<sup>260</sup> There is the sense in this passage, as often in Dunsany's writings, that the East does not need to be visited, but merely to be imagined. In fact, echoes of Burton's narrative voice can be found in Dunsany's stories when the dreamer-narrator travels to incredible exotic lands purely through the power of his imagination. Dunsany, however, in his own work can never resist a chance to reverse expectations, and often subverts his previous narratives, such as in 'A Tale of London' when an Eastern hashish eater becomes an occidentalist, dreaming of an exoticized London:

in the desiderate city, in London, all their camels are pure white. Remarkable is the swiftness of their horses, that draw their chariots that are of ivory along those sandy ways and that are of surpassing lightness, they have little bells of silver upon their horses' heads. [...] They have a river that is named the Thames, on it their ships go up with violet sails bringing incense for the braziers that perfume the streets, new songs exchanged for gold with alien tribes, raw silver for the statues of their heroes, gold to make balconies where the women sit, great sapphires to reward their poets with [...]<sup>261</sup>

<sup>259</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Patches of Sunlight* (London: Heinemann, 1938), p. 16.

<sup>260</sup> Richard F. Burton, 'Introduction' *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* Vol 1. (New York: Cosimo, 2008), p. vii. First published in 1885.

<sup>261</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Tales of Wonder* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1916), p. 17.



What the hashish eater does not know about London he produces from his own imagination, using his own land as a frame of reference, leading to visions such as the ‘white camels’ of the city. This is a parody of the orientalist looking to define the East by comparing it to his native culture, and the hypocrisy of such an approach is exposed by explaining how the Eastern dreamer frames his dreams of London in the clichés of his own land.

One story which for its very title deserves examination with regard to postcolonial criticism is ‘East and West’ from *Tales of Three Hemispheres* (1920). This story is particularly interesting as it is set in China, not a colonized country like the settings of many of Dunsany’s African tales, and so complicates the West/East, Oppressor/Oppressed dichotomy. This short story depicts a hansom cab race through China witnessed by a Chinese rustic, a shepherd. The story focuses on the effect that seeing these strange Western vehicles and their drivers in his native land has on the peasant:

By the uncertain light of a candle lamp that flickered inside the cab, a Manchu shepherd that saw the vehicle pass, where he watched his sheep on the plain in fear of the wolves, for the first time saw evening dress. And though he saw it dimly, and what he saw was wet, it was like a backward glance of a thousand years, for as his civilization is so much older than ours they have presumably passed through all that kind of thing.<sup>262</sup>

This passage introduces the theme of time that is present in the story, as the narrator suggests that our Western trappings of civilization have already been used and discarded by China. This has interesting implications for a reading Dunsany’s works in the framework of Orientalism studies. Again, Dunsany uses the stereotype of the East to ironic effect: the East’s timelessness – or rather the immense tracts of time the Eastern Empire has witnessed passing – is exactly what makes Western technology obsolete, together with the notion of chronological progress it embodies.

The shepherd is confused by the Western images, and when he smokes his opium pipe the foreigners become hallucinatory figures. In this story then a western author is imaging the East hallucinating the West. The shepherd retreats into the world of myth:

He thought of the legend of a dragon-lady, more fair than the flowers are, without an equal amongst daughters of men, humanly lovely to look on although her sire was a dragon, yet one who traced his descent from gods of the

---

<sup>262</sup> Lord Dunsany, *Tales of Three Hemispheres* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1920), p. 24-5

elder days, and so it was that she went in all her ways divine, like the earliest ones of her race, who were holier than the emperor. (p. 25)

Dunsany in this passage uses the archetypal Chinese mythic figure of the dragon, the symbol of power and the Emperor, reminding us that power and authority is always bound up with the use of legend and mythology, as much in Ireland as in China. Dragons play an important role in Dunsany's portrayal of East and West and this is extended to the description of the Westerners. They are having a race from Pittsburg to Piccadilly and the man who wins this race is named 'Lord St. George' (p. 28). Is this then an orientalist parody with the white man in China being the dragon slayer, the capitalist conquerer of the Eastern Empire? Yet the narrator's sympathy seems to lie with the native, not the Westerners:

And the rice prepared for him was hot and good, all the more after the bitter coldness of that sleet. And when he had consumed it he perused his experience, turning over again in his mind each detail of the cabs he had seen; and from that his thoughts slipped calmly to the glorious history of China, going back to the indecorous times before calmness came, and beyond those times to the happy days of the earth when the gods and dragons were here and China was young; and lighting his opium pipe and casting his thoughts easily forward he looked to the time when the dragons shall come again. (p. 29)

The reference in this passage to 'indecorous' times is rather vague, and could refer either to the imperial government of any age, or to the recent Chinese revolution.<sup>263</sup> The story was first published in *Fabulist* 1916, just after the last Emperor of China had been forced to abdicate. One wonders what this 'calmness' is referring to therefore when this was a particularly troubled time for the country. Dunsany may be alluding to the stereotype of the imperturbable Chinese, the fatalistic oriental. Just as in his writings set in Ireland, the temporality of Chinese history is here disrupted and vague. The contemporary and the past are liable to slippage in Dunsany's fiction. In particular it is relevant to Dunsany's world view that history runs in repetitive cycles: the dragons lived once and shall come again. The importance of cycles and returns is a theme Dunsany has borrowed from William Blake and W.B. Yeats. Yeats found the strongest embodiment of the circular nature of history in the image of the Great Wheel from *A Vision* (1925).<sup>264</sup> For Yeats, civilisations and historical periods are caught in an ever repeating cycle. One can see in this passage that Dunsany posits the current situation in China as a mere moment that will soon see the

<sup>263</sup> For a succinct overview of Chinese history from this period see Harold Tanner, *China: A History* Vol. 2. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2010), especially chapter 3.

<sup>264</sup> See Alistair Cormack, *Yeats and Joyce: Cyclical History and the Reprobate Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), Chapter 7 *passim*

return of a mythic, romantic past. The story ends with the Shepherd's gladness as the white men retreat, and his sense of security at the knowledge that the evil foreigners have been cast out by his god. In 'East and West', the gaze of the subject upon the object has been reversed, and it is through this reversal that the oppositions between occidental and oriental can be challenged.

Ireland and orientalism are two seemingly unrelated concepts that nevertheless spark off one another, particularly in the texts of the Irish Revival. This is demonstrated in Edward Said's writings on W.B. Yeats. In an article titled 'Yeats and Decolonization' Said traces the Irish writer's position as inhabiting two different cultural positions, firstly as a purveyor of the British imperialist narrative concerning Oriental cultures, and secondly as an author of anti-colonial literature born of his resistance to British imperial rule in Ireland. Said explains that Yeats's use of myth and symbolism has its roots in this condition of being suspended between two cultural poles:

For Yeats the overlappings he knew existed between his Irish nationalism and the English cultural heritage that both dominated and empowered him as a writer were bound to cause an overheated tension, and it is the pressure of this urgently political and secular tension that one may speculate caused him to try to resolve it on a 'higher', that is, nonpolitical level.<sup>265</sup>

Part of the intent of this passage is Said's apology for the obscure occultism of Yeats's *A Vision*, but the suggestion that the Irish artist existed between two worlds is also relevant to Dunsany's works. Although he is clearly not an advocate of Irish nationalism, he does inhabit a hybrid role between the two cultures, and after all this is the very essence of Unionism. In trying to find a position for the author in conflict between different cultures, it is particularly relevant that Dunsany would examine the aesthetics of wider cultural interactions and conflicts.

One of the first critics to pick up on the oriental aspects in Dunsany's writings was W.B. Yeats himself in his introduction to a collection of Dunsany's fiction in 1912:

I do not know why these stories and plays delight me. Now they set me thinking of some old Irish jewel work, now of a sword covered with Indian Arabesques that hangs in a friend's hall, now of St. Mark's at Venice, now of cloud palaces at sundown; but more often still of a strange country or state of

---

<sup>265</sup> Edward Said, 'Yeats and Decolonization' Terry Eagleton, ed., *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 80.

the soul that once for a few weeks I entered in deep sleep and after lost and have ever mourned and desired.<sup>266</sup>

Dunsany's works tell of a dreamland that may have its roots in Italy or even Ireland as much as India and the East. Irish writing has a long history of engaging with orientalism on many different levels, as has been recently investigated in Joseph Lennon's study *Irish Orientalism*. Lennon mentions Dunsany, but dismisses him as an 'Anglocentric' Irish writer rather than an author engaging with the Irish Orientalism of Yeats or A.E.<sup>267</sup> As mentioned in Chapter Four, a great deal of Irish writing has been associated with Celticism, and writers particularly during the Revival period embraced the concept of the Celt and Celtic imagination. Lennon argues that an even more pervasive image for Irish writers over the centuries has been the locating of the Irish as Eastern or Oriental: 'Long before it was treated as Celtic, Irish culture was linked to the "Orient". Ireland's ancient history and culture supposedly stemmed from Asian and Middle Eastern, or West Asian, cultures.'<sup>268</sup> This concept may seem surprising to modern readers, but at the end of the nineteenth century it was common to believe in an Eastern or Phoenician origin story for the Celt. In examining Dunsany's work we quickly find evidence for Lennon's thesis. One of the earliest periodicals to feature Dunsany's fiction was the Irish magazine *The Shanachie*. In one issue where Dunsany's work appeared there is an article comparing the bards of Ireland with those of the East:

The spirit of romance pervades the two alike. The story of Shakuntala, stripped of all Sanskrit names, might well pass for a translation from the Irish. The professional Shenachie held an honoured place in Hindustan and Erin. The subjects which he chose for public recital, to the accompaniment of the lute or harp, were thoroughly national, based on the valorous deeds of a chivalrous ancestry. In both countries, a glorious literature, with many points in common, sprung from the hero-worship and natural cult of the patriarchal grandsires.<sup>269</sup>

Both Ireland and India are pervaded with the spirit of romance, and both accord a central place to the storyteller in their cultures. Dunsany's own fantasies are strikingly reminiscent of this 'glorious literature' concerned with chivalry and heroism but undercut

<sup>266</sup> W.B. Yeats 'Introduction' to Lord Dunsany, *Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany* (Dundrum: Cuala Press, 1912), p. viii. For a full analysis of this volume see the overall conclusion to the thesis.

<sup>267</sup> Lennon, Joseph, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004), p. 209.

<sup>268</sup> Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004), p. xv.

<sup>269</sup> Ernest Horowitz, 'The Shanachie of the East' *The Shanachie* vol. 1. 1907. p. 166.

with a sense of the irony of using ancient myth in a contemporary context. The comparison of the Shanachie with the Eastern bard is just one example of the perceived links between the peasantry of Celtic Ireland and the natives of the East.

The historical Eastern origins of the Irish race – real or imagined – are less important here than the relevance of this concept to Dunsany and his contemporaries. What is key when looking at the literature of this period is that the writers themselves were convinced of this link between ancient Ireland and Oriental cultures. Lennon notes the importance of Orientalism for the writers of the Irish Revival period in particular: ‘The Celtic Revival stands as the most recognized moment of Irish Orientalism.’<sup>270</sup> Part of the reason for Dunsany’s perceived archaism after the First World War was that his engagement with this concept carried on long after the Revival had ended. To a greater or lesser extent all the major Revival adherents embraced some form of orientalism. In fact, the process of Revivalism, which featured a resurrection of a Celtic model, also involved embracing other cultures that were seen to share similar ideals and were equally ancient. From Yeats’s Noh plays to AE’s mysticism many of the Irish writers found a central place for orientalism within their works. It is when writing about AE that Dunsany makes clear his own position on the Eastern origins of the Irish: ‘He was so Irish in his poetry and in his love of the hills and streams of Ireland, and even in his Oriental air, that we may hope that some man something like him may one of these days be found in Ireland again.’<sup>271</sup> Dunsany thus sees an Oriental air as being typically Irish, not opposed to a love of the native Irish landscape but deeply connected to it.

The appropriation of the East in the writers of the Revival period was more than mere cultural robbery. The East for these writers was something deeply familiar, not other to Ireland but resurrected from the Irish past. Seamus Deane notes, regarding Yeats’s occult symbolism that: ‘Although Yeats was, of course, to rediscover in the various occult societies to which he belonged or with which he had contact a more organized and esoteric system of belief that had its ancestry in Asia, it was still in the West that he had first discovered the East.’<sup>272</sup> The appropriation of Eastern motifs, ideologies and forms was seen as reinforcing the concept of the Celtic imagination, which had been demonstrated to have Eastern, not Western roots. Of all the writers of the Revival, Lord Dunsany was the

---

<sup>270</sup> Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004), p. xxi.

<sup>271</sup> Lord Dunsany, *My Ireland* (Plymouth: Mayflower Press Ltd., 1937), p. 18.

<sup>272</sup> Seamus Deane, *Strange Country* (Oxford: OUP Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 112.

one who kept returning to the East most often in his work over half a century, whether through the mystical prophets in the Pegana stories or the more considered engagement with the East in the Jorkens stories.

Perhaps the most fascinating statement Dunsany makes on the presence of the East in Ireland is found in *My Ireland*:

I was alluding just now to eastern philosophy, while speaking of the Irish point of view; and this touch of the East that there is in Irish thought, and which with A.E. was far more than a touch, is something not to be lost sight of when thinking of Ireland [...] one can see clearly enough in the minds of the Irish people a certain lore, a wise way of looking at things, which in greater or lesser degree all peasantries have, but which seems to me to come from the East and which shines now and then in their talk, like flashes from gold that has come from a far country. I once mentioned this Oriental trait in the Irish to no less an authority than Kipling, who said to me: 'By every test that I know, the Irish are Oriental.'<sup>273</sup>

One wonders what Kipling's 'tests' involved, but it is interesting that the great writer of Empire who has become something of a pariah for postcolonial criticism is here cited by Dunsany as an authority on the Oriental nature of the Irish. It is the peasantry, who for Dunsany as for the other Revivalists represent a truer, ancient Ireland, that link West to East.

## Conclusion

The distinction between the oral tale and the modern short story seems clear, yet in Ireland the distinction breaks down.<sup>274</sup>

Ingman notes the peculiarity of the Irish short story, a unique form categorized by the legacy of oral culture in the literature. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this Irishness is found throughout the short fiction of Dunsany's collections, particularly in the role of the narrator and the combination of the heroic and the every day. As we have seen in this

---

<sup>273</sup> Lord Dunsany, *My Ireland* (Plymouth: Mayflower Press Ltd., 1937), p. 46-7.

<sup>274</sup> Heather Ingman, *A History of the Irish Short Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 3.

chapter, Lord Dunsany's late stories echo the changes in literary tastes after the First World War. His late stories often feature shifts in form and content but they are consistent in their engagement with Irish tradition. Partly the changes are dictated by the magazines to which Dunsany contributes which call for detective stories and other genre fiction. There is however also the influence of the changing literary tastes in Ireland at the time. It is important to note that the changes in Ireland from the years before Irish independence to the Free State years are not just political; there were also major changes in literary culture:

In a strange series of reduplications, a great deal of Irish writing, from the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth, uses the same paradigm of opposition between 'realism' and 'fantasy', both within the work of individual writers and within those critiques that interpret that work as belonging either to the 'fantasy' (Irish Revival) phase or the 'realist' (Free State) phase.<sup>275</sup>

Naturally there is realism written at the height of the Revival and plenty of fantastic literature being written in independent Ireland. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Dunsany's fantastic fiction was much more in synch with literary culture during the Revival, than in his later work of the thirties and forties. The stories that come closest to combining the fantasy and realist or Revival and Free State strains in Irish literature are the Jorkens tales. This chapter has hinted at the reasons why Jorkens proved such a rich vein of production for Dunsany during his later writing career. In particular, through examining strategies of colonial and imperial dominance, these tales interact with the perceived connections between East and West, Ireland and the Orient.

Joseph Lennon writing on orientalist texts written during the struggle for Irish independence notes that: 'For many Irish writers, the motif of the Orient allowed a variety of rhetorical strategies, many of which provided discursive control over an aspect of empire, that is, the representation of (other) colonized peoples.'<sup>276</sup> The Jorkens stories allow Dunsany to act out narratives of colonialism and postcolonialism but at a safe distance from Ireland. It is his Jorkens stories set in Ireland that are therefore doubly interesting as this distance is erased, and these tales show the dangers of categorizing the author as nationalist or unionist in ideology. In fact, Dunsany's late fictions are an interesting and challenging addition to the postcolonial canon as at time he embodies both colonizer and colonized, native and foreigner.

---

<sup>275</sup> Seamus Deane, *Strange Country* (Oxford: OUP Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 158.

<sup>276</sup> Joseph Lennon, 'Irish Orientalism: An Overview' in Clare Carroll and Patricia King, eds., *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003), p. 130.

One of the most fascinating consequences of recent scholarship on Irish orientalism has been the interrogation of the link between the Celt and the Oriental. This relationship is enacted in Dunsany's work with his oscillation between East and West, Orientalism and Celticism. The exotic East becomes not only a metaphor for rural Ireland but a contested space that has little to do with literal geography. Locating East and West is just as problematic in these late stories as it has been throughout Dunsany's oeuvre, and the Western setting of *The Man who Ate the Phoenix* through the oscillations between fact and fiction proves just as unstable as the boundless East. More than just presenting East and West as two shimmering oases, Dunsany draws out links between the two, particularly in his portrayals of the dreamy Irish peasants and the fatalistic Eastern men, just as Yeats and AE would do through their appropriation of Eastern mysticism to Irish culture. E.A. Boyd wrote of AE's mysticism that:

He has made the legendary lore of Ireland comprehensible in terms of Eastern mysticism, the result being verses which are at once specifically Irish and profoundly human in their world-wide appeal. A.E. is intellectually a citizen of the universe, nay, of the cosmos, but he bears none the less the imprint of Irish incarnation.<sup>277</sup>

One may appropriate this sentiment for Dunsany himself, a writer of the cosmos who is nevertheless an Irish incarnation.

The examination of the boundaries between East and West is simply a natural progression for Dunsany who throughout his career examines the importance of geographical place. The importance of place and the Irish landscape is examined in the late stories, most comprehensively in *The Man who Ate the Phoenix*. The stories of Paddy O'Hone and his drunken exploits may still show an affection for rural Ireland, yet it cannot be ignored that each story explodes a myth or Irish legend as mere hallucination. In some ways this is the logical culmination of Dunsany's exploration of myth and belief since the first tales of Pegana in 1905. Yet the change in readership from Ireland to England and the States leaves Dunsany open to accusations of stereotyping the Irish for an outside audience.

The Ireland presented in these stories is still largely the rural Ireland closest to Dunsany's heart, and it is the peasantry not the middle classes that take centre stage. The Irish peasantry that had been such a focus of attention during the Revival period had undergone significant changes under Irish independence, and not necessarily all for the better. One of

---

<sup>277</sup> E.A. Boyd, *Ireland's Literary Renaissance* (New York: John Lane Co., 1916), p. 228



the most striking depictions of the peasantry of this period is Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger* published in 1942. In this long poem, Kavanagh satirises the valorised rural life promoted by government of the new nation as being the life and heart of Ireland by showing it as stagnant and self-destructive. This poem features Paddy Maguire, a farmer who finds himself in a predicament common at the time where men were leaving marrying until late in life. This social condition was due to a combination of the Catholic state's prudishness and economic issues with the subdivision of family farms.<sup>278</sup> Maguire watches the years pass by until, too late, he realises that he has lost his chance at having a family, and is forced to live with his mother, who along with the family field, becomes his true bride. Kavanagh warns against the poetic desire to idealize this peasantry, instead of dealing with the fact that the real peasantry may be self-destructing:

*There* is the source from which all cultures rise,  
And all religions,  
*There* is the pool in which the poet dips  
And the musician.  
Without the peasant base civilisation must die,  
Unless the clay is in the mouth the singer's singing is useless.<sup>279</sup>

The land in Kavanagh's poem is still significant as in Dunsany's work but this time it is a prison, not a place of imaginative freedom. Kavanagh points to his peasant with a mocking warning to those that idealize his position for the purpose of politics or poetry, without understanding that this very ideal is under threat as peasant life is no longer tenable. Dunsany's peasants are not idealized in the sense that they are in *The Man who Ate the Phoenix* exposed as lovers of deception and petty criminals, yet there is little real hardship in Dunsany's depictions of rural Ireland. The Famine is never mentioned, perhaps because the landscape is where Dunsany centres his dream of Ireland, so that he does not wish to represent the land as damaged or threatening.

Lord Dunsany's late tales are both local and exotic. Throughout his works his interest oscillated between the importance of his own locale and the attractions held by faraway lands. It is the sense of localism that in part negates his desire for nationalism. As Padraic Colum states, 'Dunsany himself would put the fact that he was Meath man before the fact

---

<sup>278</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 476.

<sup>279</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, *The Great Hunger* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1942) Section XIII, p. 28.

that he was an Irishman.<sup>280</sup> Nationalism and regionalism are just two aspects of Dunsany's works that are difficult to pin down; like the shifting borders of Elfland the location of Ireland and Irish identity is never fixed in his texts. In the conclusion to this thesis we will see how the themes of Orientalism, Celticism and Irish identity combine with other themes within the entire narrative of Dunsany's oeuvre from the earliest tales to the very end of his writing career.

---

<sup>280</sup> Padraic Colum, 'Introduction' to Lord Dunsany, *A Dreamer's Tales and Other Stories* (New York: The Modern Library, 1919), p. ix.

## Conclusion: Lord Dunsany and His Fellow Irishmen

His work which seems today so much on the outside, as it were, of life and daily interest, may yet seem to those students I have imagined rooted in both.<sup>281</sup>

Yeats's comments on Lord Dunsany in the introduction to the 1912 selection of the Lord's writings echo through this study. In the course of this thesis I have taken on the task of finding roots for Dunsany's work within a framework of Irish literature, history and culture. Each chapter has considered how Dunsany's fictions can be located within an Irish context, and how he in turn locates Ireland within his works.

This conclusion will evaluate Dunsany's relationship with Irish writing and society through a comparative analysis of work from the start and end of his writing career. Although the thesis aims for a more or less comprehensive understanding of Dunsany's writings throughout his life, thus far there it has given little consideration to works written after the Second World War. In fact, these out of print texts are barely discussed at all, even by notable writers on Dunsany such as Schweitzer and Joshi. The late works, often difficult to find as they appeared in small print runs and have never been reprinted, are physically obscure as well as thematically and stylistically different from the works that made Dunsany famous. In this conclusion there will be an attempt to redress this balance through an analysis of one of Dunsany's late novels, *His Fellow Men*, published in 1952. This novel is unusual in Dunsany's oeuvre as it is an attempt to deal with sectarianism in Ireland head on, without any fantastic framework to mediate Dunsany's point of view and distance him from his critique of Irish society. The earlier works, whether plays, novels or short stories, often use exotic settings and supernatural elements so that their relationship to Ireland is through analogy and metaphor. *His Fellow Men* is unapologetic in its engagement with contemporary Ireland. Needless to say the topic is embellished with typical Dunsanian flair and ironic humour, which adds to the realistic setting. The novel may be viewed as a culmination of Dunsany's decades-long musings on Ireland and Irish affairs.

---

<sup>281</sup> W.B. Yeats, ed., *Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany* (Churchtown, Dundrum: Cuala Press, 1912) (1971 reprint), p. iv/v.

To locate *His Fellow Men* within the context of Dunsany's lifelong engagement with Ireland I will begin by analysing a much earlier publication, Yeats's 1912 edition of Dunsany's work for the Cuala press quoted above, *Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany* (1912). These two works from around the beginning and the end of Dunsany's writing career pinpoint not only the location of Ireland as a concept, an imaginative space, in each of the texts, but also chart the imaginative development of ideas of Ireland across different time periods, and the changing techniques by which he articulated these ideas in his fiction.

The publication history of the Cuala press *Selections* offers a valuable insight into Dunsany's relevance for Irish letters at that period. Established in 1908, the press was a Yeats family venture, run by Elizabeth Yeats, W.B.'s sister. Although Elizabeth was director of the business, it was her brother who wielded creative control over who was and was not included for publication.<sup>282</sup> For Yeats, the press, along with the Abbey Theatre and many other creative initiatives, was an important outlet for his cultural nationalism. Robin Skelton points out the importance of the press in this endeavour:

By means of the Cuala Press series of books, and by means of the broadsides, he [Yeats] identified, for himself and for others, a whole literary culture. So successful was he in doing this, that one finds oneself thinking of writers who appeared in the Cuala series as having some kind of Certificate of Irish Literary Membership, and of those that were omitted as being, in some way, 'on the fringe'.<sup>283</sup>

In other words, Yeats was forming his own canon of Irish literature. The inclusion of a volume of Dunsany's fiction in the list of imprints is thus significant for the author's position as an Irish writer. By this point Yeats had already drawn Dunsany into the environs of the Abbey Theatre, but the publication of Dunsany's works by his own press shows another level of engagement between the two authors. Skelton goes on to note that, 'this press, during Yeats's lifetime, gave a large proportion of the best living Irish writers a public, and a reputation'<sup>284</sup>. However, in this respect at least, Dunsany is the exception to the rule, as from this point onwards his relationship with the Irish literati became increasingly fraught. His inclusion within the Cuala canon comes at the height of his

---

<sup>282</sup> See Simone Murray, 'The Cuala Press: Women, publishing, and the conflicted genealogies of 'feminist publishing'.' *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol. 27, 5-6 (2004), pp. 489-506 for information regarding the (often fraught) collaboration between brother and sister on the press.

<sup>283</sup> Robin Skelton, 'Twentieth-Century Irish Literature and the Private Press Tradition', *The Massachusetts Review* Vol. 5, 2 (1964), p. 371.

interaction with the Irish literary establishment, concurrent with his plays being performed at the Abbey and his works appearing in Irish literary periodicals. Instead of establishing an enduring reputation and permanent connection with the Irish public, *Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany* in fact marks the beginning of the end of his fame within the Irish literary community. If we wish to consider what connected Dunsany with the Irish Revival, and what ultimately severed the connection, it is useful to consider what attracted Yeats to the Dunsany material in the first place. We may then consider why the collection perhaps did not gain the author the prominence in Ireland that both men felt he deserved.

Some clues to Yeats's decision to include Dunsany in his new 'Library of Ireland'<sup>285</sup> can be found in the extensive introduction that the poet wrote to *Selections*. This introduction, which does not actually mention Dunsany until its third page, sets out Yeats's agenda for the Cuala press, and for the Irish Revival in general. Yeats is upfront about his desire to co-opt Dunsany for his own cause:

When I was first moved by Lord Dunsany's work I thought that he would more help this change [the Irish literary revival] if he could bring his imagination into the old Irish legendary world instead of those magic lands of his with their vague Eastern air; but even as I urged him I knew he could not, without losing his rich beauty of careless suggestion, and the persons and images that for ancestry have all those romantic ideas that are somewhere in the background of all our minds. He could not have made Slieve-na-mon nor Slieve Fua incredible and phantastic enough, because that prolonged study of a past age, necessary before he could separate them from modern association, would have changed the spontaneity of his mood to something learned, premeditated, and scientific.<sup>286</sup>

There are many conflicting ideas in this passage. Firstly, Yeats is reinforcing his own importance in early twentieth century Irish literary culture, a spider in the middle of a literary web of his own making. There is also the sense of backhanded compliments being paid, where Dunsany's 'spontaneity' is simultaneously criticised and complimented. It may be more than mere coincidence that it took Dunsany another twenty years to write about Ireland and Irish legends. At this point in the introduction Yeats's inclusion of Dunsany in the Cuala canon seems little more than a whim. However, by considering the

---

<sup>284</sup> Robin Skelton, 'Twentieth-Century Irish Literature and the Private Press Tradition', *The Massachusetts Review* Vol. 5, 2 (1964), p. 370.

<sup>285</sup> W.B. Yeats, ed., *Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany* (Churchtown, Dundrum: Cuala Press, 1912) (1971 reprint), p. ii.

<sup>286</sup> W.B. Yeats, ed., *Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany* (Churchtown, Dundrum: Cuala Press, 1912) (1971 reprint), p. iv.

contents of the volume we can begin to see what may have attracted Yeats to include the early works of Lord Dunsany in his plans for the Irish Revival.

*Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany* includes *The Gods of the Mountain*, the first act of *King Argimēnes and the Unknown Warrior* and some short stories including ‘The Fall of Babbulkund’ and ‘Idle Days on the Yann’. Yeats would have been eager to promote Dunsany’s plays due to their connection with the Abbey Theatre, even if *The Gods of the Mountain* had not at this point been included in the theatre’s repertoire. The selection of the short stories is however particularly interesting. It may be a coincidence, but in including ‘Idle Days on the Yann’ Yeats chooses one of the few short stories from that period that includes a direct reference to Ireland, as we have seen in Chapter Four:

And I told how I came from Ireland, which is of Europe, whereat the captain and all the sailors laughed, for they said, “There are no such places in all the land of dreams.” When they had ceased to mock me, I explained that my fancy mostly dwelt in the desert of Cuppar-Nombo, about a beautiful blue city called Golthoth the Damned [...] When I said this they complimented me upon the abode of my fancy, saying that, though they had never seen these cities, such places might well be imagined. (pp. 69-70)

At this point in Dunsany’s writing career, Ireland is not even a dream-state; it is something that is not allowed imaginative space for the author, at least directly, and is decidedly inferior to the worlds of his fancy. The inclusion of this story may have been an ironic choice by Yeats who simultaneously wished to claim Dunsany for the Irish Revivalist cause but also questioned his ability to write about Ireland.

It is not known how much influence Dunsany had on which texts were included in the Cuala edition; it is however clear from the introduction that Yeats’s selection was carefully thought out: ‘Not all Lord Dunsany’s moods delight me, for he writes out of a careless abundance; and from the moment I first read him I have wished to have between two covers something of all the moods that do.’<sup>287</sup> *Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany* is hence about Yeats’s own aesthetic pleasure in the texts, as well as a calculated selection aimed at claiming a place for Dunsany in the Irish literary canon. Yeats’s sense of possession over Dunsany is never more strongly put than in a letter he sent the Lord asking him to be part of the Cuala project: ‘You will be there with Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge, and Douglas Hyde and A.E. and the rest of us. It is my way of claiming you for

---

<sup>287</sup> W.B. Yeats, ed., *Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany* (Churchtown, Dundrum: Cuala Press, 1912) (1971 reprint), p. ix.

Ireland.<sup>288</sup> Yeats does manage to claim or locate Dunsany's work within an Irish framework, through his inclusion in the Cuala canon, so it is perhaps surprising that Dunsany's fame in Ireland only lessens from this date onwards. Part of the reason is the decline in popularity of the Revival itself: fringe figure though he may have been to the Revivalists, he had less in common with the writers who followed them. These writers, including Patrick Kavanagh and Louis MacNeice, were grappling with a new Ireland, a land of strict censorship and cultural control. Sean O'Faolain notes that the change in the literary landscape between the writers of the Revival and the authors of the 1940s was due to the change in Irish society: 'There are still tinkers and horsecopers and sailors and porter-drinkers: but we all know that life is largely a matter of what a dramatist might call a balance of characters, and that when a new balance of the characters takes place it is no longer the old play.'<sup>289</sup> The stage is the same, but everything else about Irish society has changed in the decades between the start and end of Dunsany's writing career. Between the twilight years of the Irish Revival when *Selections* was published and the publication of *His Fellow Men* in 1952, Irish literature and culture went through several remarkable changes. Chief among these changes was the transformation in Irish culture brought about by the creation of an independent Ireland. As has been noted throughout this thesis, the years of Irish rebellion and eventual independence, combined with the traumas of the First World War, left an indelible mark on Dunsany's fiction. By the time *His Fellow Men* was published Europe had endured another World War, one in which Ireland had remained neutral, leading Dunsany to despair of the government of the new Ireland. This period also saw the dominance of the Catholic Church over every aspect of life in Ireland, further distancing Dunsany from the image of his country promoted at the time. It is these changes throughout the first half of the twentieth century that enabled Dunsany to write, in *His Fellow Men*, his only sustained examination of modern Ireland.

*His Fellow Men* was one of the last novels Lord Dunsany wrote, published a mere five years before his death. Like most of his other Irish novels, the action is set earlier than it was written, in this case before World War II: 'And the time of this story lies in between wars.'<sup>290</sup> Although there is an aspect of nostalgia in setting the novel prior to the Second World War, this is Dunsany's strongest, most overt attempt to deal with political and religious issues in contemporary Ireland. It also sees Dunsany trying to locate a new

---

<sup>288</sup> Mark Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany* (London: Collins, 1972), p. 78.

<sup>289</sup> Sean O'Faolain, 'Romance and Realism' in David Pierce, ed., *Irish Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Reader* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), p. 516.

<sup>290</sup> Lord Dunsany, *His Fellow Men* (London: Jarrolds, 1952), p. 5.

Ireland; one which is urban as well as rural, modern as well as primitive. The central character is Mathew Perry, a young Northern Irish 'member of a good Protestant family' (p. 9) whose parents have just been murdered in a sectarian killing. In this the novel echoes *The Curse of the Wise Woman*, yet by making the main character an adult rather than a young boy, and middle class rather than aristocratic, Dunsany brings the conflicting strands of present day revenge and forgiveness to a head.

Mathew is encouraged by his Aunt to take revenge upon the murderers of his parents, but, although he understands the attraction of vengeance, he vows instead to leave Ireland and find a way to avoid the intolerance that he blames for his parents' deaths. His motive is not just a way of seeking forgiveness or a better Ireland; he has also simply fallen in love with a Catholic girl and looks to find a way in which they could be together. He leaves Ireland so that he may return home with the lessons of tolerance from distant lands: 'And, as he saw it in his dream, he would go back to Ireland with lore that he found in the East and teach them to live in harmony, and there would be no longer any barrier between him and the girl with the chestnut hair' (p. 69). Mathew decides to bring back the knowledge of the East to renew the troubled West. This recalls Revival figures such as AE and Yeats who looked Eastward to mysticism to renew Irish spiritual life.

Although there is an orientalist aspect to this novel, West and East are juxtaposed in a more thoughtful fashion than earlier in the writer's oeuvre; it is their core beliefs that are compared, not just landscapes or individuals. Mathew embarks on a 'frantic quest of tolerance' (p. 42) and travels through Africa, the Middle East and India trying to find some kind of belief system that might provide him with a solution to the sectarian intolerance in Ireland. To the horror of his fellow white travellers Mathew embraces all religions in an effort to find one not troubled by the sectarian tensions of Christianity. This is reminiscent of Dunsany's early short story collections where no religion is absolute and each faith is replaced by another. On his travels Mathew decides that:

All religions [...] came out of the calm of the East, and broke into factions on the rough shores of the West like a long wave falling on rocks from a blue sea. Into that calm he would go, searching amongst its creeds, and would not yield to despair or give himself over to vengeance until the East had failed him. (p. 54)

This statement links Dunsany with the Irish Orientalists discussed in Chapter 5, voicing the view that the East is the origin point, the beginning of civilisation that is then adopted by the West. Mathew experiments with Islam, Hinduism and many other faiths, but finds



them all to be lacking the complete tolerance he is looking for. Eventually he encounters a wise man in Persia who tells him that ‘all religions were revelations by God to man’ (p. 89). Mathew believes he has found his solution; he will embrace all religions and return to Ireland with new optimism. Back in Ireland Mathew meets all kinds of people, including Irish nationalists and Orangemen. Mathew’s naivety in believing that his new found tolerance will allow him to join all sides allows Dunsany to employ some particularly cynical humour in depicting Irish politics.

Mathew goes to live near the girl he fell in love with, Eileen O’Shaughnessy, and continues with his quest, accompanying her to mass while applying for membership of the local Orange Lodge, while still finding the time to participate in other religions. The local Orangemen have little problem with him praying like a Mohammedan but when they learn that he has been to a Catholic cathedral he and Eileen are forced to leave for Dublin, or be murdered in their beds.

Initially Dublin is presented in idyllic fashion as the centre of culture, peopled by artists and poets, much as Dunsany would have found Dublin during the days of the Irish Revival. As Eileen comments: ‘They are like people in old songs here, like the people in Tom Moore’s poems. Sure, they love all that’s beautiful’ (p. 131).<sup>291</sup> Mathew soon finds himself joining a company of Irish Republican nationalists (those against the newly partitioned Ireland), whose idealism becomes the subject of Dunsany’s sly irony. Harrity, one of the nationalists, explains his vision of Ireland:

Mathew could soon see that he was a minor prophet telling them of the new Ireland that was to come [...] Perhaps it was the old Ireland that he saw, preserved rather by legend than history, and destined to be brought back again by himself and friends whose names he would not reveal. (p. 120)

In this passage Harrity’s nationalism harks back to the earlier sentiments of Yeats and the Revival nationalists who desired to resurrect an ideal Ireland from the past and bring it to bear in the present. The idealism of the nationalists is quickly shown to be naive, however compelling their ideal vision of Ireland may be: ‘There were to be no trams or slums or anything noisy in that Ireland, but only freedom and a long dream fulfilled.’ (p. 121). Matthew is attracted to these men and realises the power of the ideal over the real: ‘the true

---

<sup>291</sup> Thomas Moore was a nineteenth century sentimental poet whose heroic verse based on Irish legend was highly popular in his own time. See Maureen O’Rourke and James MacKillop, *An Irish Literature Reader: Poetry, Prose Drama* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006), p. 106.

Ireland was not the Irish Free State, in case he should have supposed it, but something more glorious and beautiful' (p. 121). However, he quickly lands himself in trouble by also making friends with a group of Unionist cricketers. Again, Mathew finds himself in the centre of a conflict between two worlds, two ideas of Ireland which are mutually exclusive: 'In the afternoon the Phoenix team fielded until the light of the sun low over the mountains was less adapted for cricket than for dreams of fairies or demi-gods in the high glens, or of armies that were about to set Ireland free.' (p. 141) Despite a warning from Harrity that he should be playing hurley rather than cricket, Mathew ends up dining with the cricketers and is spotted toasting the health of the King. Not only does he get told to leave Ireland or be killed by Harrity, but Eileen also rejects him and calls off their engagement.

The rest of the novel sees Mathew searching all over England for tolerance, but each time he seems to have found it, it turns out to be just an illusion. He has to leave a little country town when they catch him praying with a Hindu, and he is then forced to leave London when he is seen meditating. He even tries a temperance league which attracts him with its claim of never being 'intolerant'. In London, dejected by the failure of his quest, he hears the Derry air, which calls him to Ireland and Eileen, even if it might mean death at the hands of Harrity. The final scene is a reunion between Mathew and Eileen where he learns that Harrity is in prison, so that he need not fear for his life. Mathew explains his quest to Eileen, and she quickly reasons that it is his need for tolerance that has been his downfall. Eileen's speech is a supreme example of Dunsany's dark wit, turning suppositions on their heads:

Now I'll tell you what we'll do, Mathew. I'll marry you, and I'll go on being a Catholic; and you are to go on being an Orangeman, and as intolerant as any of them; as any of them, mind you. And as for my religion, which I won't give up for you or for anybody in the world, you're to call it Popish idolatry. And I'll have no more nonsense about tolerance. Look at all the trouble it's got you into. And as for that man that taught you all that nonsense, isn't he only a foreigner? And what would any foreigner know about the way things are, any way? Tolerance indeed! Don't let me hear any more of it. (p. 224)

In a dazzling inversion of ethics, Mathew's quest for tolerance ends in a validation of intolerance. The solution for Irish sectarianism which at first appeared illusory in fact turns out to be merely the need for an acceptance of irreparable differences.

There is one particularly poignant moment in *His Fellow Men* where the narrator's fictional voice slips for just three words. It is just as Mathew has chosen to leave Ireland for the East:

Over the sea that the moon had inlaid with a strip of silver he gazed, and wondered why he was leaving Ireland. [...] Why had he been discontented with these shores he was leaving, he wondered? Why had he preferred other shores, and ones of which he knew nothing? No answer came from the moon or the glittering water, or from anywhere at all. The causes of his discontent were too far back for him to see them, or for me. The shock of his parent's murder some years ago may have left a scar on his spirit, or some still older force drove him. He wondered and found no solution. Nor can I. (p. 11)

This intrusion of Dunsany's voice into the novel is unusual and particularly poignant. Dunsany has no solution for the troubles of Ireland, his home which has changed so much during his lifetime.

*His Fellow Men* is a fitting conclusion to Dunsany's engagement with Ireland and Irishness that lasted over half a century. Throughout this thesis the aim has been to locate the nation or notion of Ireland within Dunsany's texts, but also to examine the influence of the Irish literary tradition on the writer. Although he has been neglected by the Irish critical community from his contemporaries up to the present day, there was at least one literary figure who understood that he deserved a place in the Irish canon. In *Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany* W.B. Yeats tells of his dream of a new literary culture of which his country could be proud:

But to persuade others that it is all but one dream, or to persuade them that Lord Dunsany has his part in that change I have described I have but my superstition and this series of little books where I have set his tender, pathetic, haughty fancies among books by Lady Gregory, by AE., by Dr. Douglas Hyde, by John Synge, and by myself. His work which seems today so much on the outside, as it were, of life and daily interest, may yet seem to those students I have imagined rooted in both.<sup>292</sup>

This thesis has demonstrated that Lord Dunsany's 'fancies' are rooted in Irish life and daily interest, a concept that enriches his fantastic fiction of all genres and time periods.

---

<sup>292</sup> W.B. Yeats, ed., *Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany* (Churchtown, Dundrum: Cuala Press, 1912) (1971 reprint), p. iv-v.

## Bibliography

Amory, Mark, *Biography of Lord Dunsany* (London: Collins, 1972)

Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006)

Anonymous, Review of *The Gods of the Mountain* at the Haymarket Theatre, *The Times* (2<sup>nd</sup> June, 1911)

Anonymous, Review of *The Gods of the Mountain* at the Princess Theatre, *The New York Times* (26<sup>th</sup> December, 1915)

Anonymous, Review of *Up in the Hills*, *The Times* (15<sup>th</sup> October, 1935)

Anonymous, 'Sketches of the Irish Peasantry', *The Quarterly Review* (July, 1841)

Armitt, Lucy, *Theorizing the Fantastic* (London: Arnold, 1996)

Arnold, Matthew, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder and co., 1867)

Attebery, Brian, *Strategies of Fantasy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992)

Bartlett, Thomas, *Ireland: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Bassnett, Susan, 'Pirandello's Debut as Director: the Opening of the Teatro d'Arte', *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 3, 12 (1987), pp. 349-351

Bauman, Zygmunt and Benedetto Vecchi, *Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004)

Bhabha, Homi, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994)

Bierstadt, Edward, *Dunsany the Dramatist* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1917)

Bini, Daniela, *Pirandello and his Muse* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998)

Birmingham, George, ed., *Irish Short Stories* (London: Faber, 1932)

Boltwood, Scott, ed., *Renegotiating and Resisting Nationalism in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Irish Drama* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2001)

Boyd, E.A., *The Contemporary Drama of Ireland* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1918)

— *The Glittering Fake: A Fantasia* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1918)

Brown, Terence, *The Life of W.B. Yeats* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001)

Burke, Edmund, *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1856)

Burton, Richard F., *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* Volume I (New York: Cosimo, 2008) First published in 1885

de Camp, L. Sprague, *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers: The Makers of Heroic Fantasy* (Sauk City, Wisconsin: Arkham Publishers Inc., 1976)

Carlson, David J., 'Lord Dunsany and the Great War: Don Rodriguez and the rebirth of romance', *Mythlore* 25 (2006), pp. 93-104.

Carroll, Clare and Patricia King, eds., *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003)

Caserio, Robert L., *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

Clare, David, 'C.S. Lewis: an Irish writer' *Irish Studies Review* Vol. 18, 1 (2010), pp. 17-38.

Clarke, Brenna Katz and Harold Ferrar, *The Dublin Drama League 1919-1941* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979)

Cleary, Joseph N., *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Corbin, John, 'The Gods of Dunsany', *The New York Times* (26<sup>th</sup> June, 1919)

Corkery, Daniel, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature: A Study* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1931)

Cormack, Alistair, *Yeats and Joyce: Cyclical History and the Reprobate Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008)

Cronin, John, *Irish Fiction 1900-1940* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1992)

Crowley, Aleister, Unpublished letter to Lord Dunsany, Undated (Dunsany Archive)

Cullen, Fintan, *Visual Politics: The Representation of Ireland 1750-1930* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997)

de Cervantes, Miguel, *Don Quixote* (Digireads.com 2009)

Deane, Seamus, ed., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* Vol. 2. (Derry, NI: Field Day Publications, 1991)

— Review of Mary Lavin's stories, *Irish University Review* Vol. 4, No. 2, (Autumn, 1974)

— *Strange Country* (Oxford: Oxford University Press with Clarendon Press, 1998)

Donoghue, Denis, ed., *W.B. Yeats: Memoirs* (London: MacMillan, 1972)

— *We Irish: Essays on Irish Literature and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986)

Dove, George N., *Suspense in the Formula Story* (Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1989)

Dunleavy, Janet, 'The Fiction of Mary Lavin', *Irish University Review* Vol. 7, 2 (1977), pp. 225-31.

Dunsany, Lord, *The Blessing of Pan* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1927)

— *The Book of Wonder* (London: Heinemann, 1912)

- *The Charwoman's Shadow* (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926)
- *The Chronicles of Rodriguez* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1922)
- *The Curse of the Wise Woman* (London: Heinemann, 1933)
- *The Donnellan Lectures* (London: Heinemann, 1945)
- *A Dreamer's Tales* (London: George Allen, 1910)
- *A Dreamer's Tales and Other Stories* (New York: The Modern Library, 1919)
- *Fifty-One Tales* (London: Elkin Matthews, 1915)
- *Five Plays* (London: Grant Richards, 1918)
- *The Gods of Pegāna* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1905)
- *His Fellow Men* (London: Jarrolds, 1952)
- *If* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1922)
- *If I Were a Dictator* (London: Methuen, 1934)
- *Jorkens Borrows another Whiskey* (London: Michael Joseph, 1954)
- *The King of Elfland's Daughter* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1924)
- *The Last Revolution* (London: Jarrolds, 1951)
- *The Little Tales of Smethers* (London: Jarrolds, 1952)
- *The Man who Ate the Phoenix* (London: Jarrolds, 1949)
- *My Ireland* (Plymouth: Mayflower Press Ltd., 1937)
- 'A Note on "Blanco Posnet"', *The Saturday Review* (28<sup>th</sup> August 1909)

- *Patches of Sunlight* (London: Heinemann, 1938)
- *Plays of Near & Far* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1923)
- *Rory and Bran* (London: William Heinemann, 1936)
- *Selections from the Writings of Lord Dunsany* (Dundrum: Cuala Press, 1912)
- *The Story of Mona Sheehy* (London: Heinemann, 1939)
- *The Sword of Welleran* (London: George Allen and Sons, 1908)
- *Tales of War* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1918)
- *Tales of Three Hemispheres* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1920)
- *Tales of Wonder* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1916)
- *Time and the Gods* (London: Heinemann, 1906)
- *The Travel Tales of Mr. Jorkens* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1931)
- *Up in the Hills* (London: Heinemann, 1935)
- *Unhappy Far-Off Things* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1919)
- Eagleton, Terry, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (London: Verso, 1995)
- Eagleton, Terry, ed., *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990)
- *Sweet Violence: the Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003)
- Echevarria, Roberto Gonzales, *Cervantes' Don Quixote: A Casebook* (Oxford: OUP, 2005)
- Eliot, T.S., *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003)
- Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986)



Finneran, Richard J., *Letters of James Stephens* (London: MacMillan, 1974)

Flannery, James W., 'High Ideals and the Reality of the Marketplace: A Financial Record of the Early Abbey Theatre', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* Vol. 71, 283 (1982)

Foster, J.W., *Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987)

— *Irish Novels 1890-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

Foster, R. F., *Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Penguin, 1993)

Foucault, Michel, *Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980)

Frawley, Oona, *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-Century Irish Literature* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005)

Fulmer, Jacqueline, *Folk Women and Indirection in Morrison, Ni Dhuibhne, Hurston, and Lavin* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007)

Fussell, Paul, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

Gallagher, Joseph, 'The Uses of the Supernatural in the works of Lord Dunsany and James Stephens' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington, 1990)

Gogarty, Oliver St. John, *It isn't this time of year at all!* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1954)

Gregory, Lady, ed., *Ideals in Ireland* (London: Unicorn Press, 1901)

— *Irish Folk-History Plays* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912)

— *Our Irish Theatre* (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 1972)

- Greene, Nicholas, *The Politics of Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- Hadfield, Andrew and Willy Maley, *Edmund Spenser: A View of the State of Ireland* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997),
- Harrington, John P., *The Irish Play on the New York Stage, 1874-1966* (Lexington Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1997)
- Heaney, Seamus, *Preoccupations: selected prose 1968-1978* (London: Faber, 1980)
- Helleiner, Jane, *Irish Travellers: Racism and the Politics of Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000)
- Hogan, Robert, ed., *The MacMillan Dictionary of Irish Literature* (London: MacMillan, 1980)
- *The Rise of the Realists, 1910-1915* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979)
- Hooper, Glenn and Colin Graham, eds, *Irish and Postcolonial Writing* (Houndsmills, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillian: 2002)
- Horowitz, Ernest, 'The Shanachie of the East', *The Shanachie* Vol. 1. (1907)
- Ingman, Heather, *A History of the Irish Short Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
- Jackson, Rosemary, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 2000)
- Joshi, S.T., *Lord Dunsany: Master of the Anglo-Irish Imagination* (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995)
- Joshi, S.T. and Darrell Schweitzer, *Lord Dunsany: A Bibliography* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1993)
- Joyce, James, *Occasional, Critical and Political Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

— *Ulysses* (London: Penguin, 2000)

Kavanagh, Patrick, *The Great Hunger* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1942)

Kearney, Richard, *Postnational Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1997)

Kelly, Aaron, *Twentieth-Century Irish Literature* (Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008)

Kiberd, Declan, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Vintage, 1996)

— *Irish Classics* (London: Granta Books, 2001)

Killeen, Jarlath, *The Fairytales of Oscar Wilde* (London: Ashgate, 2007)

Kilroy, James F., *The Irish Short Story: A Critical History* (Boston MA: Twayne Publishers, 1982)

Kinsella, Thomas, ed., *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986)

Kipling, Rudyard, *The Phantom Rickshaw* (New York: Lovell, 1899)

Lambdin, Laura C., ed., *A Companion to Old and Middle English Literature* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002)

Lavin, Mary, *Tales from Bective Bridge* (London: Readers Union, 1945)

Lawrence, C.E., Review of *If, The Bookman* (December, 1921)

Leerssen, Joep, *Remembrance and Imagination* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996)

Lennon, Joseph, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004)

Levitas, Ben, *The Theatre of Nation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002)

- Lyons, Paddy and Alison O'Malley-Younger, eds, *No Country for Old Men* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009)
- MacDonagh, Thomas, *Literature in Ireland* (Tipperary: Relay, 1996)
- Maclean, Stuart John, *The Event and its Terrors* (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2004)
- Malone, Andrew E., *The Irish Drama* (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1965),
- Manlove, Colin, *The Fantasy Literature of England* (London: MacMillan, 1999)
- Martin, Augustine, *Bearing Witness: Essays on Anglo-Irish Literature* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1996)
- Mattar, Sinéad Garrigan, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
- McCormack, W.J., *From Burke to Beckett; Ascendancy, Tradition and Betrayal in Literary History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994)
- McMinn, Joseph, *The Internationalism of Irish Literature and Drama* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1992)
- Meredith, Dianne, 'Landscape or Mindscape? Seamus Heaney's Bogs', *Irish Geography*, Vol. 32, 2 (1999) <<http://www.ucd.ie/gsi/pdf/32-2/bogs.pdf>> [accessed January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010]
- Miller, Dean E., *The Epic Hero* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000)
- Moore, George, Uncollected letter to Lord Dunsany, March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1911 (Dunsany Archive)
- Morash, Christopher, *A History of Irish Theatre: 1601-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)
- Morse, David E., and Csilla Bertha, eds, *More Real than Reality: The Fantastic in Irish Literature and the Arts* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991)

Murray, Christopher, *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997)

Murray, Simone, 'The Cuala Press: Women, publishing, and the conflicted genealogies of 'feminist publishing'.', *Women's Studies International Forum* Vol. 27, 5-6 (2004), pp. 489-506.

O'Brien, Flann, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (London: Penguin, 1967) First published 1939.

— *The Poor Mouth* (London: Flamingo, 1993) First published in Gaelic in 1941.

O'Connor, Frank, *Classic Irish Short Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985)

— *A Backward Look: A Short History of Irish Literature* (New York: Capricorn, 1968)

O'Grady, Standish, *The Coming of Cuculain* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1893)

O'Grady, Standish Hayes, *Silva Gadelica: A Collection of Tales in Irish*, Vol. II. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1892)

Patterson, David, *Literature and Spirit: Essays on Bakhtin and his Contemporaries* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1988)

Pierce, David, ed., *Irish Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Reader* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000)

Pilkington, Lionel, *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (London: Routledge, 2001)

Pittock, Murray, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999)

Rabkin, Eric, *The Fantastic in Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976)

Rafroidi, Patrick, *The Irish Short Story* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1979)

Ramazani, Jahan, 'Is Yeats a postcolonial poet?', *Raritan* Vol. 13 Issue 3, (1998), pp. 64-89.

Richards, Sean, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

Robinson, Lennox, *Ireland's Abbey Theatre* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd., 1951)

Rottensteiner, Franz, *The Fantasy Book* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1978)

Russell, George William (AE), *The Avatars: A Futurist Fantasy* (London: MacMillan, 1933)

— *Some Unpublished Letters from AE to James Stephens* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1979)

Sandner, David, *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader* (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004)

Schwab, Gabriele, *The Mirror and the Killer Queen: Otherness in Literary Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996)

Schweitzer, Darrell, *Pathways to Elfland: The Writings of Lord Dunsany* (Philadelphia: Owlswick Press, 1989)

Skelton, Robin, 'Twentieth-Century Irish Literature and the Private Press Tradition', *The Massachusetts Review* Vol. 5, 2 (1964), pp. 368-377.

Small, Douglas, 'The Phantasmagorical Imagination: From Singular Perversion to Curious Celebration', *eSharp* 14 (2009), pp. 91-111.

Smith, Hazel Littlefield, *Lord Dunsany, King of Dreams: A Personal Portrait*, (New York, NY: Exposition, 1959)

Smyth, Gerry, *The Novel and the Nation* (London: Pluto Press, 1997)

S.O., Review of *If*, *English Review* (September, 1921)

Stephens, James, *The Crock of Gold* (London: MacMillan, 1912)

— *The Insurrection in Dublin* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1916)

— *Irish Fairy Tales* (London: MacMillan, 1920)

Stewart, Bruce, 'The Old Bog Road: Expressions of Atavism in Irish Culture' *Writing Ulster*, No. 6. (1999)

Stewart, Bruce, ed., *That Other World* Vol. II (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1998)

Synge, J.M., *The Works of John M. Synge* Vol. II (Boston: John W. Luce, 1912)

— *The Shadow of the Glen, and Riders to the Sea* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1905)  
Dunsany Estate Copy

Tanner, Harold, *China: A History* Vol. 2. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2010)

Tinterri, Alessandro, 'The Gods of the Mountain' at the Odescalchi Theatre', *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 3, 12 (1987), pp. 352-7.

Todorov, Tzvetan, *Genres in Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

Trotter, Mary, *Modern Irish Theatre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008)

Tymoczko, Maria and Colin Ireland, *Language and Tradition in Ireland* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003)

Warner, Alan, *A Guide to Anglo-Irish Literature* (New York: Gill and MacMillan, 1981)

Warner, Marina, *From the Beast to the Blonde; On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1995)

Warren, Henry, 'The Death of a World', *Fortnightly Review* (February, 1934)

West, Trevor, *Horace Plunkett, Co-operation and Politics* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1986)

Wilde, Lady, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland* (London: Ward & Downey, 1887)

Williams, Jack, *Cricket and Race* (Oxford: Berg, 2001)

Williams, John R., *The Life of Goethe: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001)

Williams, Martin, 'Ancient Mythology and Revolutionary Ideology in Ireland, 1878-1916', *The Historical Journal* Vol. 26, 2 (1983), pp. 307-328.

Wilson, Janelle L., *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning* (Cranbury NJ: Rosemont Publishing, 2005)

Yeats, W.B., *Celtic Twilight* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1893)

— *The Poems* (London: Everyman, 2004)

Yeats, W.B. and Lady Gregory, *The Unicorn from the Stars and other Plays* (London: MacMillan, 1908)