

National Heroes for Children

An Analysis of Irish Nationalism in Late 19th Century Adaptations of Cú Chulainn for Children

Robin de Jager

4065190

Dr. Jeroen Salman

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Introduction

Ireland as a first world country is often overlooked in postcolonial studies. In the nineteenth century, however, Ireland was still a part of the Commonwealth. Its people were prohibited from expressing their own culture through means of language, art and sport (Tymoczko 18). After Irish culture, had been oppressed for centuries, many Celtic stories were forgotten and only existed in manuscripts from the Middle Ages. When the interest in Irish heritage and language started to grow during the nineteenth century, these manuscripts became object of study for philologists and historians. An increasing amount of translations and adaptations of Old Irish stories became available to the public as part of a Celtic cultural revival (Yeats 69). This Celtic cultural revival, however, had a political agenda. Irish nationalism was growing, but many of the public did not have a shared national identity, since this was destroyed by centuries of English oppression. The Celtic cultural revival had as aim to (re-)create an Irish national identity (Tymoczko 21). The building of a national identity included using old Irish heroes, like Cú Chulainn as role-models for the public by introducing them in (children's) literature. This thesis will study how the character of Cú Chulainn and his stories are used to convey Irish nationalism in *The Coming of Cuculain* by Standish O'Grady (published in 1892) and *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* by Lady Augusta Gregory (published in 1902). Both texts use different techniques to express nationalism and are aimed at children as well as adults.

Cú Chulainn was and is one of the better known Irish heroes. His stories have been adapted in- and outside of Ireland (for instance in the Japanese Manga *Fate/Stay Night* originally released in 2004). The life of Cú Chulainn exists of multiple stories from the Ulster Cycle of Irish mythology and together they form some of the oldest Celtic stories available. The stories originate from several manuscripts from the twelfth and thirteenth century, but are believed to have an even older oral tradition dating back to the ninth century (Tymoczko 12). The character of Cú Chulainn is interesting for a study in nationalism in literature because his

character was actively used in Irish nationalist propaganda during the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1916 Dublin was the main stage to a rebellion called the Easter Rising. One of the key figures in this rebellion was a man called Padraig Pearse. Pearse founded an Irish school (Scoil Éanna) in 1908 before taking part in the Easter Rising. He was known for using the character of Cú Chulainn as a role-model of an Irish hero for his pupils (O'Leary 22-23). Cú Chulainn was ideal to be used in this way because his story describes him showing incredible courage and fighting entire armies against odds at a very young age. But Pearse was not the first to use the character of Cú Chulainn to inspire the young. Both O'Grady and Lady Gregory use the stories of Cú Chulainn to spread nationalism among children and adults.

In order to determine how these texts express nationalism, this thesis will first describe the political situation in Ireland in the late nineteenth century. It will show how nationalist movements in Ireland influenced the Celtic cultural revival and eventually came to use this movement to (re-)create an Irish nationalist identity. Some scholars even claim that this (re-)creation of national identity with the use of literature eventually led to Irish independence (Tymoczko 15). Secondly, this thesis will consider children's literature. It will show, with the use of observations provided by Peter Hunt (*Criticism, Theory, & Children's Literature*) and Matthew Grenby (*The Child Reader, 1700-1840*), why children's literature is an important tool in spreading nationalism. It will use research by Ríona Nic Congáil into nationalist children's culture in Ireland in the nineteenth century to show how children's literature was used as a tool for spreading Irish nationalism. It will then attempt to clarify the complexity of the concept of children's literature in the late nineteenth century to determine whether *The Coming of Cuculain* and *Cuchulain from Muirthemne* can be considered children's literature. Finally, this thesis will use a close reading of these texts to show how they use the stories of Cú Chulainn to express nationalism. In the analysis of these texts I will use the book, *Translation in Postcolonial*

Context by Maria Tymoczko to explain the different techniques and strategies O'Grady and Lady Gregory use when enforcing nationalism through the character and stories of Cú Chulainn

Both *The Coming of Cuculain* by O'Grady and *Cuchulain from Muirthemne* by Lady Gregory are famous works in the tradition of adapting Cú Chulainn. The choice to use these works in this thesis is not only based on their reputation, but also on their educational purpose. Both texts were used to spread nationalism among schoolchildren, but was this the original purpose of the texts when they were written? Were the texts even meant for children? This thesis will look at the evidence in the texts themselves to determine this. I will use concepts by Michael Grenby because his work *The Child Reader, 1700-1840* has a very pragmatic approach to the use of children's literature in the period preceding the publication of the primary texts that are the subject of this thesis. Similarly, I will use concepts from the work of Peter Hunt because he gives a proper overview of different concepts used in the study of children's literature (and often shares the pragmatic approach of Grenby). The studies of Ríona Nic Congáil into nationalist children's culture in Ireland in the nineteenth century were chosen because they show the connection between nationalism and children's literature. This thesis will study the textual evidence for nationalism in O'Grady and Lady Gregory by using and commenting on the analysis made by Maria Tymoczko in *Translation in Postcolonial Context*. This study looks at evidence for nationalism in translations from the Ulster Cycle in English. Most texts Tymoczko uses were published in the second half of the twentieth century, but the strategies in dealing with Early Irish myth she discovers also apply to earlier texts like those from O'Grady and Lady Gregory. She also gives a good overview of different strategies in the translation and adaptation of Early Irish literature, to which O'Grady and Lady Gregory belong.

1. Politics and Nationalism in the Celtic Cultural Revival

The nineteenth century was a turbulent time in Ireland. To properly understand the political situation at the end of the nineteenth century in which the Celtic Revival originated, one must first understand some basics of Irish political history. The English arrived in Ireland in the twelfth century (Duffy, et al 36). At first English rule did not oppress Irish culture. The English and Irish profited from each other. During the fourteenth century, this changed. The Statutes of Kilkenny from 1366 racially segregated the English invaders from the Irish (Duffy, et al 35). Over the next centuries Irish culture and language were oppressed by law. The laws created a twofold society, existing of Protestant English landowners and Catholic Irish workers. The gap between the two groups was enlarged during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by Penal Laws which made it impossible for Catholics to hold political office or to own land (Duffy, et al 76). Despite this, Ireland saw a phenomenal economic growth during the eighteenth century (Ranelagh 100). The American independence from 1776 inspired an Irish rebellion under Wolfe Tone in 1798 (Sean Duffy 82). The rebellion failed, but it became clear that the English were in threat of losing Ireland, which had become an important part of the English economy. The English developed the Act of Union. The Act of Union meant that the Irish parliament, which was separated from the parliament in England at this point, would be disbanded and Ireland would answer to Westminster directly (Ranelagh 104). Irish Parliament was persuaded to vote for its own disbandment with the promise of Catholic emancipation and in 1800 the Act of Union was officialised (Ranelagh 106).

Because of the Act of Union, the new century started with a heavily divided Ireland. The public was divided in several oppositions: Protestant and Catholic, Irish and English, Unionist, Separatists or those in favour of Home Rule (Ranelagh 162). The Unionists existed of those who saw the advantages of the Act of Union. Some of them were English land owners,

but most Unionists were Irish Anglican workers, who feared to be part of a Catholic Ireland (Ranelagh 104).

Opposite to the Unionists were the Separatists, who fought for Irish Independence. The Separatists themselves were also divided in two groups: Constitutionalist and Revolutionaries (Ranelagh 113). The Constitutionalist believed Irish Independence could (and should) be achieved through legal means. They had little support during the nineteenth century because many Irish politicians believed that Irish independence would never be allowed by England. These politicians, thus, often chose to support Home Rule, explained below, instead. The Revolutionaries believed that aggressive action was the only way to achieve an Irish independence. This group took form in the Irish Republican Brotherhood established in 1854 (Ranelagh 135). They are also often associated with the Fenians or the Fenian Brotherhood, who were behind the rebellion in 1798. The IRB spend most of the nineteenth century gathering funds to finance a rebellion. No successful rebellion was organised during the nineteenth century, but membership of the IRB kept growing especially after the turn of the century.

Besides these groups there was also large support for Home Rule. Ireland under Home Rule would reinstate their own parliament. This parliament would have to answer to Westminster, but would be able to make day to day decisions (Ranelagh 150). Many politicians and influential Irish families felt that the Irish public was not ready for independence. They feared for civil war in case of Irish independence because of the lack of coherence and national identity among the Irish. In the late nineteenth century Ireland came close to achieving Home Rule, but this failed when the head of the Irish party, Charles Stewart Parnell got involved in a big scandal (Ranelagh 161).

In this political situation, the Celtic cultural revival came into existence. Many artists felt that it was a shame that the Irish people had not only lost their language, but had poor knowledge of their own heritage in general. A group of influential people, like Douglas Hyde,

William Butler Yeats and, George Russel (under the pseudonym A.E.) felt that this had to change. They took it upon themselves to teach the Irish people about their own heritage and to promote the Irish national identity. They started the Celtic cultural revival (Duffy 35). The aim was to improve the Irish self-confidence and to de-Anglicise Ireland. Many translations of Old Irish stories started to appear because of this movement. Some, like Charles Gavan Duffy, foresaw a possible great influence of the texts on society: “What they might do, not for the individual, but for the nation, I dare not predict – the possibilities are so prodigious.” (30). The Celtic cultural revival also actively promoted the use and knowledge of the Irish language.

The initial aim for the Celtic cultural revival was to be unpolitical, because it was in the interest of all Irishmen to improve the national identity whatever their political stance.

Gaelicism was not political to begin with. It did have an important political element which harked back to the idealism of Grattan and Wolfe Tone, but it was far more concerned with reawakening interest in every element of the Irish past so as to restore pride and self confidence in all Irishmen. (Ranelagh 172).

This idea, however, did not hold ground for long. In 1884 the Gaelic Athletic Association (or GAA) was established. Their aim was to improve the national identity through the playing of Celtic sports, like hurling and Gaelic Football. Soon after its establishment the Fenians and IRB became involved in the running of the GAA (Ranelagh 172). Similarly, the Gaelic League, which was established in 1893 (Ranelagh 173), promoted and published Irish national literature. Its main motivation was the de-Anglicisation of Ireland in general (Hyde 116-161). The League started working together with the GAA. Through the combined work with the GAA the Fenians hoped to use the literature published by the Gaelic League as nationalist propaganda (Ranelagh 174). Douglas Hyde, the president of the Gaelic League, who himself was a Unionist did not agree with this, but was unable to stop it. In 1915 he resigned from his post as president because of these issues (Ranelagh 174). Likewise, W.B. Yeats, who started out as an active member of

the League eventually refused to publish work for them, because he believed that the League only wanted him to publish propaganda for the Irish nationalist cause.

The literature published by the Gaelic League might not have been meant to carry out a specific political message, but there are references to nationalism in these works. The publications were not meant to be used for political ends, but because the Fenians became involved this did eventually happen. Since the texts we will be looking at in this thesis were published in the early years of the Gaelic League, there is no way of telling if the national message they carry across was meant to be used in a political way. What we do know is that the texts have been exploited in a political way by for instance Padraig Pearse, who used the works of both Standish O'Grady and Lady Gregory in his *Scoil Éanna*. What we will be able to see in the last chapter of this thesis is that the way in which both works enforce Irish nationalism is very different, even though the works were written with similar motivations.

2. Nationalism in Children's Literature?

In the previous chapter, I have shown that the Celtic cultural revival used literature to enforce nationalism. Why are we, then focused on children's literature in this thesis? It seems quite logical to assume that children's literature is the ideal medium to express nationalism and to build a national identity, but why does this seem so logical and is this connection between nationalism and children's literature valid? Unlike adult fiction children's literature often had (and has) an educational function. With educational function, it is not only meant that children's literature is used to teach children how to read. Children's literature is also used to teach children knowledge and values as well. Peter Hunt even claims that: "In terms of educational value, children's literature has much to contribute to the acquisition of cultural values." (19). It is, thus, not surprising that a movement like the Celtic cultural revival that was focused on building a strong Irish national identity, would choose children's literature as one of its media. Another feature of children's literature that makes it susceptible for the enforcement of nationalism, is that it reaches both adults and children. Since adults not only determine which books are published but also which books are bought (assuming parents purchased the books, instead of the children themselves), children's literature is often aimed at an ambiguous public (Grenby 8). These two main functions make that children's literature is an important medium for groups to spread social values or new ways of thinking. Contemporary children's literature, for instance shows children growing up in same-sex marriages to make this concept more accepted in society (like *Mommy, Mama and Me* by Lesléa Newman and Carol Thompson, published in 2009).

In the nineteenth century, commercial children's literature came to flourish. The commercial market for children's literature came into existence during the seventeenth and eighteenth century (Grenby 3). In his book *The Child Reader 1700-1840* Matthew Grenby challenges the idea that the market for children's literature only came into existence during the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In nineteenth century Ireland books were considered a luxury item. Books and literary magazines for both adults and children became more and more popular during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially after the Education Act from 1880, which made it compulsory for children from the ages five and ten to attend school and, thus, learn how to read (parliament website). At the same time inventions in the publishing world, like the rotary press (1843) and cheaper ways to produce paper, made it increasingly easier and cheaper to publish books. Grenby challenges the idea that: “children’s literature meant only those printed works produced especially for children” (2). Grenby claims children often got their hands on literature not meant for them. They often read popular literature meant for adults (Grenby 98). Both Hunt and Grenby expressively talk about the importance of nineteenth-century children’s literature in the political education of children: “nineteenth-century children’s books were heavily didactic, and they were primarily designed to mould children intellectually or politically.” (28). Grenby even makes a stronger statement:

Children’s literature may have been one of the most important agents of consensus building, spreading and solidifying the moral and ideological positions that would characterise nineteenth-century culture and enabling the gradual coherence of national identity (70).

These two functions of children’s literature, thus, make it very susceptible to be used to enforce nationalism or other ideologies.

The choice to focus on children’s literature in connection to nationalism and the (re-)creation of the Irish national identity is justified by Ríona Nic Congáil’s studies: “‘Fiction, Amusement, Instruction’: The Irish Fireside Club and the Educational Ideology of the Gaelic League” (2009) and “Young Ireland and *The Nation*: Nationalist Children’s Culture in the Late Nineteenth Century” (2011). Both studies show that movements like the Young Ireland Movement and the Irish Fireside Club, used newspapers and literature to influence children.

just as early nineteenth century religious groups competed to influence children through the moral literature they distributed in the schools, so too did politically motivated forces later seek to influence the young (Congáil, “Young Ireland” 42).

She further claims that the ideologies of these movements influenced the focus of the Gaelic League: “By the turn of the twentieth century, the child had thus become the focus as principal receptacle and potential transmitter of the Gaelic League’s cultural nationalist ideology,” (Congáil, “Fiction, Amusement and Instruction” 113). It seems that these movements indeed consciously used children’s literature to spread nationalism.

The definition of children’s literature has always been problematic, especially so during the late nineteenth century. The term exists of two concepts which are both difficult to define: children and literature. This thesis will use the following definition of children’s literature: children’s literature contains all those works that have been written for children (roughly those under eighteen) or appropriated by children, including both works for entertainment and works that are used for educational purposes. This thesis does not concern itself with the literary value of texts. For this research, it is not important to classify a work in a higher or lower segment of art.

The works that are discussed in this thesis were not explicitly written for children or published in that way, but they were used for educational purposes by for instance Padraig Pearse and, thus, fall within the definition given above. They also show hints that they were aimed at a young audience as well as adults.

Both O’Grady and Lady Gregory have based their adaptations on Old Irish texts which can be found in several manuscripts (like for instance *Lebor na hUidre* or *the Book of the Dun Cow*). This thesis will not focus on a comparison with these original manuscripts. It will,

however, look at the intentions and motivations in writing the works. For instance, Lady Gregory states in her own introduction that she has made some minor changes to the original stories. She claims to have changed some of the more vulgar phrases to make the work more accessible to children (8). The changes Lady Gregory has made in the original stories prove that she had a younger audience in mind when she was writing *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*. Similar changes cannot be found in the works of Standish O'Grady, because the work is only loosely based on the original manuscripts. The amount of changes is so vast that the reason for specific changes cannot be determined.

Paratextual evidence from both texts shows that the works were aimed at a younger audience as well. The target audience for both works is named in the introduction. Lady Gregory herself mentions children in her introduction as the reason for making minor changes in her adaptation (8). She also states that she believes that: "If we will but tell these stories to our children the Land will begin again to be a Holy Land." (16). She expresses a believe that her work will be used for educational purposes. The introduction of O'Grady's work, written by A.E. (George Russel one of the prominent figures in the Gaelic League), also explicitly addresses children: "Do not believe it, dear Irish boy, dear Irish girl." (xiv). Here A.E. challenges the idea that the epic of Cú Chulainn should not be read by the Irish youth, because it is a folktale and would, thus, lack education purpose. In this instance, it is not the writer himself, but one of those involved in the publication of the work that expresses the target audience in the introduction.

As mentioned above the introduction of Lady Gregory expresses her desire for the text to be used in school: "The third aim she had in retelling of the sagas was that there should be nothing in them that would offend the people who might read them, especially if they were to be read by children in school." (8). The text of Standish O'Grady was also used as educational text by the earlier called Padraig Pearse. O'Leary even claims that: "no one growing up with an

interest in the Irish past in Pearse's time could have avoided the influence of O'Grady, and the young Pearse was undeniably captivated by the epic grandeur of O'Grady's creations." (26).

3. Nationalism in late 19th Century depictions of Cu Culainn for Children

The first two chapters have shown how the Celtic Revival has influenced Irish nationalism in (children's) literature published in late nineteenth century Ireland. There are different ways of using Irish nationalism in literature. One of those ways is the translation or adaptation of Celtic stories. Maria Tymoczko claims that there are two traditions in the retelling of Celtic myths. The first is mostly concerned with transmitting the content of the story to target audience (111). The other is more focused on preserving the form of the Old Irish language and stories (111). According to Tymoczko both O'Grady and Lady Gregory fall in the first category, because they are both literary translations. In this chapter I will, however, show that *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* does show care for the original form of the Cú Chulainn stories and that *The Coming of Cuculain* does not concern itself especially, with content or form and can, thus, be considered as an adaptation rather than a translation.

Furthermore, Tymoczko states that there are three strategies when translating Celtic stories to English: the assimilation, the dialectical and, the ostensive strategy. In the close reading, it will become clear that O'Grady uses an assimilation strategy, in which the culture of the source text is reduced to concepts that are understandable for the target audience (Tymoczko 174). Lady Gregory uses a dialectical strategy, in which a definition is given of the source culture, but is still influenced by the target culture (Tymoczko 175).

This thesis will first look at the political stance of the writer and the motivation for writing the work. Then it will be discussed how nationalism can be seen in the work itself. Finally, it will give a close reading of the works themselves and show how they convey nationalism on a textual level. It will furthermore illustrate how they relate to the target culture.

Standish James O'Grady – *The Coming of Cuculain*

Standish O'Grady started out as a scholar of Irish history. He wrote books like *History of Ireland* (1878), that tried to retell the Irish history in an understandable way for the non-

scholarly public. According to Gregory Castle and Patrick Bixby in *Standish O'Grady's Cuculain: A Critical Edition*, he spent most of his life researching Irish history and publishing works independently from any college or institution (2). O'Grady thought that in the Irish historical tradition:

the emphasis laid in the wrong place, with too much attention paid to chronicling and not enough to understanding the ethos of the ancient times and to communicating that ethos to present readers, who stood in need of the chivalric and heroic values exemplified by legendary warriors such as Cuculain (Castle and Bixby 3).

O'Grady believed that bringing this ethos to the public would “serve as an influence on the national character.” (Castle and Bixby 9). Besides scholarly works O'Grady also published a series of historical novels on the character of Cú Chulainn, one of which will be studied in this thesis. O'Grady was a supporter of what he himself called “Fenian unionism”, which means that he was a supporter of the union with a strong sense of nationalism.

O'Grady turned Cú Chulainn into a national hero:

O'Grady's legendary and imaginative conception elevated heroes such as Cuculain in a way that enshrined certain values of heroism, masculinity, loyalty, and tragic self-knowledge that he, like Yeats, his most ardent supporter, felt were central to an authentic Irish national identity (Castle and Bixby 27).

O'Grady's aim of both his literary and scholarly texts was to create “readable and popular accounts of the legendary past” (Castle and Bixby 8). O'Grady's choice for Cú Chulainn as his main subject shows nationalism because of his reputation as a national hero. Even though this reputation originated from earlier work by O'Grady, it is still apparent that he chose to write about Cú Chulainn again.

The first edition of the book, published in 1894, did not show references to nationalism on the cover. It did, however, include an illustration of Cú Chulainn struggling with the hound of Cooley. This edition also appeared with a preface, and an introduction by A.E. (George Russel). The preface written by Standish O'Grady himself explains the subject's position in Celtic literature and the origin of the story of Cú Chulainn. It again states O'Grady's motivation: "I would bring before swift modern readers the more striking aspects of a literature so vast and archaic as to repel all but students." (O'Grady vi). The introduction is a tribute to Standish O'Grady's effort by A.E.:

In O'Grady's writings the submerged river of national culture rose up again, a shining torrent, and I realised as I bathed in that stream, that the greatest spiritual evil one nation could inflict on another was to cut off from it the story of the national soul (O'Grady xi).

In the main body of the text O'Grady assimilates the story of Cú Chulainn for an English audience, while keeping several elements of nationalism. O'Grady, for instance, uses old Celtic gods, like "Lir" (5). He then explains in a footnote, who the god was and what he stood for. There are also some Irish words in the text, which are similarly explained in footnotes. Like the use of "Ard-Druid" (8), of which he explains the meaning in a footnote. Besides using Irish words O'Grady also lets the boys on the green play hurling (12), instead of some English equivalent of the sport which would perhaps be better known to the target audience. By making Cú Chulainn exemplary at the sport, O'Grady also ensures that boys, who will identify with Cú Chulainn, will want to practice the sport as well (in chapter one the GAA and its aims were discussed). O'Grady repeatedly addresses Ireland with old Celtic names, like "*Banba*" (5), "*Eriu*" (131) and "*Erin*" (139). With these examples O'Grady foregrounds the Celtic origin of his story and, thus, also shows nationalism.

O'Grady gives Cú Chulainn a typical Irish appearance: "Then a boy stood out from the rest. He was freckled, and with red hair, and his voice was loud and fierce." (38). By making his readers associate Cú Chulainn, who was considered a hero, with an Irish stereotype, O'Grady conditioned him to be a national hero. He also describes and romanticises parts of the countryside: "That is the hill of Temair," answered Laeg, 'Tara's high citadel. Well may that city be beautiful, for the seat of Erin's high sovereignty is there. The man who holds it is Arch-King of all Erin." (141). By focusing on the positive and beautiful aspects of the country, O'Grady is attempting to (re-)create a feeling of pride for the native country and Irish nationality.

The text also romanticises fighting against the odds and a national feeling. For instance, when the champion of the Ulstermen, Fergus gives a speech calling on the Ulster branch to take over the entire island: "Let us conquer Banba wholly in all her green borders, and let the realms of Lir, which sustain no foot of man, be the limit of our sovereignty." (5).

According to Tymoczko, O'Grady uses an assimilating strategy in his rewriting of Cú Chulainn. O'Grady rewrites the life of Cú Chulainn in the form of an epic. The style seems similar to that of Homer and the warriors show chivalric traits. By referencing to these two traditions O'Grady attempts to place the life of Cú Chulainn in the canon and give him the same rank as heroes, like King Arthur or Achilles. To emphasise this new position of the story, O'Grady uses quotes from Homer, Byron, Shelley and Milton as subtitles for his chapters: "Chapter IX The Champion and the King 'Sing, O Muse, the destructive wrath of Achilles, son of Peleus, which brought countless woes upon the Achaeans.' – Homer." (66).

O'Grady clearly states that his aim in writing the book is to rewrite Irish heroic history in an understandable way for a non-scholarly audience. He achieves this by rewriting the story as an epic and comparing the Celtic warrior culture with the Medieval chivalric culture which the audience will be more familiar with. In this way O'Grady, thus, uses an assimilating

strategy, he does however use references to the Irish national heritage. These references are the main evidence for nationalism in the story, together with the use of the Irish stereotype in connection to Cú Chulainn. The work also seems to promote courage and nationalism on story level.

Lady Augusta Gregory – *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*

Lady Augusta Gregory was an Anglo-Irish widow of an estate owner in the West of Ireland. When her husband died, she and her son took up the challenge of learning Irish. In 1896 she met William Butler Yeats (Gregory 7). They became friends and through Yeats Lady Gregory became acquainted with members from the Gaelic League. It was not long till she became an active member of the League. She started collecting folktales from around her estate. When Yeats was asked to translate Cu Chulainn's life, but refused due to his personal projects, Lady Gregory took up the challenge. Lady Gregory was a supporter of Irish nationalism. Not in an aggressive political way, but as an admirer of the Irish language and culture. Unlike O'Grady the choice of subject for Lady Gregory was not a personal one. The request for this work came from the Gaelic League. Lady Gregory's choice to follow shows her commitment to the League and its cause to promote the knowledge of the Irish heritage.

Lady Gregory wanted to write an accurate version of the life of Cú Chulainn. She thought that previous translations and adaptations were either not faithful to the original manuscripts or were difficult to understand. O'Grady's historical novels about Cú Chulainn would fall into the first category. She wanted to stay true to the manuscripts while making the text available to a broader public. In the preface her method is described as "to take the best of the stories, or whatever parts of each will fit best to one another, and in that way to give a fair account of Cuchulain's life and death." (5). Besides this desire to write a proper and understandable translation of the life of Cú Chulainn, Lady Gregory was also concerned with the translation giving offence to certain readers. The original stories about Cú Chulainn are very

violent and contain certain sexual references that would not have been appreciated in the late nineteenth century. To avoid offence Lady Gregory changed some of the episodes. Lady Gregory's final aim was to create a translation that would feel like a folktale. To achieve this, she decided to write in Kiltartan idiom, which is the accent that originates from her own estate in the West of Ireland (Coole). At first the publisher, John Murray, sent Gregory's manuscript back and asked her to change the idiom to make it more appropriate for an English market. Lady Gregory refused and eventually John Murray came around. The work was published in Hiberno-English. The fact that Lady Gregory refused to change the idiom, shows how concerned she was with publishing a work that she thought would be true to the original. Lady Gregory's nationalism can, thus, be seen in her concern with the faithfulness to the original Irish text.

The first edition of *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* was bound in a green cover. The cover displayed a Celtic design which foregrounded the Irish nationalist content. The book was firstly published in 1902 (only eight years after the first publication of O'Grady's *The Coming of Cuculain*). It includes a dedication to the Kiltartan people written by Lady Gregory herself and a preface written by Yeats. He was often seen as one of the leading figures in the Gaelic Revival movement after the publishing of *Celtic Twilight* in 1893. His preface to the book is very positive and describe the book as: "the best thing that has come out of Ireland in my time." (11). Yeats explains why this book is what the Irish market was missing. The enthusiasm of Yeats, who himself was a nationalist as well hints at the nationalism of the work. Just like Lady Gregory Yeats was a supporter of Irish nationalism in the way of an admirer more than a politician. After the politicisation of the Gaelic League, Yeats broke off contact with the League, because he believed they now only aimed at publishing nationalist propaganda works.

Tymoczko states that both O'Grady and Gregory are only focused on transferring the content of the stories from the life of Cú Chulainn, and do not concern themselves with

transferring the form of the Old Irish texts. In a way I would have to agree since Lady Gregory does reform the structure of the stories in the style of a folk tale. This, however would sooner be a sign of her dialectical strategy in translating the life of Cú Chulainn in English. Gregory attempts to make the work better understandable for an English audience without changing the stories too much. In this observation I, however, think that Tymoczko does not give Gregory enough credit for the use of the Kiltartan idiom. The use of this idiom ensures that Gregory uses many grammatical constructions which are typical for the Irish language (and, thus, have the same form as the original text in the manuscript would have). For instance: “I swear by the gods my people swear by” (86). This is a typical exclamation in Old Irish. Another example can be found in numerals. Instead of saying one hundred and fifty young men, Lady Gregory describes: “three times fifty other young men” (81). This grammatical construction originates from the Irish numerical system. Even though, the loss of poetry, which is also present in the original manuscript, I would thus argue that Lady Gregory is concerned with the transferring of the Old Irish form of the text. Especially since Lady Gregory also refuses to change the Kiltartan idiom when asked to do so by her publisher.

The text references to Irish culture in more ways, which show her dialectical strategy. For instance, Lady Gregory leaves several difficult Old Irish words untranslated. In the chapter “Bricriu’s Feast” Lady Gregory uses the word “*geasa*” (60). The concept of the *geiss* is original to the Irish culture and is often translated with curse. The concept of the *geiss* has posed many problems for translators, because the target cultures often do not have an equivalent concept (Tymoczko 169). Lady Gregory chooses to use the untranslated Old Irish word in her work and gives a similar English word, to explain the concept: “I put *geasa*, that is, bonds, on you,” (60). In this way Lady Gregory ensures that the audience becomes familiar with the Old Irish concepts instead of just giving them an English concept that they will be more familiar with. Furthermore, Gregory takes over some typical aspects of Celtic literature, like the explanation

of place-names. Many Old Irish place names had an explanation in myth. These explanations were a big part of storytelling in Irish culture. Lady Gregory uses these explanations in her work as well: “And it is from that the place was called Magh-mucrimha, the Plain of Swine-counting.” (123). These textual references to the Old Irish original are used to teach the reader about the Irish heritage, which Lady Gregory and Yeats agreed the people knew too little of. This dialectical strategy in reworking the life of Cú Chulainn shows nationalism because the writer attempts to (re-)create Irish culture in an understandable way for an Irish audience, that is no longer familiar with their own heritage.

Besides these textual references Lady Gregory has also inserted some characters explicitly talking about the importance of Ireland and the Irish heritage. In the chapter Fate of the Sons of Usnach Naoise, one of the main characters is forced to leave Ireland, because he has wooed Deirdre, the woman who was meant for Conchobar, the king of Ulster. When a messenger comes to tell him that he should leave Ireland and sail for Scotland to save himself from the wrath of Conchobar, Naoise says: “for Ireland is dearer to myself than Alban, though I would get more in Alban than in Ireland.” (102). Naoise shows here a kind of nationalism that Lady Gregory supports, namely a nationalism that is not political, but comes forth from a feeling of pride about the Irish heritage.

Conclusion

In the first chapter, we could see that there is a complex relationship between politics and the Celtic cultural revival. Some academics and sources, like for instance Maria Tymoczko, claim that the Celtic cultural revival was one of the main reasons that military action was taken in the early twentieth century and that the movement is, thus, directly responsible for Irish independence (15). When one starts to study the subject it however becomes clear that this relationship is more complex. The late nineteenth century was a turbulent time in Ireland. The country was politically divided in groups supporting and opposing independence. It seems that most writers and artists involved in the initial creation of national movements, like the Gaelic League, did not have political aims. The motivation for this nationalism was not political to begin with. The movements were meant to (re-)create an Irish national identity and give the Irish people back pride for their own heritage. The political influence on the Celtic cultural revival starts around the turn of the century. After the disgrace of Parnell, achieving independence or Home Rule through political means seemed impossible. The Celtic cultural revival, however, kept on influencing the public. At this point in time political groups, like the IRB and Fenians, started to use the cultural revival to spread their message. Some writers and artists had no problem with the political influence on their work. Others, like Yeats refused to produce work for the Gaelic League any longer. The political influence into movements like the Gaelic League is something that will need more research. There have been studies into the different forces at play before, but I would argue that now more than a century after the Easter Rising, more objective research will be possible.

Like the political influence on the Celtic cultural revival, the relationship between nationalism and children's literature is often a controversial one. It is often difficult for the public to see the difference between children's literature as a tool to teach children values or as a tool for indoctrination. I would argue that aspects of for instance nationalism are not different

from other values that we teach our children. During my research, it became apparent that there are many case studies that look at the connection between nationalism and children's literature (like the studies from Róna nic Congáil), but there is no theory available that describes how the two are connected. I would press that there is need for further research into nationalism in children's literature. It will be interesting to see what forces influence children's literature. The educational purpose of children's literature is one that has been established by many, like Peter Hunt and Matthew Grenby. Now it has been established it is necessary to determine the ways in which educational aspect of children's literature was and is used.

In the second chapter, I determined that both *The Coming of Cuculain* and *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* can be considered as children's literature because they were used as educational texts in schools. This definition, however, becomes problematised because works like the *Odyssey* from Homer were also used in schools. Are these now also children's literature? I would not attempt to argue that. The status of the texts used in this thesis as children's literature can be challenged on many grounds. In the case of Lady Gregory, I would like to argue that it is shown in the introduction that she kept children in mind in the writing of her work. For O'Grady, no such evidence is available. Even though the status of children's literature for these works may be controversial, I think there are interesting insights when reading works like these as children's literature. Works like these have an ambiguous character and are often aimed at both adults and children. For this reason, it is useful to analyse them as both adult fiction and children's literature.

In the final chapter, this thesis showed how both O'Grady and Lady Gregory used nationalism in their retelling of the life of Cú Chulainn. Even though both had the aim to rewrite the life of Cú Chulainn in a way that it would be understandable for a non-scholarly audience, they both use a different approach. O'Grady used an assimilation strategy and attempted to give Cú Chulainn a heroic reputation that was similar to the Ancient Greek heroes like Achilles. By

rewriting the story of Cú Chulainn in the style of an epic with knights and chivalric manners, O'Grady changed the story and text vastly. Even though he made these changes he also put several references to Irish heritage in his text, like the use of Irish words and concepts. Even though O'Grady made major changes in his rewriting a message of nationalism can still be seen. O'Grady wanted to elevate the status of the Cú Chulainn story and make it popular by transforming it in a way that would be understandable to the public. Lady Gregory, however, attempts to change the original stories as little as possible. Her work can, thus, be regarded as a literary translation rather than an adaptation of the life of Cú Chulainn. According to Tymoczko, Lady Gregory is only concerned with transferring the content of the old stories, but her use of the Kiltartan idiom shows that she was indeed concerned with transferring the Old Irish form as well. She attempts to show the Celtic heroic culture from the life of Cú Chulainn in all its glory. The work she creates is readable for both scholars, who are trying to understand the Old Irish versions of these stories as non-scholars, who enjoy reading about the Irish heroic age. This is a result of her choice for a dialectical strategy.

The introduction of this thesis states that it will research how these two texts express nationalism with the use of the stories about the life of Cú Chulainn and his character. The character of Cú Chulainn has, however, gotten little attention in the close reading of the texts. It becomes clear that O'Grady connects the character of Cú Chulainn to an Irish stereotype, but no such thing can be seen in Lady Gregory's text. I, thus, conclude that she does not use Cú Chulainn's character as a national hero, but rather uses his stories as national heritage. At the time when Lady Gregory was writing Cú Chulainn was already established as a national hero, by the work of O'Grady. It was unnecessary for her to present Cú Chulainn as a national hero. To conclude we can, thus, say that even though Lady Gregory clearly thought that she was improving on the existing translations and retellings of the life of Cú Chulainn she was indebted

to O'Grady for establishing the character of Cú Chulainn as a national hero in both his historical and literary works.

The conclusion of this thesis is rather paradoxical. We've seen that both O'Grady and Lady Gregory show Irish nationalism in their texts. By transforming Cú Chulainn and his stories into an epic, O'Grady improves the hierarchical status of the hero and his stories. This makes his work very useful for Irish nationalist movements attempting to spread nationalism. While doing this O'Grady, however steps further away from the original manuscripts than Lady Gregory. Even though her work is more true to the original texts, it is less useful for nationalist movements. The reason for this will have to be determined in later studies looking into the audience reception of the works.

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