More Than A Woman To Me:

A comparison of female personifications of Ireland in the late nineteenth century

Jet Nitsche

Student Number: 6230024

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Supervisor: Milica Trakilovic

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Nitsche, 6230024

Summary

From 1801 to 1922 Ireland occupied a specific position in the British Empire under a law called the Act of Union. The Act of Union came into being because of the Irish rebellion of 1798 and did not address the religious and cultural oppression that majority Catholic Ireland suffered at the hands of Protestant England. Starting with the 1798 rebellion and blossoming after the potato famine of 1849, Irish nationalism became a force to be reckoned with, eventually ending in the establishment of the independent Irish Free State.

During the time of conflict, people from each side sought effective ways to spread their beliefs and encourage others to choose their side. Many artists relied on symbolic imagery that was instantly recognizable and rousing. Goddesses based on Celtic mythology had represented Ireland for centuries (Martin 2003, 34) and depictions of young, sensual and inviting girls marked the English view of the Irish lands. These female figures, essentialized in the figure of Hibernia, represented Ireland while masculine and animalistic figures represented the Irish as a race (Innes 1994, 6). This view was problematized by Irish nationalists who reimagined Irish women as pious and pure mothers committed to the Church and the Irish state. This in turn allowed for the 'sons of Mother Ireland' to reaffirm their manhood by banishing the male colonizer and "restoring her to her youthful beauty" (Innes 1994, 10).

Both of these personifications represent a specific idea of the norms and values of the Irish nation as well as the role women are allowed to play in the construction of that nation. Through the analysis of an English cartoon using Hibernia to criticize the Irish nationalists and a play written by prominent Irish poet W.B. Yeats aimed at mobilizing young Irishmen to the nationalist cause, I argue that female figures were employed by both sides of the conflict to entice men to fight, either for a romanticized wife or a dishonored mother. Additionally, I argue, these glorified depictions solidified the positions women (and to a certain extend men) were allowed to occupy in society as living symbols of the Irish nation.

Introduction

On April 22 2020, Tourism Ireland's YouTube channel Discover Ireland uploaded a video titled '*I will return | Fill your heart with Ireland'*. This 50-second video combines scenic footage of Ireland's natural wonders with a poem recited by a sensual male voice. The video starts with the sentence "I will return into her arms, gently into the fold. To see her waters and her hills and all the beauty she beholds" (Discover Ireland, 2020). Throughout this video, the Irish country is referred to with female pronouns and complimented on her incredible beauty. As I will show in this thesis, the imagining of Ireland as female has a long history that, as evidenced by this video, still influences the way many people see the country today.

Additionally, the female personification of Ireland has had a huge effect on the lives of women in Ireland. In the official Irish constitution established in 1937, women were referred to as mothers who needed to be "confined to their duties in the home" (*Bunreacht na hEireann; Constitution of Ireland*, quoted in Lehner 2010, 6). The emphasis on women's duties as mothers can be linked to the nationalist movement in Ireland that was deeply intertwined with Catholicism, and made the religion itself a political stance (English 2011, 448). After gaining independence in 1922, the Irish Free State was established which set a precedent for the highly conservative government that would continue to influence the freedoms and agency of women for decades to come. Elizabeth Francis Martin explains that "the appropriate role for women was to provide a good home for propagating the Irish family and to impart to her children the moral and nationalist traditions" (2003, 32). The woman was to put the achievements of her children and her country before her own, and as the literal "vessel of her race" (Martin 2003, 32) her duty as mother and wife eclipsed all others.

The imagery of Irish women as mothers was originally a form of anti-colonial counter protest. In the plethora of Celtic folk tales that have become synonymous with the Irish national identity, women were frequently depicted as warriors, with a fierceness and sexual drive that rivaled that of their male allies and opponents. As was the case with iconic mythological figures such as Cu Chulainn, these women achieved supernatural status: "the most powerful female figures of early Irish literature were hardly women at all but goddesses, numerous abstracts in sagas and myths who signified war with its terrors and exhilarations" (Perry Curtis Jr. 1998-1999, 72). When the English colonized Ireland, these warrior women were sanitized and pacified into a young, virginal girl bearing the name Hibernia. She became the English ideal of the Irish woman: beautiful, sensual and ready to be civilized through marriage to an Englishman.

In an attempt to subvert this image, Irish nationalists began to portray Ireland as a mother who had been wronged by a male outside force. Arguably the most famous iteration of this new figure was Cathleen Ni Houlihan, in the play of the same name written by William Butler Yeats. Yeats was part of a group called the Irish Literary Theatre which during the late nineteenth century focused on portraying the 'real' Ireland in opposition to the representations of Irishness often staged by English plays (Dean 2014, 71). With the emergence of Postcolonial Studies in the 1980s came an interest in Ireland as a former colony and a new way of analyzing and appreciating Yeats. One of his admirers was Edward Said, who describes him as an "indisputably great *national* poet who articulates the experiences, the aspirations, and the vision of a people suffering under the dominion of an offshore power" (1990, 69). If we adhere to this vision then, that Yeats had captured the zeitgeist of the Irish people, a comparison between Cathleen and Hibernia as representations of Ireland from two different sides can tell us something about how the Irish national identity was formed through these figures.

For my research, I will therefore focus on the figures of Hibernia and Cathleen ni Houlihan in their relation to Irish nationalism, to answer the question: how is the Irish national identity constructed by the female personifications Hibernia and Cathleen Ni Houlihan and vice versa? I will do this by answering the following subquestions: How was the figure of Hibernia portrayed in cartoons produced by London-based magazine *Punch;* How was the nationalist message conveyed through the figure of Cathleen ni Houlihan in the play and finally how do these two figures compare in their role as embodiment of the Irish nation. Both of these figures have been studied by scholars in the past but there has not been a true comparison drawn between them, nor have they truly been analyzed from a postcolonial perspective. Thus, that is the main intervention this thesis is attempting to make.

Theoretical Framework

For my theoretical framework, I will rely on several theories surrounding the concepts of culture, representation, semiotics and discourse. These are, especially representation and culture, broad concepts that can be defined and interpreted in many different ways. It is therefore necessary for me to clearly state the way in which I will be taking them from this broader abstract level to a specific and detailed analysis. The concepts of culture and representation will be explained here, whereas semiotics and discourse can be found under methodology. To do this, I have chosen to base my definitions on Stuart Hall's writing in his 1997 book *Representation*. Hall's work on the study of cultural products and the making of meaning has been influential in many different fields, including that of gender studies. In this thesis I am analyzing and comparing two forms of cultural products. To do this, I must first establish the definition of culture.

As Hall explains in *Representation*, the definition of culture has been contested in the human and social sciences for a long time and the concept has gone through a series of 'turns' (2003, 2). Indeed, the term 'culture' has been morphed, broadened and narrowed again by many different people, who have used it to express many different things. In his text, Hall defines culture as follows:

> Culture, it is argued, is not so much a set of *things* – novels and paintings or TV programmes and comics – as a process, a set of *practices*. Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings – 'the giving and taking of meaning' – between the members of a society or group (2003, 2).

Here, Hall remarks on an essential aspect of culture: the production of meaning which is shared by members of a specific group. An important aspect of this is that meanings have regulatory power; they shape the norms and values of a given group. This makes the meaning-making process all the more inviting to those who seek to control others and their ideas (Hall 2003, 4). In other words, culture is a common language spoken and understood between certain people, and with this has the power to regulate, include and exclude. This exclusionary power is of great importance when looking at practices of nation building and representation. When a country is represented as a white, Christian woman for example, this becomes the standard. Anything other can be seen as an outsider, not inherently part of the nation.

Similarly, when people of a different race are continuously represented as savage or beastlike, this works to exclude them from the 'sophisticated' race. This same gate-keeping happens at the physical boundaries of a nation.

Turning to representation, then, Hall talks of 'systems of representation' which function the same way languages do (2003, 4). Language in this context is more than just verbal communication: it also includes imagery, sounds, facial expressions and body language. These are all ways through which we communicate and produce meaning, using a word, image or expression to represent a thought, feeling or an idea. These elements are in turn referred to as symbols or signs, carrying ideas and feelings from one person to another. This language, or system of representation, is crucial to creating a national identity. Hall explains it as such:

> Representation, here, is closely tied up with both identity and knowledge. Indeed, it is difficult to know what 'being English', or indeed French, German, South African or Japanese, *means* outside of all the ways in which our ideas and images of national identity or national cultures have been represented. Without these 'signifying' systems, we could not take on such identities (or indeed reject them) and consequently could not build up or sustain that common 'life-world' which we call a culture (2003, 5).

It is undeniable now that discussing how culture and representation function in society is of great importance when analyzing nationalist personifications and the nation-building process in general. Before doing that, however, I will illustrate how I approach the topic of nationalism and nation.

Throughout this thesis, Benedict Anderson's theory of nationalism as an imagined community will be the angle from which I approach the nation. He uses the term 'imagined' because most citizens of a country will never meet all of their follow citizens, yet they exist together in the mind of each individual member. It is therefore a 'community', because "the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 2006, 7). This comradeship is seen as inherent because two people of a nation supposedly share the same culture. As Hall explained, culture is communicated between members of a certain group, thereby connecting them on the grounds of mutual understanding. This shared culture then is the basis for the feeling of belonging to the same community.

Furthermore, Anderson's theory approaches nationalism as a cultural artefact rather than an ideology or political leaning. This means that it can be studied within its historical context, that is has been subject to change over the course of centuries and most importantly, that it is not given or natural but came to be through human creation. Although Anderson's approach to the nationalist project is revolutionary in its framework and very useful for this thesis, it is severely lacking in its acknowledgement of the role gender plays in the production of nations.

To fill this gap, I am using Nira Yuval-Davis' book *Gender & Nation*, one that has inspired many (including myself) to look at the relationship between nationalism and gender. She shows that women have often been excluded from nationalist analyses because they existed within the private sphere, and nationalist projects took place in the public sphere (2008, 2). Yuval-Davis problematizes this assumption by, for example, showing that women were vital to national reproduction due to their role as mothers. Furthermore, she shows that a gendered analysis goes beyond including women's stories, and involves studying the roles of both men and women in conjunction. She argues that "constructions of nationhood usually involve specific notions of both 'manhood' and 'womanhood'" (2008, 1). Although this thesis will focus on female personifications, it is important to note that the nation requires action from both men and women in different ways, and this affects the way each is represented.

Additionally, Yuval-Davis theorizes that the construction of a nation happens on three different levels, indicated by the terms Volknation, Kulturnation and Staatnation (2008, 21). This thesis operates on the level of Kulturnation which focuses on the cultural aspects of a nation, such as language and customs. As explained before, the members of the imagined community share a common culture that connects them. This common culture or identity became identified with national symbols that represented it.

Non-verbal symbols were often used to spread messages quickly, as many Europeans in the nineteenth century were illiterate and thus had to understand what was being communicated through visuals only (Mosse 1982, 223). This meant that big institutions or abstract concepts, like nations, were often simplified into easily recognizable symbols. These symbols, as Peter Alter explains in his study of Irish nationalist symbols, were often created spontaneously by the people in moments of revolution and were later justified as having been inspired by cultural traditions (1974, 105). National symbols, as a result, are not static but are capable of change and can carry different meanings depending on their context (Alter 1974, 121). This symbolic quality was not just reserved for material imagery, like a flag or an instrument, but especially in cartoons was often anthropomorphized. George Mosse refers to this as the "sexual dimension" (1982, 223) of nationalism. An ideal human body, often

stereotypically female, came to represent the beauty of the nation. However female symbols, or even real women in their daily lives, were more than just symbols of sexuality and beauty. In her work *Gender & Nation*, Yuval-Davis explains that: "Women especially are often required to carry [the] 'burden of representation', as they are constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour, both personally and collectively" (2008, 45). So in addition to the sexual dimension of the nation, women had to embody the nation and its collective spirit, norms and values.

As explained in the introduction, I have chosen to focus on two female symbols: Hibernia and Cathleen ni Houlihan. Both of these figures have been studied by various academics before, however, they have not been compared to each other in the gendered and nationalist way I am applying here. Hibernia has been studied mainly as a figure within art history (Martin 2003 and Perry Curtis Jr. 1998-1999), where the main focus remained on her portrayal in paintings throughout different centuries. Similarly, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* has primarily been compared to other works of literature from the same era, with analyses ranging from a supernatural reading (Harris 1996) to a comparative study of family romance as national allegories (Chadwick 1986). Hibernia and Cathleen have previously met in a comparative analysis of Irish female symbols and African female symbols (Innes 1994) but were not compared to each other, nor placed in their nationalist context. This is thus where my research adds to the contemporary academic debate, by emphasizing Hibernia and Cathleen's role in the creation of the Irish national identity and the consequences this brought forth for the men and women of Ireland.

It is important to acknowledge that I approach the question of gender in the figures of Hibernia and Cathleen Ni Houlihan from an intersectional perspective. Yuval-Davis explains this approach as such: "gender, ethnicity and class, although with different ontological bases and separate discourses, are intermeshed in each other and articulated by each other in concrete social relations" (2008, 7). The question of race with regards to the Irish is one that has a long, heavily debated history which goes beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I recognize that it is at play in the historical period discussed in this thesis, and remains of great value to any intersectional analysis of Ireland during its build up to independence.

Building on Yuval-Davis' introduction of gender analysis into the nationalist arena, I will also bring a postcolonial point of view to nationalism as explained by John McLeod in his book *Beginning Postcolonialism*. I include this not just because factually Ireland was a colony of the British Empire until 1922, but because national identity functions in a particular way when a people has been oppressed for centuries. It becomes more than a will to establish a

national consciousness within the inhabitants: there is a real fight against a real enemy that needs to take place. McLeod, partially quoting Tamara Sivanandan, explains that:

> Anti-colonial nationalism historically functioned as an instrument of cultural resistance against a racist colonial discourse which had long denied all cultural value to its subject people, claiming them culturally incapable, therefore, of ruling themselves in the modern world (2010, 90).

As illustrated before, a common culture is paramount to the functioning of a nationalist project, and it is unsurprising that when a people's cultural value has been denied by an oppressor, it is this very culture that strengthens the resistance. McLeod goes on to elaborate why nationalism was able to take hold so strongly in colonized places:

> Historically, the myth of the nation has proved highly potent and productive in forging effective resistance to colonialism. It was popular with a variety of independence movements because it served many of their intellectuals and leaders as a valuable ideal behind which anti-colonial endeavors could collect and unite (2010, 90).

McLeod uses the phrase 'the myth of the nation' here because it should be acknowledged that, as Anderson explains, the nation is imagined and therefore mythical. This also means that there is no one definition of nationalism, the same way that there is not one universal struggle against colonialism. Each colony had its own circumstances that influenced their individual campaign against oppression. This does not mean that there are no similarities to be found between various anti-colonial efforts, but rather that the differences should be recognized. McLeod specifies that "while many anti-colonial nationalist movements drew inspiration from each other, the cultural and historical specifics of each struggle meant that the 'derivative discourse' of nationalism was rendered different in each case" (2008, 91). So as I approach Ireland with a background in postcolonial theory, I recognize that its specific situation was unique and therefore its definition of nationalism was also formed in a way that reflected its long colonial history and struggle for independence.

This full theoretical framework allows me to comment on metaphors or symbols of nationalism, gender and race in my analysis of political cartoons including the Irish Hibernia and the play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. Through approaching both of these 'texts' as cultural products constructed under nationalism, I am able to show how they compare and contrast.

This could then in turn give way to a larger analysis, beyond the scope of this thesis, to the role of women in Ireland during the struggle for independence and today.

Methodology

The methods that I will primarily be using for this research are semiotics and discourse analysis. Semiotics was first introduced into the field of cultural studies by Roland Barthes in his work *Mythologies* ([1957] 1987). It is, in short, the study of signs and their function as vehicles of meaning (Hall 2003, 6). It works on a denotative level and a connotative level. The denotative level examines what is factually being shown or said, for example a silhouette of a human figure wearing a skirt, whereas the connotative level then translates this to what we as speakers of a language associate this with, in this case a women's bathroom. These two levels together create what is known as the 'myth', which would in this case be that only people who we identify as women are allowed into this bathroom and anyone else entering it would be wrong. This could then be linked to an even bigger myth, such as that the categories of Man and Woman exist in the first place. This method is extremely useful when analyzing national symbols or personifications, as they have often been intentionally created to carry a specific message. Semiotics then can be applied both to a cartoon image as well as to the text of a play, as this includes descriptions of what a character is supposed to look like when viewed by an audience.

The second method that I will be applying is discourse analysis. In her text on discourse analysis, Rosalind Gill shows that there is not one 'discourse analysis', but many different styles that all function under the same name. They all intersect in "the rejection of the realist notion that language is simply a neutral means of reflecting or describing the world" (Gill 2000, 172). Hall recalls this approach to discourse analysis in his book *Representation*, and compares it to the semiotic approach. He defines discourses as "ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about […] a particular topic" (2003, 6). Although he acknowledges that the semiotic and discursive approach have similarities, he emphasizes that there are some major differences. He says the following:

> One important difference is that the *semiotic* approach is concerned with the *how* of representation, with how language produces meaning […] whereas the *discursive* approach is more concerned with the *effects and consequences* of representation – its 'politics'. It examines not only how language and representation produce meaning, but how knowledge which a particular discourse produces and connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are

represented, thought about, practices and studied. The emphasis in the *discursive* approach is always on the historical specificity of a particular form or 'regime' of representation" (Hall 2003, 6).

For my thesis, I am using these two approaches in tandem to show not just what is being represented by the figures of Hibernia and Cathleen Ni Houlihan, but also how that relates to power relations, hegemonic practices and eventually a national identity.

I will first apply a semiotic and discourse analysis by analyzing both the visual and textual elements of cartoons published by English magazine *Punch* around the end of the nineteenth century that responded to the unrest in Ireland. I will show that these elements rely on a sense of understanding within the target reader for their message to take hold. To do this, I must look at how the visual and the verbal work together in a time when many people could not read. They are primary sources, taken directly from the *Punch* online archives because they have the most complete collection of the images produced by the earlier editions of the magazine. I have chosen these cartoons because they were made at a time when Irish nationalism was at its peak, and harbor clear political affiliations. These images, of course, rely on the visual much more than on the textual. It is probable to expect that a visual analysis, based more in the semiotic approach, will be most relevant here.

For the play, however, I will rely more heavily on the textual aspects. In general, reading drama can be done in two ways: the play can be considered solely as a dramatic performance, or solely as a dramatic text (Montgomery et al 2013, 308). For my analysis of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* I will be using a combination of these two methods, through performing a close reading of the text as well as interpreting the stage directions and descriptions of costume and looks attributed to each character. A 'close reading' refers to the "process of interpreting or analyzing a written text" (Montgomery et al 2013, 352). Interpreting a written text through a close-reading can be seen as a form of discourse analysis. As explained above by both Gill and Hall, discourse analysis is often applied to an analysis of language. Through a combination of close-reading and discourse analysis I will highlight several phrases or sentences from the play that use specific words and their connotations to send a 'coded' message. This can be done through allegories or metaphors for example. I will show that although the play seems to be a simple family drama in a surface level analysis, it actually relies heavily on the symbolic narrative and the interpretation of the audience.

Hibernia in Punch cartoons

Female personifications of Ireland have a history that is nearly as tumultuous and plentiful as the history of the nation itself. Around 1720, the guild of Irish silversmiths adopted the 'maiden harp' as their hallmark. This image was that of a harp decorated with the top half of a woman, her face and breasts bare and prominent (Perry Curtis Jr. 1998-1999, 70). This woman became known as Hibernia, or Erin, names which were used interchangeably through the centuries. To pinpoint an exact starting point for these types of female depictions on Irish national symbols is not an easy task, and not the task I am undertaking in this thesis. My focus, rather, is on the specific way that the nation of Ireland was depicted in a female form around the turn of the 19th century.

The rise in increasingly militant forms of Irish nationalism posed a threat to the British government, and many British magazines illustrated their disdain for these nationalists. A way of reaching all levels of society that became significantly effective in the nineteenth century was the publishing of cartoons in magazines, newspaper and pamphlets. London-based magazine *Punch* which ran from 1841 to 2002 credit themselves with the invention of the cartoon as we define it today. Whether this claim holds true or not, *Punch* was one of the biggest magazines in the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century and published several cartoons concerning the political unrest in Ireland and labelled themselves as a "very British institution" (Punch Magazine, n.d.)

One such cartoon was published by *Punch* cartoonists John Tenniel in 1866, which can be seen below (figure 1). The cartoon is titled *The Fenian Pest*, referring to the Fenians, a group of Irish nationalists established in 1858 who were more militant in their call for a free Ireland than other groups had been before. Many English journalists ridiculed these men, not least because they were most popular among the working classes (Bew 2016, 93). The cartoon depicts Hibernia and Britannia, the female personification of England. Behind them is a mob of men, presumably the Fenians, shouting and carrying weapons. The text underneath reads: Hibernia. "O my dear sister, what *are* we to do with these troublesome people?" Britannia. "Try isolation first, my dear, and then-". Additionally, both Britannia and Hibernia have one of their feet on a sash that says 'rebellion'.

This portrayal of Britannia and Hibernia as sisters is one that was frequently used by those against Irish nationalism. Creating a familial relationship between the two symbols where Britannia functioned as the big sister asserts the power and dominance of England, simultaneously emphasizing the helplessness of Hibernia and therefore Ireland. As L. Perry

Curtis Jr. describes it, "when placed next to the dominatrix figure of Britannia, who is usually clad in her Pallas-Athene uniform of helmet, breast-plate, sword or spear, and shield, Hibernia seems all the more feminine and demure" (1998-1999, 77). This contrast can also be seen in figure 1. Britannia has donned her helmet and a piece of armor around her neck and chest, her fists are balled and her brow is furrowed into a stern look. Her stature is confident, powerful yet restrained. Hibernia on the other hand, is an image of fear and despair. She has turned herself away from the crowd, one arm around Britannia's waist while the other clutches her arm. Her dress reveals the outline of her leg, visible through the thin fabric of her dress, providing a wind-swept and mobile look contrasting Britannia's grounded stance. Her posture suggests she is literally running into her sister's arms seeking safety. Her hair is loosely tied into a bun, with flowing curls down her back and a crown of flowers on her head. This can be seen as a symbol of her natural maidenhood, young and innocent. She is not the polished warrior goddess that her sister is, but wild, untamed, and above all in need of rescue.

The text provided with the image includes similar references to Hibernia's powerlessness in the face of the Fenians. She does not ask her sister "what am *I* to do with these troublesome people?" but "what are *we* to do with these troublesome people?". Using the term 'troublesome people' to describe a group that is actively voicing concerns about their government's oppressive regime is demeaning at best. It does not recognize the Fenian movement as a true political uprising but as an annoyance. Labelling them as a 'pest' in the cartoon's title further supports the idea that they should be eradicated swiftly. Hibernia does not merely ask her sister for advice, but for her active participation in seeking an appropriate solution to this problem. Britannia's answer, "try isolation first, my dear, and then-", can be seen as a threat. She suggests isolation at first, but as if anticipating this will not be enough to silence the Fenians, adds an unspoken follow-up measure. It is up to the reader to imagine what this follow up measure will be, but from Britannia's fierce stance and angry facial expression it is unlikely this will be a peaceful action. Here the text and the image complement each other perfectly, and the cartoon is able to communicate its message verbally as well as non-verbally.

Figure 1.

THE FENIAN-PEST.

HIBERNIA. "O MY DEAR SISTER, WHAT *ARE* WE TO DO WITH THESE TROUBLESOME PEOPLE?"
BRITANNIA. "TRY ISOLATION FIRST, MY DEAR, AND THEN————"

If we take this iteration of Hibernia as the embodiment of her nation, Ireland is a young, wild nation in need of rescue and advice from England. *Punch* produced more cartoons that echoed this sentiment, with Hibernia continuously under assault by the aggressive Fenian men. This reflects a popular trope within nationalist symbols and discourse that is not contained to Ireland's case only. Often, the discourse revolves around the notion of rape, literally or figuratively. Through an analysis of racism and sexuality, Yuval Davis describes the anxiety around the assault of 'pure' women by racial others as "structured around the common stereotype of the male stranger harassing, threatening or actually raping 'our women', whose honour has to be defended" (1997, 51). This theory is applicable here, though

I would argue it needs nuance to accurately reflect the case of the Irish racial other. In the nineteenth century, the Irish were seen as a race separate from other white races, in particular Irish men. They were depicted and described as "bestial and apelike" (Innes 1994, 6), a danger to Irish women, who were depicted as "virginal and helpless maidens" (Innes 1994, 6). This image of the demonic Irish man was immortalized in the form of the 'Irish Frankenstein', heavily inspired by another cartoon published by *Punch* in 1882*,* also by John Tenniel (figure 2). This means it is not a case of a racial other praying on 'our women', but of women needing to be rescued from the men of their own race. Hibernia, then, as the female personification of the country of Ireland, needs to be protected from her own citizens by the civilized English. Moreover, she is a pure and virginal girl who needs to be married (Unionized, literally, reflecting the Act of Union) to England before she is corrupted by the barbaric men of Ireland.

Figure 2.

THE IRISH FRANKENSTEIN.

"The baneful and blood-stained Monster * * * yet was it not my Master to the very extent that it was my Creature ? * * * Had I not breathed into it my own spirit ?" * * * (*Extract from the Works of* C. S. P-RN-LL, M.P.)

Cathleen Ni Houlihan

There was another personification of Ireland who was popular in the nineteenth century, and the most famous iteration of this figure is the character Cathleen Ni Houlihan in the play of the same name. Cathleen is an example of a trope called the Sean-Bhean Bhoct, which means poor old woman in Irish (Dean 2014, 76). At first glance, this woman seems to be the polar opposite of Hibernia. Although both are female, Hibernia is young and beautiful whereas Cathleen is old and poor. To see exactly how Cathleen was chosen to portray Ireland, I will give a short summary of the play and an analysis of the character of Cathleen.

The play is set in Killala, a small village in the North-West of Ireland in 1798, the year of the Irish Rebellion, in a cottage where the Gillane family is preparing the wedding of their son Michael. The preparations are interrupted by an old woman who visits the family and tells them of the horrible things that have happened to her at the hands of male intruders. Michael is overcome with emotion and answers the old woman's call to join her in her fight to recover her stolen property, thereby abandoning his family and his fiancé. As they disappear down the road, the old woman has magically transformed into a young girl.

I argue that the development of the relationship between Cathleen ni Houlihan[1] and Michael Gillane is the main metaphor used to convey the nationalist message of the play and I will highlight several passages from the play to support this claim. A moment before the Old Woman is welcomed into the house, the stage directions describe her movement, saying "*An* Old Woman *passes the window slowly, she looks at* Michael *as she passes*" (Yeats 2015, 41). This is the first act committed by the Old Woman in the play, prior to this she has only been supposedly seen coming down the road by two members of the family. The stage directions clearly state she looks at Michael: she literally has her eyes set on him. It is not a coincidence that he is the one who subsequently opens the door to let her in, thereby setting the rest of the play in motion. At first, Michael is interested but skeptical towards the woman; he is described as "*watching her curiously from the door*" (Yeats 2015, 41). The first change in their relationship comes when the woman, sitting by the fire, begins to sing about a man named Donough who was hanged in Galway. Where Michael was previously watching the woman from the door with suspicion, now he moves towards the woman and asks her what brought this man to his death. The Old Woman answers: "He died for love of me: many a man has died for love of me" (Yeats 2015, 45). While the rest of the family question the

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[1] Referred to as 'Old Woman' in the play

woman's sanity, Michael seems enticed by the woman's story. The Old Woman asks him to sit beside her and adds "Come nearer, nearer to me" (Yeats 2015, 45). As Michael physically moves nearer to the woman, he also metaphorically brings himself closer and closer to his country. He is no longer curiously watching from the door: the story of a glorious but regretful death has lured him to his country. As the woman gets up to leave she tells Michael she has "the hope of getting my beautiful fields back again; the hope of putting the strangers out of my house" (Yeats 2015, 48) and that she must go meet her friends who have promised to help her. Michael wants to go with her but his mother attempts to hold him back by reminding him of his wedding the next day. Michael, however, seems to have chosen the Old Woman over his own mother: he no longer listens to her. Delia, Michael's fiancé, runs into the house during the final scene which plays out as follows:

DELIA.

Michael, Michael! You won't leave me! You won't join the French, and we going to be married!

> *[She puts her arms about him, he turns towards her as if about to yield.]*

OLD WOMAN'S voice outside.
They shall be speaking for ever,
The people shall hear them for ever.

[MICHAEL breaks away from DELIA, stands for a second at the door, then rushes out, following the OLD WOMAN'S voice. BRIDGET[2] takes DELIA, who is crying silently, into her arms.]

PETER[3].

> *[To PATRICK, laying a hand on his arm.]*

Did you see an old woman going down the path?

PATRICK[4].

I did not, but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen. (Yeats 2015, 53).

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[2] Michael's mother.
[3] Michael's father.
[4] Michael's twelve-year old brother.

This final scene of the play functions not just as the climax of the story but as the completion of the relationship between Michael and Cathleen ni Houlihan. She has successfully convinced him to leave his mother and his fiancé behind to join her, knowing it could lead to his own demise. The love of these physical women is no longer enough for him; he has received a higher calling and is prepared to lay down his life for this old woman. This devotion then restores Cathleen to her youthful beauty.

The relationship between Cathleen ni Houlihan and Michael mimics that of the audience and the play. The audience here is represented by Michael, young men keeping busy with such trivial matters as family and marriage. The play is Cathleen ni Houlihan, the unexpected wake-up call that exists to motivate the young men to fight. Through the promise of ever-lasting glory and the love of a woman which surpasses that of a mother and a wife, Yeats calls to every young Irishman in the audience to follow Michael's example and join the nationalists in their fight for freedom.

Comparing Hibernia and Cathleen

Now that I have analyzed these two figures, I can compare them to see how they each fulfilled their role as representative of a nation. Looking at the figures of Hibernia and Cathleen, it is important to remember the historic context in which they were produced, who produced them and who their target demographic was. Ireland and England had differing ideas of what was the best future for Ireland and it showed in the propaganda they each produced. At first glance it is easy to see the differences between the English representation of Hibernia and the Irish personification Cathleen: one is beautiful and young, while the other is old and poor. One is unsure and naïve, while the other is confident and demanding. Similarities then remain, which is that they are both women, and they each need help and protection. Both of these depictions function as a call to action, and when agency lies with the men of the country (be they English or Irish), the female figure becomes the cause and the man the crusader.

Thinking back to Hall's explanation of how cultural representations function, it is important to look at how the relationship between these symbols and their audience shaped a larger national identity. Hall shows that national identity is created through certain signs or symbols, without which there would be no identity to take on (2005, 6). The dichotomy between Hibernia and Cathleen is a direct reflection of the agency, or lack thereof, to create a national identity. Hibernia as a national symbol was appropriated by the English to represent their relationship to Ireland which was part of their own national identity. Their practices as colonizer needed to be justified and to rephrase colonization as a rescue mission was an ideal way to do so. For Englishmen, the relationship between England and Ireland was sometimes referred to as an unconsummated marriage (Bew 2016, 76). Hibernia was supposed to represent a romantic interest, a beautiful, young lover who was under threat of being ruined by savage Irishmen and needed to be rescued by a good and civilized English gentleman.

The Irishmen, of course, did not see themselves as savage or brutal, nor did they see their country as a romantic interest. They had been stripped of their agency to create their own national identity and were continuously misrepresented with maleficent intent by their oppressor. For them, the female personification of Cathleen was an act of resistance that allowed them to change the way they had been symbolically represented. They were no longer aggressive beasts, but were now given the opportunity to see themselves as good, honest soldiers who could heal their country. Cathleen had to represent something that reflected their lives growing up in Ireland and their experiences with years of oppression and poverty. It should not represent a romantic connection, but a familial one: that of a good, maternal woman who has been wronged. The character of Cathleen herself emphasizes her

righteousness by referring to her sexual purity when she tells Michael "With all the lovers that brought me their love, I never set out the bed for any" (Yeats 2015, 47). She is not calling upon Michael's sexual interest in her, but upon his love for something that has cared for him since the day he was born; even more so perhaps than his own physical mother. Michael denies both his romantic love and his biological mother for a figure who, in the end, transcends these categories and yet embodies the most important characteristics of both. Cathleen ni Houlihan is thus a redemption story that purposefully denies the figure of Hibernia by creating a national symbol that juxtaposes her in every way.

Women, however, continue to lack the agency to create their own national identity. They are either identified as wife or mother, whichever is in accordance with the view of the dominant group in society. As I explained in the introduction, national liberation did not go hand in hand with women's emancipation: in fact, it was seen as a threat to the newly formed foundations of the Irish Free State (Martin 2003, 31). Where men had redefined themselves as glorious soldiers and heroes of the Motherland, the liberation of Ireland confined women to the home in the role of mother and their symbolic function as the vessel of the race. They were implored to pass down the Catholic religion and nationalist ideology as espoused by the Free State to their children, under the assumption that their fulfillment would come not from their personal achievements but that of their (male) children. In this way, Irish women were defined either as maidens in need of rescue, mothers in need of rescue, or eventually mothers content to stay at home to pass down the nationalist identity all as consequence of how men had symbolically identified them as personifications of their country.

Conclusion

The question I aimed to answer in this thesis was how is the Irish national identity constructed by the female personifications Hibernia and Cathleen Ni Houlihan and vice versa? At the basis of this question lay the assumption that national symbols are reflections of ideologies that are carefully crafted and curated to embody the identity of a nation. Moreover, when these national symbols become personified, they exercise a certain power that leads to direct consequences for the lives of the men and women who identify as or are perceived as part of that nation. This is to say, national personifications are not innocent.

There is a plethora of national personifications used by nation states that all have different histories and relationships to nationalism. I have chosen to focus on Ireland because of its unique position as a former colony of England that is often overlooked in discussions of postcolonial identity. Reasons for this mostly surround the reality that the Irish managed to assimilate themselves into the category 'white', as opposed to alternate racial others. This assimilation does not mean however that their previous 'othering' no longer influences Irish identity.

Through my analysis of two female characters who were associated with the Irish national identity, I have showed that their femaleness reveals how their male creator sees not just Ireland, but himself. I have showed the masculine character of both colonial power and colonized resistance. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, I have shown how nationalism and the process of obtaining liberation are gendered practices that, consequently, are inherently exclusionary towards those who do not embody the masculine standard.

The study of nationalism as a masculine practice that excluded and often imprisoned women was revolutionary, mostly due to the monumental work by George Mosse and Nira Yuval-Davis. They opened the nationalist arena to critiques of gender and sexuality and gave way to research like mine. There is still much research to be conducted in this field, concerning the function of gendered national personifications in different historical contexts but certainly also into their application today. Parallels could easily be drawn between the Irish woman in need of rescue from her bestial masculine counterparts and the discourse around Muslim women and men today, for example.

In any case, this thesis has added to the collection of research conducted into Irish nationalist symbols by comparing two prominent figures who had previously been studied in isolation, and has shown that there is still much to discover in this fascinating field.

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