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**INTO THE TWILIGHT:**  
**A VIEW ON *THE CELTIC TWILIGHT*, BY W. B. YEATS**

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UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL  
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Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso apresentado ao Instituto de Letras da UFRGS, como requisito parcial para obtenção do grau de Licenciada em Letras pela Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

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“I am certain that the water, the water of the seas and of lakes and of mist and rain, has  
all but made the Irish after its image.”

W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*

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As I wrote a few years ago, my life has not been the typical topic for a classic novel. Due to the dramatic forces of youth, I struggled to find what I truly wished to dedicate to. It turns out that until now I still encounter numerous things that I want to do, to study and to dream of. This work is not, to me, merely a written finalization of a course, but the result of years of study and search for myself.

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## RESUMO

Publicado em 1893 pelo escritor irlandês William Butler Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight* traz consigo releituras do folclore irlandês. Dentro do contexto do final do século XIX e das lutas políticas para romper a influência britânica na Irlanda, esta obra exerce um importante papel no *Irish Literary Revival*, movimento que buscava resgatar a cultura e a memória irlandesa, com o objetivo de estabelecer uma legítima cultura nacional. Desse modo, esta pesquisa visa identificar como *The Celtic Twilight* se insere nesse contexto e quais instâncias tornam a obra importante para o movimento nacionalista irlandês e para a obra de Yeats, analisando, no decorrer do trabalho, certos aspectos relevantes para a percepção da obra, como o contexto histórico e literário, as principais temáticas apresentadas pelo autor e de que forma a identidade irlandesa se manifesta no contexto da proposta poética de Yeats. Este trabalho se dá a partir de leitura e análise de pontos percebidos na obra e na bibliografia relacionada. Em conclusão, espera-se obter uma maior e melhor compreensão da importância de *The Celtic Twilight* não apenas no contexto do período e da obra de Yeats, mas também como uma obra que traz em si elementos da construção de uma identidade nacional.

**Palavras-chave:** 1. Literatura irlandesa; 2. *The Celtic Twilight*; 3. W. B. Yeats; 4. Tradição oral; 5. Folclore.

## ABSTRACT

*The Celtic Twilight*, published in 1893 by the Irish author William Butler Yeats, brings tales and retellings of Irish folklore. Considering the 19th-century context and the political conflicts to leave behind centuries of English domination, Yeats's book plays an important role in the Irish Revival, a movement that sought to reawaken Irish culture and memory, aiming at establishing a legitimate national identity. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to identify in what ways *The Celtic Twilight* fits into this context, and in what ways it is determinant in the body of Yeats' production. To do so, certain aspects of the book will be analysed, such as the historical and literary context, the main themes presented by the author, and how the Irish identity is manifested as part of the Poetics proposed by Yeats. Thus, the research unfolds through the reading and analysis of the tales and of the related theoretical bibliography. In the end, a broader and better understanding is meant to be obtained concerning importance of *The Celtic Twilight* not only in the historical context and in Yeats's career, but also in the shaping of a nation's identity.

**Keywords:** 1. Irish Literature; 2. *The Celtic Twilight*; 3. W. B. Yeats; 4. Oral tradition; 5. Folklore.



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## INTRODUCTION

From the time of its first inhabitants, since its first conquerors, Ireland has been seen as a land of magic. Not the kind of magic that comes from a divine source or any supernatural being, but rather a strong force that comes from nature. Ireland is known to the world as the “Emerald Island” because of its vast green fields, an image that is imprinted in each Irish heart. The sense of identity was present when difficult times came, when they lost their original language and their national memory as an effect of subjugation, or when the famine stroke forced many to cross the ocean to remain alive. Those who left kept their national identity and their sense of cultural belonging with them, printed in their souls. Ireland was never abandoned, either by those who moved far away or by those who stayed, resisting as they could the invasions, the domination, the famine, the revolutions. Ireland remains in the heart of every Irish man, each one in a particular way. This memory shall not be left in the past; it must be remembered, retold in many ways in different times so every single being will know what lies on that ground.

My first encounter with Ireland happened through James Joyce. Even though his amazing writing is a force in itself, it was not just that what made me so impressed with his work, but especially the object of his writing, in that specific situation, the Dubliners. The conflict between their legacy and the first signs of modernity, the same city depicted by different people, aroused something special in me. Through readings on Irish history and culture, I got in contact with myths and heroes still unknown to me up to that moment. What truly surprised me, after all, was the way many of these cultural aspects of Ireland would persevere amongst people and literary manifestations despite the historical and political occurrences of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the process of turning my impressions into an academic research, I found *The Celtic Twilight*, an almost obscure book published in 1893. Yeats was, up to that moment, to me, a known important figure of Ireland’s literature and history due to his poetry, plays and nationalistic involvements. However, after further research, it came to my senses *The Celtic Twilight* could be a beginning in terms of research on folklore and Irish studies.

The first impressions of the book were more related to an ethnographical essay than anything else. This idea was formed due to the reputation of the writer as an important figure in the Irish Literary Revival, and its characteristics as a collection of folk tales. However, as the

reading progressed, it was possible to perceive that the ethnography on the stories was mostly a background to an interpretation of what it meant to be Irish, a comment on the connections existing between the traditions from the past and what had remained of that in Yeats's time. These traditions were the basis for the Irish nationalism which would provide a "sense of depth in history" despite the idealization of its folk culture (COSTIGAN, 1973, p. 143).

Considering that, a few questions were raised in me, for instance, how possible was it to write about folklore in such a personal way, without providing details about the informants? And so, how was this truly related to Yeats's work, and in what way was the book inserted in its historical and political context of nationalism? In order to find the answers to those questions, I thought I should develop a panorama of the historical and literary background which enclose the book, to establish a better understanding of the context of its creation and its further outcomes. As a result, I hoped to find the keys to Yeats's proposal in *The Celtic Twilight*, not only in his poetics, but also in the context of his work, through an analysis of the tales contained in the book and the themes which are recurrent there.

To better organize the development of this research, the work is divided into two sections, named "Words from the Past" and "Into the Twilight". In the first, the contextual background is provided, placing *The Celtic Twilight* within the body of Yeats' production so as to clarify in what ways it is important for the development of Yeats' proposal. The second section is divided into two subdivisions named "Yeats and the Twilight" and "'The earth is only a little dust under our feet'". The objective in the first part is to explore Yeats's life and career in order to situate *The Celtic Twilight* in his works related to the criticism around it and further impressions carried out by the author. In "'The earth is only a little dust under our feet'" the purpose is to analyse the book through a selection of common themes such as supernatural creatures, places, ghosts, and others.

For this research, criticism on Yeats's work will be used, especially texts related to *The Celtic Twilight*. One of the critics is Gale Schricker (1982) who, in *A New Species of Man*, explores the poetic persona created by Yeats in his works. The author covers from the first writings, such as *The Celtic Twilight*, up to his last poems and establishes connections among them, pointing how similar or different they. A comprehension of the author's poetics is also the subject of Nicholas Grene (2008) in *Yeats's Poetic Codes*, where the author analyses the poetic resources used by Yeats. Another critic of a similar topic is Edward Hirsch (1981) who proposes, in "Coming out into the Light: W. B. Yeats's *The Celtic Twilight* (1893, 1902)," to analyse *The Celtic Twilight* not only in relation to Yeats's life and work but also to the specific content of the book. Many parts of the article seek to understand the reputation the book got

after its publication and in the course of Yeats's life, showing his responsibility in creating it. Considering that the basis for *The Celtic Twilight* is Irish oral tradition and folklore, the work on the oral tradition by Jan Vansina (1973), *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* will be used to obtain more knowledge on how the book stands in relation to the tradition of storytelling.

Whereas *The Celtic Twilight* is not part of the highlighted works of Yeats, it is important, in this research, to comprehend and analyse the book to settle a clearer idea of its position in the author's literary development. Also, taking into consideration the important historical context of its publication, it is relevant to establish connections between this historical background, previous works by other folklore collectors and writers, to understand in which forms Yeats collaborates in the formation of a sense of national identity.

## 1. WORDS FROM THE PAST

Ireland, or Éire, as the Gaelic language says, is an island located in the North Atlantic Ocean, separated from the Great Britain by the Irish Sea. According to the ancient *Leabar Gabála* (the *Book of Invasions*), the island was first inhabited by the Tuatha Dé Danann, “a superior race, semidivine in their arts of magic and wizardry” (CURTIS, 2002, p. 1) which lived in the land of Erin and were conquered by the three sons of Mileadh of Spain. Since then, this island has been, through the course of time, an object of conquest by many. Vikings, Normans, British, and before them the Celts and the Romans, all had Ireland as their “master prize” for impositions, exploration, and domination. The main course of events which resulted in the process of revolution and posterior independence, however, started much later than the first arrival of Henry II’s Normans in the twelfth century. It would take roughly another six hundred years until the idea of Ireland as a nation-state started to gain strength.

### 1.1. Historical Background

At the end of the eighteenth century, influenced by the French and American Revolutions, revolutionary groups such as the United Irishmen, the Catholic Committee, and the Whigs started to emerge in Ireland. Along with them prevailed a feeling of freedom from the hundreds of years of British dominance. Their main objective, then, was to obtain the establishment of a republic on the model of France and the United States, independent from Britain. At this moment, the main concerns were divided by Protestant and Catholic interests which had started to gain sectarian influence in the course of the years. The first manifestation of their claims started to be planned in the form of an insurrection at the end of 1797. As 1798 started, risings burst around the country without the planned effect despite a few successes in places such as Wexford. The waited and promised French help did not come in time due to Napoleon Bonaparte’s concerns focused on Egypt and by the beginning of the summer, the insurrection had lost its force. It is dated that at least 30,000 died during what became known later as the Rebellion of 1798. For many decades to come the wounded and dead in the risings all over the country would be symbols of the Irish nationalistic sentiment and a propelling towards rebellion.

Despite its unsuccessful outcome, the Rebellion brought to light the problems which up to that moment had been set aside. During his rule, the British Prime Minister, William Pitt, turned over to the Irish question and proposed the union between the Irish and British parliaments. According to his claims, this union would provide not only British investments in Ireland but also would eliminate Protestants' fears of Catholic emancipation, a long-discussed matter amongst the Protestant leaders in Ireland. In June 1800, the Act of Union passed during the parliamentary session of the Irish House of Commons. With it, Ireland officially became part of the United Kingdom, counting with 100 representative members of the total 658 in the British parliament and setting aside the six hundred years of Irish ruling over its own country at College Green (STATE, 2009). The Irish representativeness symbolized for the patriotic supporters, at that moment, that different from before, now all the Irish matters would set in the same spot as many others in the House of Commons.

After the Act, not much had changed in Ireland; the Protestants remained their sovereignty over the Catholic as landlords and other notorious positions in society. Their support over the Union had much to do with the fear of the Catholic emancipation which hovered the country. The Catholics, on the other hand, were not as organized as the Protestants despite representing a majority of the population. It is estimated that in 1834 Catholics composed 83% of the Irish population. Amongst them, it was also the majority of the rural population of the country. Then, rural life represented to Ireland the main setting of the organization, with its agricultural practices not having changed much since the seventeenth century. Its hierarchy was based on the size of the land each one possessed, going from 30 acres down to 5 or less. Those who possessed 5 or less were called "cottiers" and below them, there were the landless labourers and smallholders, who lived in complete poverty and represented one-half of the rural population in the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The rural population and so, the Catholics, were part of the realm of Daniel O'Connell's ideas. The Irish political leader was the creator of the Catholic Association, one of the first Catholic organisations in the country, and was part the House of Commons. O'Connell's agenda was mainly turned towards Catholic emancipation rules and as an irony, he himself could not be part of the parliament for being a Catholic. In 1829, Catholics still could not take up high offices, the Parliament, and many other high positions. In fact, up to that moment, Catholics could not even be educated in official schools, elevating the illiteracy levels in the country. With the introduction of a bill of Catholic emancipation by the Prime Minister Arthur Wellesley and Home Secretary Robert Peel in 1829, O'Connell could finally take his seat in

the Parliament and conduct for the following twelve years his policies of the emancipation of the Catholic and Ireland as whole through non-violent acts.

By the end of O’Connell’s career as a part of the parliament, Ireland had seen its rural population rise in numbers and in levels of poverty. For a long time, the main food source of most of the rural areas was the potato. The tuber grew throughout nine months of the year in most types of soil and under various states of the environment, essential qualities considering the conditions of life those people had. The state of three-quarters of the Irish population, the previous “cottiers” and other landless labourers who at that moment found themselves in the same conditions of poverty due to an act of the Parliament<sup>1</sup>, by 1840 was devastating. It is known that most suffered intensely with various diseases such as cholera and typhus, and with a poor nourishment, the numbers would only increase. So, it happens that in 1845, despite a longstanding wet weather, the potatoes’ crops seemed promising, but by the beginning of July the expectations were overcome by desperation. The potato blight, which had a strike in other European countries already, had arrived in Ireland.

Even though the country had suffered numerous blights in the past, the one which started in 1845 was the biggest. On its first year, the government’s measures and external aid to contain it were successful. However, 1846 would change that scenario. It is said by travellers around Ireland that through the course of weeks a whole plantation would completely rot. By then end of 1849, when the disease ceased, it is calculated that as many as 1 million died due to what was called “famine fever”. This was a merge between typhus and relapsing fever. People would die also from dysentery, hunger edema, scurvy, and infections caused by malnutrition and other related factors. To those who managed to survived, staying in Ireland was not a profitable option. It is estimated that more than 2 million Irish emigrated to different countries up to 1855 and another 1 million up to 1890 (STATE, 2009, p. 189). Their destinations were mainly the United States, Canada, England and in some cases, for the fortunate, New Zealand and Australia. The population of Ireland which by 1840 summed approximately 8.2 million people was reduced by its half by the end of the nineteenth century, never, up to these days, returning to its latter number.

The main consequences of the Great Famine, besides the massive emigration and death, were various. The patriotic sentiment which accompanied the beginning of the 1800’s remained strong despite Famine’s losses. Many of the emigrants formed in their destinations nationalist groups to maintain strong the fight for Irish emancipation. The Fenians, inspired by the

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<sup>1</sup> In 1829 the “40-shilling freehold franchise” was abolished, harming many of the arrangements made by the cottiers and landlords and causing to make many of them to be without any kind of land or tenancy.

mythological warriors, were founded in 1858 in Dublin with an American fellow based in New York. A few years ahead, they would become the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood (IRB), one of the responsible for the later risings and rebellions which led to the independence of the country in 1922. Different from O'Connell's non-violence ideals, the IRB, and other revolutionary groups thought that only by force they would finally thrive towards an independent Ireland.

The course of events which took place in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century was much influenced by the positioning the IRB and other leaders assumed and the British response to it. Two important Irish leaders, Michael Davitt and Charles Parnell, rose in this period. Davitt was a Fenian member who had close bonds with the American branch of the group. Alongside him, Parnell was elected to the Parliament in 1875 and advocated intensely for the Irish Home Rule. The acting Prime Minister at the time, William Gladstone, focused seriously on the Irish matter and decided for important land acts which would change the configuration of the rural apparatus and the landlord-tenants' relations. Scandals involving Parnell stroke a little before his death that and amongst his followers, many split into two different sides, the pro-Parnell and the con-Parnell. In 1891, after his death, however, the union feeling reached all and the Irish nationalism gained much force. Despite the lack of a new strong leader at that moment, to the nationalist movements, the sentiment of turning Ireland independent was not over; it was about to grow and reach other instances of society.



## 1.2. Literary and Cultural Background

By the beginning of the 1800s, it is estimated that half of the Irish population could speak Gaelic. After the Great Famine and scholar initiatives to promote the English rather than the Gaelic, these numbers were diminished to 600,000 out of 4 million people. With the Irish language, the folkloric music, and oral tradition lost their way in time and was about to die alongside with all the dead during the Famine. It seemed that the British impositions had finally thrived over Gaelic. However, amongst political forces, another one was about to gain power.

In the mid-nineteenth century, it started to rise in Ireland a cultural movement later called the Irish Revival. The movement does not have a specific date of birth, but a moment in time; the moment when the folk traditions and stories showed as put aside. The reasons for this were various and mostly related to the ideals which had been born in the first insurrections. Furthermore, they were largely influenced by the nationalist ideas which have started to grow in Europe at that moment. The Irish nationalism is considered different from others in Europe due to its delay to actually flourish. Most countries such as Poland and Italy had their nationalist development as the first political discussions started. In Ireland, these discussions emerged with the cultural movement towards the Gaelic language. According to Costigan, amongst the main characteristics of the Irish nationalism are “the development of a powerful mystique of the nation” and “involving a passionate quest for the origin of national roots in a remote past and an idealization of folk culture” (COSTIGAN, 1973, p. 143). These aspects are also part of the “identity *check-list*”,<sup>2</sup> which would be, according to Anne-Marie Thiesse, “the basis of all nation's representation”<sup>3</sup>, containing “ancestors, a history that would establish the continuity of the nation through the vicissitudes of history, a group of heroes, a language, cultural and historical monuments, a *lieux de mémoire* [realms of memory], a typical landscape, a folklore [...]”<sup>4</sup> (THIESSE, 2002, p. 8-9).

In a moment when official archives were understood as the main source for the writing of history, an idea that later would be questioned, Ireland needed its own registry of that past. Resistance to the British version of the country consisted of turning to the myths and ancient narratives not found in written but oral forms. The establishment of an “imagined community”, as Benedict Anderson (2006) says, passed by the retrieval of that folklore which made Ireland

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<sup>2</sup> Translated from Portuguese. Original: “*check-list* identitária”.

<sup>3</sup> Translated from Portuguese. Original: “É a matriz de todas as representações de uma nação”.

<sup>4</sup> Translated from Portuguese. Original: “Ancestrais fundadores, uma história que estabeleça a continuidade da nação através das vicissitudes da história, uma galeria de heróis, uma língua, monumentos culturais e históricos, lugares de memória, uma paisagem típica, um folclore [...]”.

so different from the other island. Thus, the question was not only establishing the concept of a national identity for the Irish but its naturalisation as something different from what had been the reality up to that moment. As Kelly (2006) says, the wish was an “Irish Ireland”. What was thought about the country until then started to be understood as an outsider’s vision, and at times, contrary to the Irish’s interests. It was seminal to them to build an *Irishness* in order to justify the autonomy or using their words, Home Rule, which they had been fighting for – a fight which later would convert into a separatist movement, culminating with the process of independence. Taking into consideration Yeats and other writers from the nineteenth century, it is possible to encounter all these characteristics intrinsically attached to their work in a way to build this notion of identity through folklore.

Along with the ideas of identity and nationalism, were created in Ireland the Gaelic Society of Dublin in 1807 and the Ibero-Celtic Society in 1818, “dedicated themselves to advancing knowledge of Ireland’s ancient traditions through study and publication of old Irish manuscripts” (STATE, 2009, p. 174). In these, many writers and intellectuals could produce material either published in English or in the Irish language. One of the first to produce works on folklore studies was Thomas Crofton Croker, a Cork antiquarian who published his folklore collections based on excursions around Ireland from 1812 to 1822. Croker published *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland, Legends of the Lakes; or Sayings and Doings at Killarney*, and other works. Throughout his writings, the author talks about Ireland with an almost curious tone, observing and making notes about every aspect of the peasantry everyday life. Karen Golightly (2007) mentions that Croker walks a line between a “straight colonialist approach” and “a native Irish attitude in his endeavours”, especially when he admits the differences between the English and Irish but also recognises the centuries of violence suffered by the Irish. Yeats talks about Croker in the compilation *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* saying that he did not take people seriously “and imagined the country as a humourist’s Arcadia” (YEATS, 1890, p. xv). Despite the various opinions about him and his work, T. Crofton Croker, as he became mostly known, ventured in something that not many had done before and published his writings in order to maintain it alive for prosperity.

In 1866 the folklorist Patrick Kennedy published his collection of Irish folklore: *Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts*. Despite having published another a few years earlier, this had the peculiarity of being considered the first collection of Irish folklore by an Irish peasant in English. Due to his experience and knowledge about the rural life, it was expected that the author would depict the peasantry in a closer way. However, he approaches collecting with the vision of an outsider, “an educated, urban Dubliner, who can edit and polish the stories for an

English and Anglo-Irish audience” (GOLIGHTLY, 2007, p. 38). Nevertheless, Kennedy is considered by many the first to capture completely the spirit of an oral tradition before the famine which would have been lost without his recordings. Jacobs (1990) mentions that the author retold the stories and changed from Gaelic to English in a way to preserve the dialect of County Wexford with a vigorous storytelling.

Such as Croker and Kennedy, Lady Jane Francesca Wilde is also an important author in Irish folklore. Her 1887's *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland*, was gathered through the notes that her late physician husband, Sir William Wilde, had left. Sir William collected most of what he had from his patients and from ventures in the countryside of County Galway and Mayo. Despite never having stepped close to the peasantry, Lady Wilde has many merits. She is considered the first woman to collect folklore in Ireland and reveals in her work her nationalist with sometimes marks of anti-English position and visions of Irish folklore as a way to achieve a unified Ireland. Such as previous authors, Wilde also puts herself at a distance from the peasantry, at times refereeing to them as a separate race.

With a different positioning than Lady Wilde, Douglas Hyde wrote about Ireland in the end of the nineteenth century as his birthplace and as a place where nationalist ideals had a place and could change the current situation of the country. Hyde published a long list of poems and articles in Gaelic and numerous books amongst the most famous are *Love Songs of Connacht* and *Leabhar Sgéulaigheachta*, not fully written in Gaelic but with most part of the texts in the language. His main concerns towards literature were mostly related to creating a national identity separated and distinct from the British. The author long advocated for the preservation of the Gaelic language, to make it a requirement for primary and secondary students in 1899, and helped to establish a national university, which nowadays is known as the National University of Ireland (NUI) and is associated with many universities around the country, for instance the University College Dublin and the University College Cork. Hyde also had a strong political involvement, being the president of the National Literary Society in 1892 and helping found the Gaelic League, an important group in the Irish Revival movement, in 1893. Moreover, after the establishment of the Free State in 1922, Hyde was a Senator and later, in 1937, he became the first President of Ireland under the 1937 Constitution.

Into another background and coming from the other side of the ocean, Jeremiah Curtin was the first American to record folklore in Ireland. With a large career in the translation from Polish into English, Curtin arrived in Ireland in 1871 as a representative from the *New York Sun* and collected from the peasantry mostly in the west of the country, such as County Galway, the Connemara, and the Aran Islands. The folklorist wrote three books on Irish folklore, *Myths and*

*Folk-Lore of Ireland* (1890), *Hero-Tales of Ireland* (1894), and *Tales of the Fairies and of the Ghost World: Collected from Oral Tradition in South-West Munster* (1895). Another posthumous one was published in 1942 named *Irish Folk-Tales*. Curtin focused, in his work, on the peasants' belief of the supernatural world and their conditions of life. He was also very much preoccupied with the linguistic aspects of the storytelling due to his background in linguistic studies. Though he does not assume a firm position against British influence in Ireland, Curtin provides a hint of his thoughts in the preface of *Myths and Folk-Lore of Ireland* saying that

Though in some countries of Europe the languages of the earlier inhabitants, and notably those of the Western Slays, are forced into inferior political positions, no language has been treated with such cruelty and insult by its enemies and with such reasonable indifference by the majority of the people to whom it belongs as the Gaelic (CURTIN, 1890, p. 9).

Despite the similarity in his way of understanding and presenting folk tradition with Kennedy and Croker, Curtin could see beyond the barrier of an outsider and comprehend the peculiarities that Ireland had been facing at that time.

Besides Lady Wilde, another important female writer from the nineteenth century is Lady Isabella Augusta Gregory. Born in Roxborough, County Galway, she was the daughter of a gentry family in the west of Ireland. Since childhood, she had much contact with various aspects of Irish folklore, perceiving a great enchantment and admiration for it. Most of the influence for it came from her nanny Mary Sheridan, who was a Gaelic speaker and taught a bit of the language and every sort of knowledge she had. Isabella Augusta married Sir William Gregory in 1880 and with it, became Lady Gregory. Her involvement with nationalist ideals started when in Egypt, Lady Gregory met Wilfrid Blunt, an English man who was engaged in the Egyptian nationalist cause and with whom later she would have an amorous involvement. Her folklore collections started mostly influenced by her fondness towards Irish folklore and as an adult, she fully learned Gaelic and the dialect of the Kiltartan, the region where she was born. Gregory says 1894 in her autobiography how much reading Yeats's *The Celtic Twilight* influenced her towards doing something similar.

The Sligo legends in that little book made me jealous for Galway, and the gathering of legends among my own neighbours became a chief interest and a great part of my work for many years to come. . . I know how barren one side of my life would have been without that poetry of the soil, those words and dreams and cadences of the people that helped me to give some echoed expression to that dragging driving force (GREGORY, 1974, p. 308-309).

Lady Gregory wrote many collections, being the largest one *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland*, published in 1920 due to twenty years of work and revision. The author also has an immense importance in Yeats's work for her protagonist role in the creation and development of the Irish Literary Theatre and later the Irish National Theatre Society in 1904 along with W. B. Yeats and John Millington Synge. Her work is not narrowed to folklore collections but extended to numerous plays and translations from Gaelic to English. Ultimately, Golightly mentions that Gregory's work shows an effort to create national identity to the Irish and that despite not influencing directly on the possibility of Home Rule, her collections created "a model for translation, dialect, folklore collecting and editing, and presentation of the Irish character as well as an immense level of production late in her life" (GOLIGHTLY, 2007, p. 191).

In their travels around the west of Ireland in 1897, Lady Gregory shared with Yeats much of her findings, furnishing him with valuable materials which later would become important parts of his writings. She is often mentioned by him in *The Celtic Twilight*, especially in the revised editions, and other works, showing how important she was to him as a respected folklorist and later as a friend. These collaborations would yield many books and plays in the years ahead, turning both essential characters in Ireland's literature and history.

## 2 “INTO THE TWILIGHT”

“Folk art is, indeed, the oldest of the aristocracies of thought, and because it refuses what is passing and trivial, the merely clever and pretty, as certainly as the vulgar and insincere, and because it has gathered into itself the simplest and most unforgettable thoughts of the generations, it is the soil where all great art is rooted.”

W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*

### 2.1. Yeats and the Twilight

Born in 1865 in Dublin, Yeats had a happy childhood, spending it divided between the greatness of London and the country life in the west of Ireland. Sligo, where he would go to stay with his mother’s relatives, the Pollexfen, was to him the dreamy land in which he could have a sense of self. Later, this place would become the scenery to where he would return when talking about the common people of Ireland. Declan Kiberd comments that the ideas about Ireland established by many writers of the Irish Revival were strongly connected to their childhood experiences in different places of the country. For many, different landscapes in Ireland had a way of living life that could not be found in other places. For Yeats, “Sligo became a place sacred to the youth who no longer longed to hold a sod of earth in his hand” (KIBERD, 2002, p. 102); Sligo, as many other places for different Irish writers, became a place that preserved everything they considered lost in the developing industrial society, a place where the imaginary and the mythical blew as strong as the wind, and that should not be forgotten.

In his late years of youth, Yeats gathered the works of other writers, edited and made *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* to be published in 1888. In his introduction, later further explored in this work, he mentioned how many of these writers used humorous ways to retell folklore and how others, such as Douglas Hyde, could understand the peasantry and all elements of folklife and that in his stories and poems, he would write simply about life itself. Regarding himself, Yeats says that his intentions on that book were “to make it representative, as far as so few pages would allow, of every kind of Irish folk-faith.” (YEATS, 1890, p. xvi).

In 1892, inspired by his previous work, Yeats published *Irish Folk Tales*. Despite being a shorter version of *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, *Irish Folk Tales* acts for many as a complementary text to the first one. Also, the stories in it have a light tone and seem to aim for a children's audience. One interesting thing about this production is that in the appendix of the book, Yeats classifies the fairies as the sociable and the solitary group. In it, he describes their "types", where they live, and in what form they usually appear. This production, alongside with *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* is considered by Golightly (2007) an important part of Yeats's development towards an academic approach to folklore collecting. She also says that in this book the author's belief in the peasantry becomes clearer, something which will be an essential aspect of *The Celtic Twilight*, where the author not only shows how much he believed in the work of the peasantry but also includes his own experiences in it, bringing an autobiographical tone to the book.

His short-written participation in *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* resulted perhaps in an inspiration to write further about Sligo and his experience with Irish folklore. He would do so in *The Celtic Twilight*, one of Yeats's first attempts to turn his own childhood memories and nationalistic ideas into literature. Based on Yeats's notes written on a diary he kept while travelling through the west of Ireland, the book was finally published in 1893. In 1902, it gained a revised edition with extra comments, new stories and new reflections, all based on the author's trips across the country in the summer of 1897 with his friend, Lady Gregory. Gale Schricker (1982), in *A New Species of Man*, mentions that this revised edition, especially the footnotes added later, show not only a kind of revision of his own beliefs but also an older Yeats, now able to elaborate a surer and more mature idea about the persona created earlier.

Young age, maturity, and idealistic beliefs; all of these are reasons why this book is not inserted among his most prestigious works. In fact, contemporary critics either choose to criticize it up to its last word or simply ignore it. Edward Hirsch, in "Coming out into the light" (1981), attributes the undervaluation of the book to a few reasons. First, he mentions how the title of the book "gave its name to an entire sensibility and has connotations of a melancholy and moody style working in the service of a world-weary Pre-Raphaelitism." (HIRSCH, 1981, p. 2-3). Also, Yeats himself, later in his life, declared in the preface of *Letters to the New Island*: "I wrote prose badly, *The Celtic Twilight*, written before I had finished the last of the articles in this book, excepted and that more for its matter than its form" (YEATS, 1970, p. xiii).

Despite all that, Hirsch still believes that is important to consider this book's relevance not only related to Yeats's literary career but also related to the historical context in which it was made. He believes that the book was written in a much clearer style than what is believed.

Also, he mentions that Yeats maintained a constant revision in *The Celtic Twilight*, especially for the 1908, 1912 and 1925's editions. For him, this "also testify to his persistent imaginative interest in the style, the tone, and the matter of the book." (HIRSCH, 1981, p. 3). Karen Golightly, in her dissertation, brings evidence on how Yeats build that world in *The Celtic Twilight* because he believed not only in that matter but also in the peasantry. She mentions that although he conducted fieldwork himself and contributed to the book with his own supernatural experiences, late in his life he would dismiss his personal involvement with the book, using arguments such as the one previously stated here. Golightly mentions that at the time when he declared such things, "he had gone on to develop his own personal mythology of his life and the world throughout history in *A Vision*." (GOLIGHTLY, 2007, p. 144). Therefore, the author seems to suggest that Yeats's dismissal of *The Celtic Twilight*'s relevance to his works may not be completely honest. She argues that in 1902 when the revised edition of the book was published, it is possible that Yeats had come to finally have a further knowledge of himself, a knowledge that he stated to be at search in *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*. Thus, all these arguments illustrate the dubious condition in which the book was put throughout the decades not only by the critics but also by Yeats. Also, they show a further comprehension around the importance of the book, taking into consideration many factors mentioned above.

In *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, many important names regarding Irish folklore collectings appear. Among them are Douglas Hyde, William Allingham, William Carleton and T. Crofton Croker, known names of Irish poetry and Gaelic collections of oral tradition. Although their work, along with Yeats, was important in terms of bringing to the public sphere what was known solely in orality, some writers argue that the search for a national identity was a consequence of an English colonialist influence. Seamus Deane, in "Yeats and the Idea of Revolution", mentions that Yeats got his own idealistic visions of Ireland through the influence of Coleridge's concept of Englishness and, going back to Berkeley and Swift, associating an idealism that he would later relate to Ireland's folk tradition. Also, the author says that "the whole Irish revival is a reaction against this attitude, a movement towards the colony and away from the mother-country, a replacement of 'Englishness' by 'Irishness'." (DEANE, 1985, p. 48). In that sense, the author does not use the appropriation of identities as a positive aspect, but in a way, that reinforces the colonialist thought about Ireland. This idea is reiterated when Deane mentions John Synge's preface to his play, *The Playboy of the Western World*, that



It is probable that when the Elizabethan dramatist took his ink-horn and sat down to his work he used many phrases that he had just heard, as he sat at dinner, from his mother or his children. In Ireland, those of us who know the people have the same privilege. (SYNGE, 1990, p. 11).

To that assertion, Deane says that Synge's affirmation "those of us who know the people" is a "perfect colonial phrase" and that "Yeats considered himself to be one of those too; he wasn't, in that sense, one of 'the people'". (DEANE, 1985, p. 49). Thus, according to the author, Yeats considers himself not part of those that he had written about. Also, Declan Kiberd (2002) says that the perhaps unconscious connection between folk tradition and memories from childhood made by many authors in order to establish a national culture is much related to a colonialist way of seeing this culture. The author explains that in many situations, by trying to encounter a national culture, some writers end up by "infantilizing the native culture", associating not only their memories to childhood but also to the culture itself.

Taking into consideration all these ideas, it is important to highlight that Yeats, Synge and many other writers and folklore collectors were nineteenth century people, all inserted in nineteenth-century values. Despite the fact that they were part of a cultural nationalistic movement, all of them, or at least most of them, were educated in English schools or schools which had their system based on the English one. The concept of folklore was, at the time they wrote, seen as something distant, as E. P. Thompson mentions:

Thus folklore at its very origin carried this sense of patronising distance, of subordination [...], and of customs as survivals. For 150 years the preferred methodology of collectors was to group such survivals as "calendar customs", which found their last refuge in the deepest countryside. As one folklorist wrote at the end of the nineteenth century, his object was to describe: "The old customs which still linger on in the obscure nooks and corners of our native land, or which have survived the march of progress in our busy city's life." (THOMPSON, 1993, p. 2).

Considering that, it was not a misconception to think about folklore as something far from those who wrote about it; in fact, it was distant exactly because those who were able to have the proper education and later to write literature with it in most cases did not come from the peasantry. For them, that folklore originated in "the deepest countryside", was distant and so, their position was a common custom, not an arbitrary use of superiority. Therefore, it would be an act of anachronism for readers of the twentieth century to say that Yeats and other nineteenth-century writers were perhaps following a so-called colonialist idea. This is important to comprehend the major acts behind these affirmations.

## 2.2. “The earth is only a little dust under our feet”<sup>5</sup>

Composed by forty tales, *The Celtic Twilight* does not follow a specific structure. All the stories revolve around folklore, ancient stories, and supernatural experiences. These, as whole, create a depiction of an Irish oral tradition, which is characterized by Jan Vansina as “‘unwritten’ sources couched in a form suitable for oral transmission, and that their preservation depends on the powers of memory of successive generations of human beings” (VANSINA, 1965, p. 1). Regarding *The Celtic Twilight*, this oral tradition is presented through the need of establishing a connection with a past about to be forgotten and the building of a national identity. This past, here connected to the experiences of the peasants and sometimes to Yeats’s himself, is originated in a distant and unknown date and remains alive through the stories told generations ahead. These stories are mostly related to an experience with the supernatural, here covering the faeries, leprechauns<sup>6</sup>, the Banshee<sup>7</sup>, spirits and ghosts, magical places or even old stories about mythical heroes such as Cuchulain and Queen Meave<sup>8</sup>.

In terms of structure for each story, there is not, in *The Celtic Twilight*, a specific one. Each story has its own characteristics, either regarding length or development. There are stories, such as “The Last Gleeman” and “Earth, Fire and Water”, which are a mixture of a story and an essay, since they have so much of the writer’s ideas and interference that they end up becoming more a reflection on the story than a story with comments. Hirsch mentions that this aspect of Yeats’s writing on this book is very peculiar and that “*The Celtic Twilight* is a curious hybrid of the story and the essay, the accurate notation of the folklorist and the fictional reminiscence of the imaginative writer.” (HIRSCH, 1981, p. 1).

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<sup>5</sup> “Let us go forth, the tellers of tales, and seize whatever prey the heart long for, and have no fear. Everything exists, everything is true, and the earth is only a little dust under our feet”. (YEATS, 1990, p. 4)

<sup>6</sup> The leprechaun is, in fact, described in *Faery and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* as one of the three “solitary faeries”. The text says that ““The name *Lepracaun*” Mr. Douglas Hyde writes to me, “is from the Irish—i. *leith brog* e., the One-shoemaker, since he is generally seen working at a single shoe. [...] The *Lepracaun* makes shoes continually, and has grown very rich. Many treasure-crocks, buried of old in war-time, has he now for his own.” (YEATS, 1890, p. 80). These “solitary faeries” are commonly confused and sometimes believed to be one. As the editor says, hardly two Irish authors would agree on that matter.

<sup>7</sup> In *Faery and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, the Banshee is described by the editor, Yeats, in these words: “The banshee (from *ban* [*bean*] a woman, and *shee* [*sidhe*] a fairy) is an attendant fairy that follows the old families, and none but them, and wails before a death. Many have seen her as she goes wailing and clapping her hands. [...] When more than one banshee is present, and they wail and sing in chorus, it is for the death of some holy or great one.” (YEATS, 1890, p. 108).

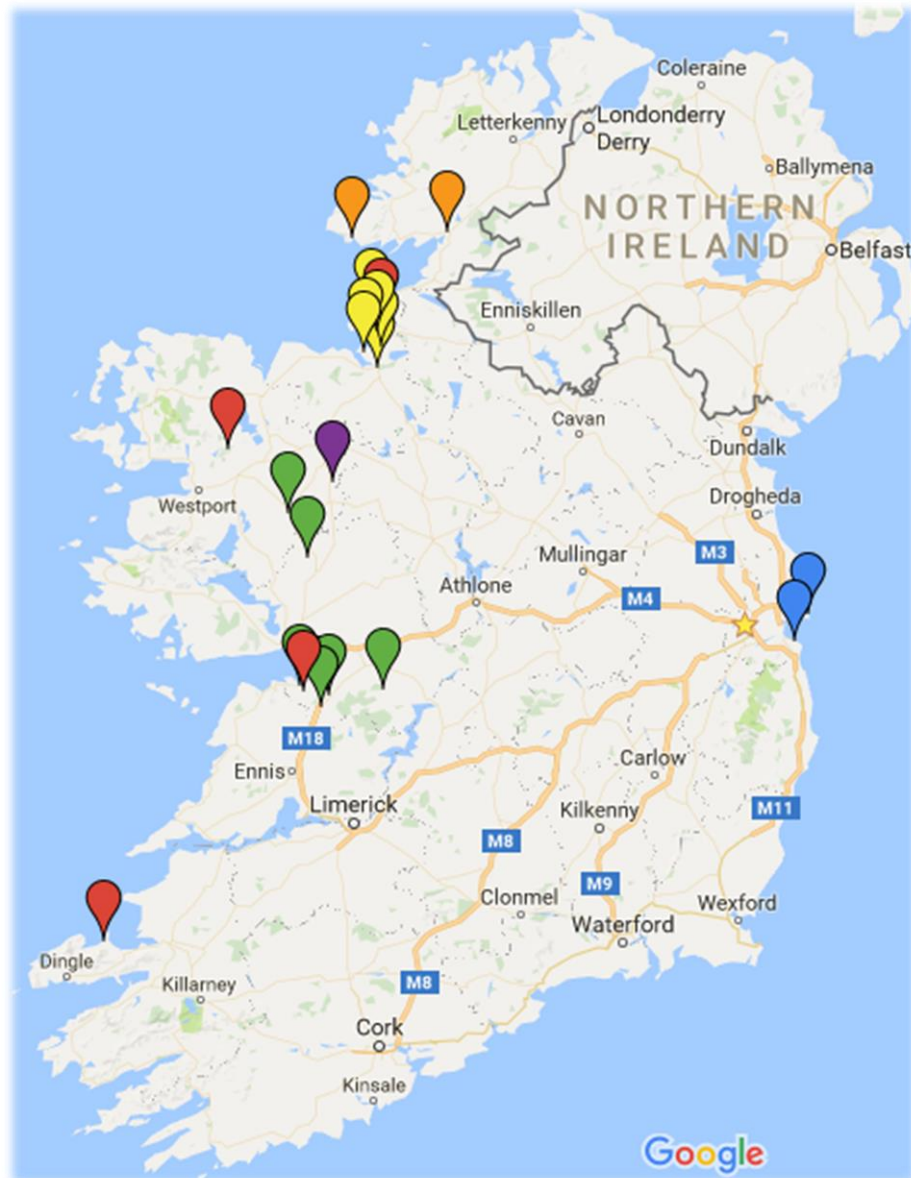
<sup>8</sup> Yeats uses the Anglicized “Cuchulain” and “Maeve” in *The Celtic Twilight*, but one of the original spellings in Gaelic for it are Cú Chulainn and Medb. For terms of consistency, here it was chosen the version used by Yeats in the book.

In addition to the absence of a canonical structure for each story, they are not attributed or related to a specific known person. For Vansina, the author of the story is in most cases anonymous, having in its interlocutors the way to maintain its memory alive through storytelling. Herewith, in *The Celtic Twilight* Yeats introduces many characters which are presented as “a woman from Mayo”, “a young man”, “one woman”, and other similar examples. As it is possible to see, in most cases, the “source” of each story is not defined by a name, but perhaps by gender or place of living. For the reader, this characteristic may create a discomfort feeling that the author is not sharing enough or that maybe there is something else not being mentioned. In *Yeats's Poetic Codes*, Nicholas Grene (2008) says that this linguistic resource so furtherly used by Yeats is a common characteristic of his work and establishes a relation between him and the person whom he is talking about, excluding the reader from it. This resort may cause a mysterious and mystical feeling to the reader, something that is in accordance with Yeats's intentions towards the depiction of Irish folklore.

Not only the characters presented in the stories do not have a specific nomination but also the places where the stories are set. These, however, are easier to identify through other details presented in each tale. One example of this is the tale “Enchanted Woods”, in which the narrator talks about the stories he heard “last summer” from “an old country man” who knew much about the creatures of the woods and that there were spirits in the Enchanted Woods. At first, it is impossible to identify the location of this place. Reading ahead, the narrator mentions a place called Shanwalla, which after some research, it was discovered to be a place in County Mayo. Another place mentioned is Lough Ia, in “The Untiring Ones”, a tale about how people of faery got tired of being immortal and decided to die. The name of Lough Ia, for unknown reasons, has changed in the past and nowadays it is known as the small Lough Dhá Géanna, very near to Lough Gill, in County Sligo. In a footnote in the book, Yeats mentions that “perhaps Lough Ia is my mishearing, or the story-teller's mispronunciation of Lough Leath, for there are many Lough Leaths” (YEATS, 1990, 69).

Still discussing places, the space used by Yeats is very particular and has much to do with his own experience. Mostly, in the stories, the space for each one is a rural set, surrounded by wildlife, woods, and forests. Below, it is possible to see a gathering of data related to all the places mentioned in *The Celtic Twilight*. For this, Google Maps was used.

Map of Ireland created on Google Maps with the locations mentioned in *The Celtic Twilight*.



Source: GOOGLE MAPS [2016].

As it is possible to see on the map, the places mentioned are mainly located in the Northwest of Ireland, especially in County Galway (green label), County Sligo (yellow label), County Mayo (purple label), and County Donegal (orange label). The exceptions on this are located in County Dublin (blue label) or even in locations that besides major efforts, were still unable to be identified, so were classified in red labels in the approximate location.

Taking into consideration Yeats's strong relationship with County Sligo, where he spent much of his childhood, it is likely that his choice of setting for these tales was much related to it. Also, it is possible that he may have heard many stories originated in other places from his

friends, especially those who he had most contact with, John Synge and especially Lady Gregory, with whom he travelled and collected folklore around Sligo and Galway in 1897.

According to 2011 census, the numbers correspondent to the part of the population in Ireland that proclaimed themselves “Roman Catholic” was more than 3.5 million (CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE, 2011). This, in percentages, would refer to more than eighty percent of Ireland’s population. Relating to other countries, which also had a Catholic dominance, Ireland has expressive numbers. Catholicism is part of their history, having as its most important character St. Patrick, known all over the world nowadays as one of the symbols of Ireland, despite its further appropriations.

At the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the numbers were probably not so different. According to the 1911 census, only the city of Dublin was 83% Catholic (NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF IRELAND, 1911). Similar numbers also appear in County Sligo and County Galway. Considering that, it would not be a surprise if Yeats, in a book which talks about the common people, would bring this subject.

In *The Celtic Twilight*, the matter of belief is brought through the ideas that people had about it, each one on their own way. Yeats himself pronounced about it and gave us some hints around the topic and this can be seen throughout his comments on the book. Focusing on the tales, the main ideas presented are related to the belief in the supernatural creatures of the world; these specially related to the stories that had been told them along their lives; and also the belief in God, heaven, hell and the words of the priest, which in this scenario, are really important as we can see in “Belief and Unbelief”, the second tale. When talking about “doubters in the western villages”, the narrator brings what he claims to be a testimony of “one woman” who told him that

She did not believe either in hell or in ghosts. Hell she thought was merely an invention got up by the priest to keep people good; [...] ‘but there are faeries’, she added ‘and little leprechauns, and water-horses, and fallen angels. (YEATS, 1990)

This excerpt shows how the two main topics mentioned previously could, at that time, coexist in the same community besides the fact that one had more believers than the other. Furthermore, it is possible to see how folk belief contrasts with Catholic dogmas in this excerpt and how the discourse used by the priest to the idea of heaven and hell is, in some cases, not accepted by the peasantry. In this situation, folk traditions, which are connected to a collective memory and ancient beliefs, overcomes the Catholic rites. Despite the importance that these

have in Ireland's history and development, it is undeniable how its knowledge about the world and nature was imposed and so, passive to unbelief from its parish.

The belief in the supernatural world is clearly shown in "Belief and Unbelief" through the image of fairies and other beings mentioned in the tale. This belief is not mentioned by chance; there is in Ireland a strong oral tradition regarding the supernatural world. This oral tradition is what makes the knowledge about such supernatural beings be passed through the generations from parent to child so this one will also pass it one to its offspring. This knowledge, according to Walter Benjamin, is known as the collective memory. The author provides a theoretical overview of this topic in "The Storyteller", in which he talks about the role of the storyteller in modern society through the image of the "master craftsman" and the "trading seaman". For him, these two figures ensemble the role of the storyteller as one who embraces a collective memory, here the master craftsman, and its individual experience in the figure of the trading seaman. He says that "the resident master craftsman and the traveling journeymen worked together in the same rooms; and every master had been a traveling journeyman before he settled down in 'his home town or somewhere else'." (BENJAMIN, 2007, p. 85). Thus, this collective memory converges with the individual experience in the sense that the one who talks about its own experience also brings with it a collective memory related to its past and descendants. Benjamin also points that "the actual extension of the realm of storytelling in its full historical breadth is inconceivable without the most intimate interpenetration of these two archaic types." (BENJAMIN, 2007, p. 85), saying that a storyteller must convey in itself not only the traces of its experience but also the collective memory attached to its past. Turning to *The Celtic Twilight* once again, it is possible to understand that the oral tradition depicted in the book by Yeats is a great example on how this folk tradition, part of a collective memory, is passed on to the author's readers along with his own experience and imagination.

Amongst the many stories in the book, some will be highlighted here in order to comment on interesting aspects that would represent the book as a whole. The first one to which the reader is presented is "A Teller of Tales", which is a type of introduction to what *The Celtic Twilight* would be. In it, Yeats introduces Paddy Flynn as the claimed narrator and person from whom he heard many of the tales in the book. On this introduction, the author describes Paddy as a wise man and as someone who "did not live in a shrunken world, but knew of no less ample circumstance that did Homer himself." (YEATS, 1990, p. 4). This introduction is very similar to the one made by Yeats in his previous work *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* not only because of its summary-like character provided for the reader to settle into the subject but also for the presentation of the same character, Paddy Flynn. His presentation is very similar in

both texts, as we can see below. First, in *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*: “The most notable and typical story-teller of my acquaintance in one Paddy Flynn, a little, bright-eyed, old man, living in a leaky one-roomed cottage of the village of B----, “The most gentle – fairy – place in the whole of the County Sligo,” he says [...]” (1890, p. xi-xii). Then, in *The Celtic Twilight*:

Many of the tales in this book were told me by one Paddy Flynn, a little bright-eyed old man, who lived in a leaky and one-roomed cabin in the village of Ballisodare, which is, he was wont to say, ‘the most gentle’ – whereby he meant faery – ‘place in the whole of County Sligo’ (YEATS, 1990, p. 3).

These two descriptions, not only sound the same as they, in fact, are, in many parts, the same. Yeats is the writer of the Introduction and editor of the first book and author of the second book, therefore these similarities are not essentially a problem. However, it is important to comprehend what he may have meant by this. Ken Monteith in *Yeats and Theosophy* says that there is a movement from Yeats to create a romanticized and stereotypical “noble Celt”. He mentions that “essentializing Paddy Flynn gives the reader a new Irish Stereotype, a stereotype Yeats intends as a positive alternative to the negative image of drunken boatmen who graces the English stage.” (MONTEITH, 2008, p. 164). This stereotype would mean to think at this point of a traditional simple Irishman who lives in the west, in the village of Ballisodare (today Ballysadare, 7km South from Sligo), is surrounded by nature in closeness to the supernatural world. Paddy Flynn may be, to many critics, the simplification of a stereotype, but he could also be a tentative of creating a persona who would embrace this memorialist *Irishness*.

Living in “the most gentle fairy place of Sligo”, Paddy Flynn contributed to the book with many stories about the fairies. This appears throughout the book and they are described and presented in various aspects and situations. In “Mortal Help”, the narrator mentions a story in which some people of fairy were seen “not far from Knock-na-gur” (County Galway, around 35 km North from Galway) and how in some occasions they would appear in human bodies. In this story, also the most important mythical Irish character Cuchulain is mentioned. However, its mentioning has no account with his great actions, but to say how much fairies sometimes need mortal help to walk in our lands. In “Happy and Unhappy Theologians”, a woman tells the narrator about how the fairies are good and how doing good to them could make them provide you also with good things. This woman, the narrator says, had only pleasant and beautiful thoughts and sights about the people of fairy and that “I have never heard her call

them the Fallen Angels”<sup>9</sup>. The narrator continues, now talking about their appearance: “They are people like ourselves, only better-looking.” (YEATS, 1990, p. 38). On the same story, it is possible to see an opposite opinion about the fairies. A man in a Galway village describes the fairies as having “cloven feet”, just like dogs. He also talks about an experience with the fairies in which they stalked him, even after his requests to leave him alone.

In “Regina, Regina Pigmeorum, Veni” the faeries are mentioned again and here, they are called “the Forgetful People”. This story provided a further description of the fairies’ appearance first through a girl’s narrative and later, through the narrator itself. The girl told a story about how one night she saw a huge light streaming out of a cage and many “little people in various colored dresses” dancing. To this part, the author added a footnote about the appearance of these “little people”:

The people and faeries in Ireland are sometimes as big as we are, sometimes bigger, and sometimes, as I have been told, about three feet high. The old Mayo woman I so often quote, thinks that it is something in our eyes that makes them seem so big (YEATS, 1990, p. 49).

Those who see the people of fairy are mentioned by the narrator in “The Friends of the People of Faery”. According to him, these are usually poor and so, are the wisest. A story is told about a man named Martin Roland who lived near a bog<sup>10</sup> out of Gort whom the fairies would often visit at night to bother saying things in Gaelic and play their pipes. Without knowing what to do, he was advised to buy a flute and play it every time the fairies came to bother him and perhaps this way they would stop. Some time after, a narrator’s friend<sup>11</sup> visited the man and he said that three fairies came to him and said he was about to die. A week after, he died. The matter of the belief of his visions and stories is mentioned by the narrator when he says that the man’s neighbours were not sure if he had actually seen things in an old age, “but they were all certain that he saw things when he was a young man” (YEATS, 1990, p. 103).

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<sup>9</sup> It was a common habit, at that time, to call the fairies ‘Fallen Angels’. In *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland*, by Lady Wilde, she mentions this nomination: “The islanders, like all the Irish, believe that fairies are the fallen angels who were cast down by the Lord God out of heaven for their sinful pride” (WILDE, 1919, p. 89).

<sup>10</sup> A bog is a wetland which accumulates turf (or peat), an organic matter or decayed vegetation. In Ireland, the most common kind of bog is the blanket bog. They exist all over the country, but are mostly found in Counties Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Kerry, Clare, and Sligo.

<sup>11</sup> Greene (2008) says that usually when Yeats refers to “a friend” he is talking about Lady Gregory.



The story “The Untiring Ones” brings many tales about the Sidhe<sup>12</sup> told to the narrator. In one of them, the Sidhe got tired of being fairies and decided to become immortals. In another, a girl in the south of Ireland was touched by a woman of the Sidhe became a fairy.

She lay asleep in a cradle, and her mother sat by rocking her, when a woman of the Sidhe (the faeries) came in, and said that the child was chosen to be the bride of the prince of the dim kingdom<sup>13</sup>, but that as it would never do for his wife to grow old and die while he was still in the first ardour of his love, she would be gifted with a faery life. The mother was to take the glowing log out of the fire and bury in the garden, and her child would live as long as it remained unconsumed (YEATS, 1990, p. 68).

After it, the mother buried the log and the girl grew up beautifully, marrying the prince. Seven hundred years later, after the prince’s death, the girl married several other times. Someday, she was defamed by the priest for her marriages and long life, so the local parish dug her log and she finally died, being buried as a Christian. This story, according to the narrator’s suspicions, is certainly about Clooth-na-bare<sup>14</sup>, “who went all over the world seeking a lake deep enough to drown her faery life [...] until at last she found the deepest water in the world in little Lough Ia, on the top of the Bird’s Mountain at Sligo” (YEATS, 1990, p. 68). This story shows not only the connection between an Irish mythological figure and the Irish folk tradition but also how a myth passes through oral tradition with its own adaptations.

In a first-person narration, “The Old Town” talks about the narrator experiencing “the power of faery”. Walking at night by a road with some friends, one of them saw a bright light moving across the road. Following it, they arrived at the ruins of an old church, having its foundations called ‘the Old Town’ “which had been burned down, it was said, in Cromwell’s day” (YEATS, 1990, p. 71). There, they saw a bright flame moving and the feeling caused by it made them all as if living in a dream. The narrator mentions that such sense of unreality caused him to spend many days listening to strange sounds and with a strange sensation. This story exemplifies the story and essay mentioned earlier. After its testimony, the narrator puts himself to wonder several aspects of the mystical world, providing much more a reflection of the story and his experience than and ending to the story itself.

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<sup>12</sup> People of fairy.

<sup>13</sup> The world of the fairies.

<sup>14</sup> The author added this footnote to the story: “Doubtless Clooth-na-bare should be Cailleac Bare, which would mean the old woman Bare. Bare or Bere or Verah or Dera or Dhera was a very famous person, perhaps the mother of the Gods herself. A friend of mine found her, as he thinks, frequenting Lough Leath, or the Grey Lake on a mountain of the Fews. Perhaps Lough Ia is my mishearing, or the storyteller’s mispronunciation of Lough Leath, for there are many Lough Leaths” (YEATS, 1990, p. 69). From it, it is possible to see the linguistic problems which the author faced for not knowing Gaelic. Also, the Lake Ia is, in fact, Lough Dhá Géanna nowadays.

Ben Bulben<sup>15</sup>, a mountain located in Sligo, is very much mentioned throughout the book. In many, it is the set for what happens, such as in “Drumcliff and Rosses”. In this story, which has a variation between a first and third person narrator, is about how Drumcliff and Rosses are places nearly connected to the fairy world. Drumcliff is described in the story as “a wide green valley, lying at the foot of Ben Bulben, the mountain in whose side the square white door swings open at nightfall to loose the faery riders on the world” (YEATS, 1990, p. 77). One very interesting aspect of this description is how the time when the fairies mostly appear in our world is, as the narrator said, at nightfall, meaning the twilight. Is not by chance that this chosen to be part of the title of the book, since this time, according to believers, is the time when the people of fair can enter our world since in the light of day this is not possible. For the folk tradition, the twilight is the time of the day when the two worlds mingle.

Rosses is also described as a place where the fairy world is much closer to ours. The narrator says that the place is “a little sea-dividing, sandy-plain, covered with short grass, like a green tablecloth” (YEATS, 1990, p. 77). This place is covered by raths, or forts, known to exist since “before modern history had begun”. These, are ancient settlements built between the Iron Age and the Early Christian period for different purposes, especially agriculture and in some situations, aristocracy. The term “rath” is an Anglicized spelling of the Gaelic “ráth”. In *The Celtic Twilight*, Yeats uses this term perhaps because it was common at his time. In history and archeology books, these structures are usually named ringforts (or ring-forts, depending on the author), since there are variations of it depending on the material they are made. According to Nancy Edwards (2004), the structures known as “ráth” and “líos” are referred to earthen ringforts. Also, “ráth” is a common nomination in the East and South-west of Ireland. “Caisel” and “cathair” are known as stone-walled and the term “caisel” is usually anglicized into “cashel”. Finally, there is also the not so common term “dún” which, when used, is done throughout the country. The term “fort” is a generalization of what they are since not all authors agree on naming it “ringforts” or “ring-forts”. Although the term “fort” is not considered perfectly appropriate because they are not forts in the military sense, it is the most common nomination used in order to avoid further problems of classification. Since they are so thoroughly part of Irish tradition and history, is no surprise that they would be so much related to the mystical and supernatural stories present in folk tradition. In other stories, there are

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<sup>15</sup> The name “Ben Bulben” is one of the anglicized variations of the Gaelic “Binn Ghulbain”. The mountain is located in County Sligo and is part of the Dartry Mountains. Yeats mentions the place many times in his writings and he was buried near the place, in the churchyard of Drumcliff, around 6km from the mountain.

references to the raths, most of them regarding the appearing of fairies, spirits or other supernatural experiences.

An interesting view regarding the fairies now in Scotland is presented in “The Remonstrance with Scotsmen for Having the Disposition of Their Ghosts and Faeries”. The narrator mentions that in Scotland the belief also exists and that he heard a story from a farmer saying that there was a water horse<sup>16</sup> in the lake in front of his house. Other stories such as this are told, especially about fairies, ghosts, and other supernatural beings. On them, it is shown how the Scottish in many situations are terrified by the presence of such creatures and how they try, sometimes without success, to fight and make them go away. Also, the narrator affirms that “these two different ways of looking at things have influenced in each country the whole world of sprites and goblins. For their gay and graceful doings you must go to Ireland; for their deeds of terror to Scotland.” (YEATS, 1990, p. 93).

As the narrator mentions when talking about the witches, there are substantial differences in the way the Irish and the Scottish face not only the supernatural creatures and phenomena but also any sign of supernatural. According to him, the Scottish burnt all their witches while them, the Irish, left them alone. One particular aspect of this story is the way the narrator talks to its reader. The pronoun “you” is often used throughout the text, especially from the middle to the end, usually referring to the Scottish. One example of this is when the narrator says “in Scotland you are too theological, too gloomy” (YEATS, 1990, p. 93). Even though in this excerpt there is an indication that this persona may be talking directly to a Scottish reader about the Scottish as a whole, in the last paragraph of the text, this communication is clear, as it is possible to see here: “You – you will make no terms with the spirits of fire and earth and air and water. You have made the Darkness your enemy. We – we exchange civilities with the world beyond” (YEATS, 1990, p. 95). As shown, not only the pronoun “you” is repeated several times but the assertion is much related to the differences pointed by the narrator between the way the Irish and the Scottish understand the mystical world, thus, indicating a strong message about the topic.

Alongside with fairies, also ghosts and spirits are recurrent topics amongst the stories. They are, however, different from the fairies in the sense that they mostly appear for specific reasons or purposes. Many of them usually cause fear or a feeling of discomfort to those who see them, sometimes making these people to be forever tormented by such idea. The narrator mentions that usually the people who tell the tales about ghosts are poor and find in them the

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<sup>16</sup> A water horse is a mythical creature present in Celtic and Scottish mythologies. The term is used as an alternative for ‘lake monster’. The most famous register of one is in Loch Ness, in Scotland.

fascination of fear. There is also, in the western villages, a feeling of curiosity related to ghost stories. It is said that these people live in such a wild and beautiful scenery that end up not being afraid of ghosts but feeling amused by their doings. In “Concerning the Nearness Together of Heaven, Earth, and Purgatory”, the narrator tells a story about a ghost of a woman who haunted her people because “they had made her grave-clothes so short that the fires of purgatory burned her knees” (YEATS, 1990, p. 86). One last aspect of the appearance of spirits is that in many stories, they are associated with the appearance of the fairies.

The first of many stories in which ghosts appear is “Village Ghosts”, set in the village of Howth, 13km South of Dublin. Many ghost stories are told by the narrator, especially stories of people seeing ghosts and ghosts that haunt places and people. One of these stories is one about Mrs. Nolan’s child who was very ill and about to die. In one night, knockings were heard at the door, but the mother did not open due to the fear of some “unhuman” thing. After some time, the front and the back door burst open and then, the child died. The doors open and closed right after, as they were before. Mrs. Nolan, after all, this, remembered that she had forgotten to leave a door or window open, “as the custom is”, so the soul would departure in peace. The narrator mentions that these knockings are usually warnings from the spirits who attend the dying. In this story, the narrator also talks about the many types of ghost manifestations. One of them, the “house ghost”, is usually harmless and brings good luck to those who live with it. The ghosts present in Connaught’s tales are different from those. They have a “gloomy, matter-of-fact way with them”. These ghosts, as the narrator says, usually have a purpose by coming, either by announcing death, fulfil an obligation, revenge a wrong or to pay their bills. The narrator also mentions that are “demons, not ghosts, that transform themselves into white cats or black dogs” (YEATS, 1990, p. 17).

Another story is about Mrs. Arbunathy, who someday left the door open at night as she was waiting for her son. A tall man entered and sat beside her husband, who was asleep by the fire. After some time, she asked this man who was he. Then, he answered: “Never leave the door open at this hour, or evil may come to you” (YEATS, 1990, p. 14). As she woke up her husband, he said that “one of the good people” must have been with them that night.

Moving west, “Enchanted Woods” is set in the village of Shanwalla, in County Mayo. There, the narrator mentions how “last summer” he met an old country man who knew much about the creatures of the woods. This specific place, “the Enchanted Woods”, according to him is known for having mystical creatures, such as animals which communicate with each other and have turned into other animals in the course of time. The narrator puts into question the credibility of this man when he says that “I am not certain that he distinguishes between the

natural and supernatural very clearly” (YEATS, 1990, p. 53). Despite this one was questionable, others told the narrator stories about spirits in Shanwalla, the place that now was a village but before was part of the woods. There, people tell him to have seen spirits accompanying them on the road at night. In some of these stories, the spirit was the ghost of a headless man. This headless man is also mentioned in “Village Ghosts” as a ghost seen by many. In this specific story, the narrator says that some have seen it upon the quay and by the cemetery wall at night.

The fear of ghosts, besides being a recurrent matter, can turn to be the major theme of a tale, as it is possible to see in “A Coward”. The title of the story speaks for itself since the main topic of this one the feeling caused to a man by a ghost apparition. This man told the narrator that one night he was coming home and suddenly saw his brother’s face rising before him. As a response, he ran as much as he could until he got home. From that day on, he became a coward and never returned to the place where he had seen the face, sometimes even walking miles to not pass by it. The man even mentions that neither the prettiest girl in the country could make him walk alone at night. The narrator end the story saying that “he feared everything, for he had looked at the face no man can see unchanged – the imponderable face of a spirit” (YEATS, 1990, p. 74).

Besides being an important place for Yeats due to its closeness to Ben Bulbin and the world of fairies, Drumcliff and Rosses have also many ghost apparitions. It is said that is a custom there to sprinkle the doorsteps with chicken’s blood on the death of a young child since blood is a great gatherer of evil spirits, so in this way, the spirits would gather into the chicken’s blood and leave the child’s spirit alone. The narrator says that it is very dangerous to cut your hand going into a fort. These sayings are very interesting to analyse since they are much related to the beliefs and context of these places. The first one, about the child’s death, is interesting due to the specificity of the deceased. Since most of these beliefs come from ancient times, the death of new-borns and small children was very common and probably higher than grown-ups, so it would make sense to establish a ritual towards it. Another interesting matter is the danger around cutting yourself when entering a fort. As mentioned earlier, forts have a special significance in Irish history and folklore. Its relation to the supernatural world would explain here why it would be so dangerous to leave blood in these places so surrounded by unknown creatures.

In these cities, ghosts appear in all shapes and places. They can be headless women, men in armour, shadow-hares, fire-tongued hounds, whistling seals, and others. However, the most curious one is the snipe-ghost, the ghost of a man who could not rest. He would appear in

a bush behind a house in an indefinite place<sup>17</sup>. This man, as the story says, when alive had found in the quay of Sligo a package containing three hundred pounds in notes. This money, as the man knew, had been dropped by a sea captain who had it for freight and committed suicide in the sea. Shortly after finding it, the man died but could not rest. It was said by neighbours that his wife would pray in the bush where he used to appear.

The comic aspect of some ghost stories is very subtle in stories such as “A Coward”, but none exemplifies it so well as “The Man and His Boots”, set in Donegal. The tale is about a man who did not believe in any supernatural being and one day decided to prove it in a known haunted house. This man went to the house and set a fire in a room under it. There, he took his boots to rest and stretch a bit. The narrator says that for some time his unbelief was proven, but after a while night fell, everything got very dark and one of his boots started to move. One moved and then the other towards leaving the room. Then, the man listened to them going upstairs and walking there. Some time passed and the man saw the boots entering the room once again. So, it happens that the boots started kicking and hitting him until driving him out of the room and at last, out of the house. The narrator says that it is unknown if the invisible being who kicked the man out of the house was a ghost or one of the Sidhe, but that was the way “Donegal was avenged upon its doubter” (YEATS, 1990, p. 73).

The man from Donegal, Mrs. Nolan, a woman from Mayo; all of these are put in *The Celtic Twilight* as protagonists. Yeats himself also is a protagonist in the story-telling process, including his experiences and impressions in the text. These tales and depictions are part of Yeats’s understanding of what meant to be Irish at his time. Despite the knowledge around the Irish established through stereotypes by the British and others, here it is possible to see the peasantry not as simple parts of the landscape, but as essential characters for its configuration. Their beliefs and stories are not underestimated; they are listened and gain a voice that will provide the support needed to the nationalist cause in order to establish an understanding about the national identity Yeats and other writers tried to forge in their works.

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<sup>17</sup> The author says that for “excellent reasons” he could not say where the house was, but that it could be in “Drumcliff or Rosses or on the slope of Ben Bulben, or even on the plain round Knocknarea” (YEATS, 1990, p. 81).

## CONCLUSION

“And so it has seemed to me that we, who would re-awaken imaginative tradition by making old songs alive, or by gathering old stories into books, take part in the quarrel of Galilee. Those who are Irish and would spread foreign ways, which, for all but a few, are ways of spiritual poverty, take part also.”

W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*

In history and literature, there are always those who have their doings and glories highlighted by time and circumstances. Therefore, there are those whose actions are mostly ignored and ideas run through as if something unimportant. The relation between Britain and Ireland does not qualify completely and directly to this dichotomy; but in some of its parts, it does. These parts are related to the right of ruling its own country and deciding for itself what concept and ideas of culture are going to be established for such.

In the course of centuries, much of what was considered *Irish* was perceived by those in power, the British. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, this picture was no longer accepted by many in Ireland. As insurrections, negotiations, acts, and time went by, it was settled that the wish across the streets of Dublin and other places around the country was for an ‘Irish Ireland’, for Home Rule, for the return of the sessions on College Green, and for the revival of everything that had been lost. The Irish language, which was disappearing in parts of the country, was included in these claims. As a consequence, the value given to the oral tradition, to the peasantry, and to Irish folklore became an important part of the social movements agenda and the development of the nineteenth century.

Since the first folklore collections and books published started, a new perception about the country started to form. The peasantry, up to that moment curtailed to its role in the country’s economy and country life, was transformed into the main character for such productions. Their ideas and stories became important not only to the intellectual community in Ireland but to all of those who, at that moment or decades ahead, would want to learn about folk life in Ireland. Every author, each with their own particularities, brought their contributions. T. Crofton Croker showed something from the west of Ireland that no one had ever paid attention to before. Patrick Kennedy enlightened many with his vivid portrayal of the oral tradition. Lady Wilde brought up the charms, spells, and words of the peasantry in a way

to also show her own nationalist ideals. Douglas Hyde advocated for Gaelic and fought for the language in literary and political terms. Jeremiah Curtin, with his foreigner perspective, captured much of the sufferings caused to the Irish. Finally, Lady Gregory and her knowledge brought to the world the words of the Kiltartan and fought for the establishment of an Irish identity. All of these and other writers not mentioned here are part of Ireland's history not only for their writings but also for their role in turning their eyes to a place never previously scrutinized.

William Butler Yeats edited and published *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, *Irish Folk Tales*, and *The Celtic Twilight* at a very young age. By that time, he had not built his own persona yet. In spite of that, many have criticized him for *The Celtic Twilight*, arguing that its writing is too ornamental; that its title has too much proximity with aesthetic notions that were any longer considered; and, finally, that Yeats was inconsistent with previous works on the subject. (GOLIGHTLY, 2007; HIRSCH, 1981; SCHRICKER, 1982). Yeats, in 1893, was not yet the man he was when he won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923. Nowadays, diminishing *The Celtic Twilight* and considering its content devalued would be unwise. The book is not the greatest publication by the author, but as Hirsch says, it is part of his development as a folklorist, writer, and certainly the development of himself (cf. HIRSCH, 1981). Yeats would, in time, develop his own style and become one of the greatest poets of Ireland. However, once he was a young man who had ideals. By that time, he sunk in the country life, absorbed its knowledge, and made the book out of a mixture of his own experiences and the folktales he knew.

In *The Celtic Twilight* it is possible to identify the method Yeats follows to depict Sligo and its surroundings through its inhabitants' stories. It is possible to understand the effect of fairies and their doings upon people and their beliefs. While, for many, they are evil creatures who would do nothing good, for other the Sidhe can bring joy and announce beautiful things. Despite their bad reputation among many people, the fairies are part of every folklore collection. On the bottom of Ben Bulbin at twilight, as Yeats says, the fairies come to our world singing and dancing, filling the peasantry's imaginary and going farther to reach other territories.

Just as the fairies, the spirits are also largely considered in the book. Many fear them; "it brings bad luck", they say. Many who have seen them became traumatized forever just as the man in "A Coward"; others understand the appearance of spirits as something good, maybe to guard people in this world. Whichever the impressions are, ghosts are ingrained into every culture. They are the response to the fear of the afterlife and are a way to face that. Ireland, as a land of many myths, would not be different.



The places mentioned in the book, in their totality, certainly represent much. Most of them have a tragic past with rebellions and the Famine. It is essential to understand them not as picked by choice; it was noted earlier how related many of them are to Yeats and Lady Gregory. But it is important to point that, by choosing these sites, Yeats was also making a statement. It was important for the Irish Revival to give a voice to the Irish as a people, as a nation.

Though Yeats uses much of his poetical essence in his tales, that does not diminish his purpose. *The Celtic Twilight* certainly brings the word of people, just as much as other writers tried before and after him. Golightly mentions that even though Yeats would pursue other kinds of writing afterwards, it is in *The Celtic Twilight* that he set his roots. She says that “*The Celtic Twilight* shows the ultimate unification of Yeats’s nationalism and belief system. It acts as the epitome, and the end, of his endeavours in folklore collecting” (GOLIGHTLY, 2007, p. 157). Thus, his commitment to Ireland and to the nationalist cause were catalyst forces that would motivate Yeats to move forward and become greater in other forms of resistance. The development of the Irish theatre with Lady Gregory and John Synge are proof of that. Despite the lack of funds, they had a purpose and achieved their goals through creative and engaging ideas.

What would it be, at last, the main legacy of Yeats’s *Celtic Twilight*? As stated in this work, he, such as other writers, intensely advocated for the establishment of an ‘Irish Ireland’, something which was also part of the nationalist’s ideals. To build this identity, the country had to go through a long and hard process. This process is described in every Irish history book, but its consequences may not be directly perceived there. These features are intrinsic in everything that ensued throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth-first. For the accomplishment of solid ideas a long building of such identity was needed, something to which Yeats and other writers are essential influences.

The idea of *Irishness* was born with the nationalist ideas. However, it took the effort to be built. It was fundamental, at that point, to pursue a vision of themselves apart from the British. This can be seen in Yeats’s work with the image of Paddy Flynn. Paddy is, according to the author, the person who told him most of the stories in his books. This old man had a great knowledge about this and the other world. Despite being poor, his wisdom was great and his ability to tell stories is compared to Homer’s. This image created by Yeats is certainly a way to bring to life a completely different character in the Irish cast of stereotypes. Up to that moment, the main type had been of a drunk, perhaps stupid man, with no prospects, and no relation to any transcendental wisdom. Paddy Flynn is different, he refers back to the wisdom of the ancient druids. Also, he comes from a place in Ireland from where no one would expect more

than turf, potatoes, and wheat. Paddy is, then, the personification of everything the nationalists had claimed for.

The importance of this would come not only in the Easter Rising in 1916 but also in the projects created by the government in an independent Ireland to revitalize the knowledge about the country. An example of that is the creation of the Irish Folklore Commission in 1935 and the creation of the Schools Folklore Scheme between 1937 and 1939, in which students all over the country would collect and document folklore and local history. Nowadays, these documents are available for a consult in the University College Dublin and count with a half million pages of valuable materials.

Another example of how this process affected the future happenings is the project created by the Irish government in 2010, the “20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030”. In this project, it is stated that by 2030 every Irish citizen will be bilingual in Gaelic and English. This strategy shows not only that the current government maintains its concerns on not letting the Irish language disappear, but also that Douglas Hyde’s first writings in Gaelic had its purpose fulfilled through time.

These facts are simply examples of how important the Irish Revival was and how important its manifestations for the maintenance of *Irishness* nowadays are. As a consequence, it is essential to see the importance of books such as *The Celtic Twilight* for the final affirmation of such ideals.

In 1888, Yeats wrote in the introduction of *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* that all those who came before him were story-tellers who made Irish folklore into literature. His goal, it said in this text, was not that; he was seeking self-knowledge. This knowledge regarded not only him, William Butler Yeats, but I believe that Ireland too as a whole. As I have stated before, my goal in this work is not like the ancient story-tellers’, neither is it like Yeats’; my goal is, in my own foreign and curious simple way, to show how important these stories are. Writing them in a time when everything seemed lost is the important thing. They are important, so is Yeats, and Lady Gregory, and everyone who followed them in this purpose. They were important not for their flowery writing or for their level of literary embodiment, but for what they wrote about. About whom they wrote. They were important for seeking a national identity. In 2016, it remains significant to tell these stories and maintain this long memory alive.

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**ANNEX:****Into the Twilight**

Out-worn heart, in a time out-worn  
Come clear of the nets of wrong and right;  
Laugh, heart, again in the gray twilight;  
Sigh, heart, again in the dew of the morn.  
Thy mother Eire is always young,  
Dew ever shining and twilight gray;  
Though hope fall from thee or love decay  
Burning in fires of a slanderous tongue.  
Come, heart, where hill is heaped upon hill,  
For there the mystical brotherhood  
Of hollow wood and the hilly wood  
And the changing moon work out their will.  
And God stands winding his lonely horn;  
And Time and the World are ever in flight,  
And love is less kind than the gray twilight,  
And hope is less dear than the dew of the morn.

W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*