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# Resurrecting Speranza: Lady Jane Wilde as the Celtic Sovereignty

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RESURRECTING SPERANZA: LADY JANE WILDE AS THE  
CELTIC SOVEREIGNTY

by

Heather L. Tolen

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English

Brigham Young University

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Heather L. Tolen

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As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Heather L. Tolen in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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## ABSTRACT

### RESURRECTING SPERANZA: LADY JANE WILDE AS THE CELTIC SOVEREIGNTY

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This thesis explores the ways in which Lady Jane Wilde, writing under the pen name of Speranza, established ethos among a poor, uneducated, Catholic populace from whom she was socially and religiously disconnected. Additionally, it raises questions as to Lady Wilde's exclusion from the roster of Irish literary voices who are commonly associated with the Irish Literary Revival, inasmuch as Lady Wilde played a critical, inceptive role in that movement.

Lady Jane Wilde, mother of Oscar Wilde, was an ardent nationalist who lived in Victorian Ireland. She contributed thirty-nine poems and several essays to the *Nation* newspaper—a nationalist publication—under the *nom de plume* of Speranza, which is Italian for “hope.” However, her audience consisted largely of the Irish peasantry, who

were for the most part poor, uneducated, and Catholic. The peasantry had little tolerance generally for members of the Protestant ascendancy who had held them in subjugation under the Penal Laws for so long. Lady Wilde, however, was wealthy, educated, and Protestant. Nevertheless, she claimed that she represented the “voice” of the Irish people. This thesis explores the notion that Lady Wilde gained popularity and trustworthiness among Irish commoners by fashioning herself after the Celtic Sovereignty goddesses in her dress, her motto and pen name, and her poetry.

Also, by connecting herself with Irish folklore, Lady Wilde played an unsung role in the development of the Irish Literary Revival—a late nineteenth and early twentieth century movement that sought cultural sovereignty for Ireland in the face of English political rule. Despite her central role in the nationalist movement and her inceptive place in the Irish Literary Revival, though, Lady Wilde has been largely excluded from twentieth century historical texts and anthologies. Possible reasons for this exclusion are raised in this thesis, as well as a call for current and future critics to restore Lady Wilde to her rightful place as an important voice in Irish national and literary history.

The first appendix of this thesis include selections from among Lady Wilde’s poetry as they first appeared in the *Nation* newspaper and were later published in a compilation titled *Poems, by Speranza*. The second appendix contains the full text of a discourse analysis conducted on Lady Wilde’s poetry in an effort to further strengthen the argument that she mimicked the role of the Celtic Sovereignty in her poetry.

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## CHAPTER 1

## RESURRECTING SPERANZA

This thesis is primarily about identity: What is Ireland's identity? What is the role of Celtic pagan mythology in shaping Irish identity? And most centrally, how and why did Lady Jane Wilde create her own identity among the Irish peasantry through allusion to Celtic mythology? Writing under the pseudonym Speranza, Lady Wilde was a household name throughout mid-nineteenth century Ireland. She was beloved by the Irish people for her commitment to Irish nationalism; her poetry and essays were widely read and critically acclaimed. Yet by the turn of the twentieth century, Lady Wilde had all but vanished from literary scholarship. Even the comprehensive, five-volume *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, with two volumes devoted solely to Irish women writers, gives little more than a passing nod to Lady Wilde. Encouragingly, in 2002, she was included in the Mellen Press "Women's Studies" series when Karen Tipper authored a 624-page biography of her. In 2007, Lady Wilde's work was finally substantially showcased in *Irish Literature: the Nineteenth Century* (Irish Academic Press, Volume II)—the first anthology to acknowledge her not just as a nationalist and as the mother of Oscar, but as a gifted poet and essayist.

This thesis joins the fledgling effort to resurrect Speranza. Not only is she important to Irish studies generally because of her entrenchment in the Irish nationalist cause, but she is significant within Irish political and Celtic mythological studies because of the unique way in which she drew on her Celtic heritage to gain ethos—that is, to become a popular and trusted nationalist voice—among the Irish people. This study of Lady Wilde's appeal to Celtic mythology as a social and political maneuver is distinctive

within the field of Speranza studies—scant as they are—for two reasons: (1) Lady Wilde has been the subject of very little critical scholarship; and (2) in that scholarship which has been done of Lady Wilde and her contributions to both Irish literature and the nationalist cause, none has recognized her reliance on her Celtic heritage as a means of creating ethos among the Irish commoners. This thesis proposes that through her name, her motto, her deportment, and her poetry written between 1846 and 1848 during the years of the Great Famine, Lady Wilde gained ethos among the Irish Catholic poor by appealing to their shared Celtic identity. She crafted for herself the persona of the *Spéir-bhean*—the “sky-woman” of the Aisling poetry tradition who symbolized the Celtic mythological goddess Sovereignty. As Sovereignty, she could offer hope to the people and encourage nationalist spirit among the Irish Catholics in ways that, because of her elevated social status and Protestant affiliation, she could not otherwise accomplish.

This first chapter will introduce Lady Wilde and place her among the prominent nationalist voices that called for Irish independence from England during the years of the Great Famine, 1845–1849. Extensive biographical information is excluded, simply because interested readers can refer to Tipper’s thorough 2002 biography. But Lady Wilde’s precarious social and political position as a wealthy, educated Protestant is underscored, particularly within the context of her efforts to connect with a largely poor, uneducated, Catholic population.

Chapter 2 of this thesis briefly outlines the historical circumstances which shaped Lady Wilde’s world. Particular emphasis is placed on the Penal Laws that stirred intense hostility among the Catholic peasantry towards the Protestant ascendancy, who were all members of the Church of Ireland and the Church of England—landowners, clergy, and

educated professionals—who effectively dominated Ireland socially, economically, and politically despite the fact that they represented a pronounced minority throughout Ireland. This chapter also explicates issues surrounding the Great Famine and England’s inadequate relief efforts. These historical issues largely informed the political and social spheres of Lady Wilde’s experience; these profoundly influenced her need to rely on her Celtic heritage to find a voice among the Irish people.

But Ireland’s history and her folklore are inextricably intertwined. Even some seemingly academic histories of Ireland, such as the *Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland*, are compelled to begin with a look at “early Irish mythological writings” (7) as a starting place for Irish history. Thus, Chapter 3 turns to Ireland’s Celtic mythological tradition, and specifically to the development of the goddess Sovereignty to whom Lady Wilde appealed for her own ethos. The chapter begins with a summary of Jungian archetypal theory, particularly the Great Mother archetype, and traces the evolution of the Great Mother archetype from early Earth Mother through various medieval goddess incarnations that eventually gave rise to the goddesses associated with Sovereignty.

Chapter 4 returns to Lady Wilde and explores the ways in which she fashioned herself as the Celtic Sovereignty in order to endear herself to the Irish people. This chapter considers Lady Wilde’s name, motto, appearance, and poetical conventions, and compares them to Sovereignty and, in particular, to the Aisling poetic incarnation of Sovereignty, the *Spéir-bhean*. The comparisons support the notion that by patterning herself after the Celtic Sovereignty, Lady Wilde created a relationship with the Irish people that endeared her to them despite her social, academic, and religious ties.

The final chapter of this thesis considers the significance of Lady Wilde and her identification with the Celtic Sovereignty within the broader framework of the Irish Literary Revival. Most modern scholarship recognizes W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory for their roles in initiating the Irish Literary Revival sometime around 1900. However, the Revival was an effort to claim an identity for Ireland apart from its status as an English colony. Literary Revivalists returned to their Celtic roots to find a common history—a common story—which would bind the Irish together. But in her use of ancient Celtic traditions to connect herself with the Irish common people, Lady Wilde played an inceptive role in the Irish Literary Revival nearly fifty years before Yeats and Lady Gregory made similar literary moves. Lady Wilde's role in this movement has gone thus far unsung; nevertheless, future scholarship would rightly consider her contributions to the Revival movement and reassess estimates as to when the Revival actually began.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, this thesis is about identity. What is Ireland's identity? What defines a nation? Dr. M. Crawford Young, a professor of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, characterizes nationalism as “an ideology claiming that a given human population has a natural solidarity based on shared history and a common destiny” (7). The “shared history” that binds the Irish is a stormy one, peppered with millennia of conflicts in search of a single prize: sovereignty. The term sovereignty (with a lower case “s”) is used in this thesis to mean unquestioned, unchallenged dominion over a land. This term is distinguished from Sovereignty (with a capital “S”)—the Celtic goddess who will be introduced later in this thesis. Political

sovereignty brings stability and peace that the Irish have never known. Instead, Irish history is riddled with conflicts, beginning with battles fought among ancient invading tribes who sought possession of the land. In the first century A.D., the Roman Empire moved through Britain; some historians argue that Ireland was also invaded, though not necessarily conquered (Wright 170). St. Patrick introduced Christianity to Ireland in the fifth century, forever altering the pagan Celtic and oral traditions of the land. Norse Vikings raided the island in the eighth century, asserting some degree of domination over the Irish until the early eleventh century (Bugge 175). And when England's King Henry II stepped onto Irish soil in 1171, a battle for Irish sovereignty from England commenced that continues even today.

The Great Famine of 1845-1849 played as defining a role in Ireland's history as any of the battles ever fought on Irish soil. Those years of suffering raised the question of Irish sovereignty to Olympian heights. And one of the strongest voices crying out for Irish nationalism during the Famine years was that of Speranza: Lady Jane Wilde. However, Lady Wilde's acclaim and popularity among Irish nationalists is enigmatic. After all, the nationalist cause, carried primarily by the Young Ireland and Fenian movements of the time, was predominantly supported by the Irish Catholics, who were generally poor and uneducated. As the oppressed majority, the Irish Catholics loathed members of the wealthy Protestant ascendancy who had subjugated them for many years. And yet, Lady Wilde, a beloved nationalist figure, was wealthy, well-educated, and Protestant. Her social and religious status should have consigned her to a category of people for whom the Irish populace had little tolerance. But Lady Wilde had a sense of

Irish heritage, cultivated since childhood, from which she fashioned a more endearing image for herself to achieve popularity.

Born as Jane Francis Elgee, Lady Wilde's exact date and place of birth are uncertain because her birth was never recorded in the Irish registries. Most (if not all) scholars, relying on apartment lease records and other scattered notations regarding the Elgee family, assert that she was born in Dublin in 1821. Nevertheless, Lady Wilde insisted throughout her lifetime that she was born in 1826. Further clouding her history, she also reported to her contemporaries that she was born of Italian heritage and changed her middle name to "Francesca" to reflect this assertion. Nevertheless, biographers and genealogists researching the matter agree that she is of Irish descent. Biographer Joy Melville suggests: "She [Speranza] took advantage of this lack of documentation about her birth to re-invent herself and weave romantic mysteries about her background" (3). Another biographer, Eric Lambert, quite unsympathetically declares that Lady Wilde attempted to project herself as an Irish heroine: "[S]he was playing a part, born of her romantic imagination, dreaming of becoming a modern Joan of Arc, a figure in the van of multitudes, or as some anonymous wit remarked, 'the Madame Roland of the Irish Gironde'" (66). Lady Wilde's acts of reinvention suggest that even from a young age, she wanted to craft a persona—build a new identity—for herself.

Lady Wilde is described as having been a bright, well-educated child. Though some girls attended boarding schools, she was privately tutored where she excelled particularly in literature, both contemporary and "the classics" (Melville 8). Recollecting her academic development, Lady Wilde records: "I was always very fond of study, and of books. My favorite study was languages. I succeeded in mastering ten of the European

languages. Till my eighteenth year I never wrote anything. All my time was given to study” (Melville 8). However, her lack of childhood writing was overcome when she witnessed the 1845 funeral procession of Thomas Davis, a beloved nationalist poet (Melville 15). Also around the same time, she encountered a nationalist pamphlet in a Dublin bookstall. Inspired by the reverence which was paid to Davis at his passing, as well as by the nationalist message, she finally began to write. She records: “Then it was that I discovered I could write poetry” (Wyndham 23). Biographers agree that around this time Lady Wilde first submitted her verse under the pseudonym “John Fanshaw Ellis” to Charles Gaven Duffy’s thriving nationalist newspaper, the *Nation*.

The popular *Nation* newspaper offered a literary outlet for the political writings of those who supported the Young Ireland and Fenian movements and were clamoring for separatism—distinct, separate nations of Ireland and England. Through the years of the Great Famine, 1845 to 1849, nationalist voices throughout Ireland acquired a stronger tenor: some called for rebellion and revolution, and others demanded a rescission of the Act of Union through more peaceful means. Lady Wilde had become painfully aware of the political and social problems plaguing mid-nineteenth century Ireland. Hoping to rally the Irish peasantry to the cause of nationalism, she began to write poetry for the *Nation*, and thus Speranza found her voice.

Known in recent decades merely as “Mother of Oscar,” Lady Wilde became a revered poet and essayist during her lifetime. She adopted the pseudonym of “Speranza,” which is Italian for “hope,” and contributed her verses to the *Nation* under cover letters which she signed as “John Fanshaw Ellis”—preserving her own initials, “JFE.” But as with many details of her childhood, the particulars of her first poetic submissions are

ambiguous. For instance, in his 1951 biography of Lady Wilde, Horace Wyndham states that a “John Fenshaw Ellis” first contributed a verse to the *Nation* in October, 1844. If Lady Wilde were indeed born in 1826, as she insisted, then this would have meant that she was, in truth, 18 years old when the verse was submitted—and this concurs with her statement that she began writing at the age of 18. However, since most scholars assert that Lady Wilde was born five years earlier, then she would have actually already been 23, and her own statement is contradicted. Karen Tipper maintains that Lady Wilde made her first tentative contribution to *The Nation* in February, 1846. Using the *nom de plume* “Speranza” and under the cover of a letter signed “John Fenshaw Ellis,” she submitted “The Holy War,” a translation of a German text which demanded the rise of a national hero. According to Tipper, Lady Wilde’s submission was well received, and between February 1846 and July 1848, Speranza published a total of 39 poems in the *Nation*, as well as several lengthier essays. Eventually dropping the name “John Fenshaw Ellis,” she became well known throughout Ireland as “Speranza.” As Joy Melville relates in her biography of Lady Wilde, “From being completely unknown and without any experience as a writer, she had, within three years, become a household name across Ireland” (Melville 41).

Lady Wilde’s poetry was directed at those suffering most deeply the effects of the famine; her verses urged the Irish peasantry to rise against English oppression and fight for national independence. However, Lady Wilde’s political position was precarious. After all, although throughout Celtic history women were hailed for their strength and political power, with the introduction of traditional Christian values came a diminishment of the female’s social status: according to Carolyn Conley, “By the nineteenth century,

the Victorian ideal of docile, delicate women, happy in a life of deference and submission informed the rhetoric of the church as well as Irish literature” (801). The ideal Victorian woman did not foray into the world of politics but, instead, focused her attentions on hearth and home.

And so, in raising the call of nationalism, Lady Wilde—well-bred, wealthy, and Protestant—needed to convince the common Irish people—predominately uneducated, poor, and Catholic, who suffered most severely the effects of the Great Famine—that she understood their suffering and wanted to help. But she clearly did not fit into the mold of the typical Victorian woman. She was frequently denigrated by her contemporaries for her prominent eccentricities, and in current scholarship, Eric Lambert criticizes her for demanding an energy and optimism from the Irish people that, because of the hardships of the Great Famine, they were wholly unable to give (Lambert 64). She is accused of being ultimately disconnected from the common Irish people and their desperate experience. Nevertheless, Lady Wilde is recorded as remarking to an acquaintance, “I express the soul of a great nation. Nothing less would satisfy me, who am the acknowledged voice in poetry of all the people of Ireland” (Wyndham 64). Her statement raises an intriguing question: how is it that one so seemingly disconnected from the Irish experience could lay claim to expressing “the soul” of Ireland?

The answer to this question lies in Lady Wilde’s association with Ireland’s great Celtic legacy. There is no question that Lady Wilde was familiar with classical and Celtic mythology. Wyndham records that as a child, “[Lady Wilde] read voraciously, and early amassed a considerable stock of general knowledge, especially where history and languages were concerned” (14). Tipper records: “Her knowledge of Irish history

and geography made her aware of the mental and physical feats of which the Catholic Celts and Norman-Irish as well as the Protestants were capable, and appreciate the richness of her country's cultural heritage, its beauty, and its natural resources" (11).

Evidence of Lady Wilde's classical acumen appears in her poetry; she repeatedly alludes to classical figures as well as characters from Irish folklore and mythology. But more convincing still is the fact that, later in her life, Lady Wilde wrote two books on the subject of Irish mythology and folklore. In *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland, with Sketches of the Irish Past* (1887), she traces the mythology of Celtic banshees and leprechauns, and addresses other aspects of Ireland's folklore and customs. After its publication, a friend wrote to her, "Congratulations on your delightful and recondite book on Celtic lore" (Melville 199). *Ancient Cures, Charms, and Usages of Ireland* (1890) also recounts the folklore of Ireland. Wyndham argues that in this book, Lady Wilde "exhibited something like an encyclopaedic knowledge of the subject" (164). Her engagement with Celtic mythology was consistent with the movements of that time which sought at least cultural sovereignty—a unique literary Ireland—if no political sovereignty was to be had.

Her essays too, confirm Lady Wilde's interest in Irish mythology and offer some evidence that Lady Wilde intended to present herself as a symbol of Ireland. In one article she wrote, "What sad Irish mother, with her half-famished children round her in their miserable cabin, could bear with life day by day without the infinite trust in the Divine Mother who, she believes, is watching over and pitying her?" (cited in Tipper 17). It is not God but the "Divine Mother," an extremely important archetype from Celtic

mythology, who will comfort the masses. Such literary references suggest that Lady Wilde was quite familiar with the mythology that informed her Celtic heritage.

In conjunction with her knowledge of Irish folklore, Lady Wilde devoted substantial energy to constructing a public image of herself. Anna, Comtesse de Bremont, an admirer of Lady Wilde's, described Lady Wilde's public image in her memoir *Oscar Wilde and his Mother* (1911). She recounts her first meeting with Lady Wilde: "What mattered the old-fashioned purple brocade gown, the towering headdress of velvet, the long gold earrings, or the yellow lace fichu crossed on her breast and fastened with innumerable enormous brooches—the huge bracelets of turquoise and gold, the rings on every finger" (46). Indeed, Lady Jane Wilde loomed larger-than-life among her contemporaries. Standing nearly six feet tall, she was an unconventional icon of Irish Nationalism. Bremont laments that Lady Wilde's "eccentricities" were frequently derided by "merciless chroniclers" (49). Tipper's biography remarks that many of Lady Wilde's contemporaries "mocked her fantastic, tawdry appearance or her 'queenly behavior'" (3). Another visitor to Lady Wilde's Dublin salon remarks: "I have never, before or since, met anyone in the least like Lady Wilde. Altogether, she struck me as an odd mixture of nonsense, with a sprinkling of genius" (Henriette Corkran, quoted in Wyndham 77).

A poignant article cited in Wyndham's biography of Lady Wilde also points to her interest in developing and maintaining a particular public image. Speaking of fashion, Lady Wilde writes:

A woman should study her own personality. She should consider well what she means to be—a superb Juno, a seductive Aphrodite, a blooming

Hebe, or a Pallas Athene. When the style that suits her best—whether for homage or love—is discovered, let her keep to it. As the symbol of her higher self, unchanged by frivolous mutilations of fashion, dress then attains a moral significance and becomes the esoteric expression of the wearer’s spiritual nature. (80)

Bibliographical anecdotes all underscore Lady Wilde’s propensity towards narcissism; thus, it is compelling but not perhaps surprising that she chose to use classical goddesses as defense of her personal fashion decisions. Clearly unfettered by concerns of modern fashion, as all contemporary accounts of her extravagant and unconventional dress suggest, Lady Wilde instead clothed herself publicly in regal attire befitting a queen, and in so doing, remained true to what she perceived to be her “spiritual nature” as one of the Great Mother goddesses of Ireland—Sovereignty. The development of the Sovereignty goddess, and Lady Wilde’s efforts to clothe herself similarly to Sovereignty, will be addressed more thoroughly in chapters three and four of this thesis.

One other small notation from among Lady Wilde’s correspondence may also intimate her association with Celtic Great Mother mythology. In a letter to a friend in Scotland, Lady Wilde expresses that among female poets, she holds “undisputed *sovereignty*” (my emphasis). This comment seems innocent until one considers that Sovereignty is one of the central Great Mother figures of Celtic lore and is the vital character in the Aisling poetry tradition of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

This chapter has established the purpose of this thesis and has introduced Lady Wilde as a nationalist writer who went to great lengths to fashion an identity for herself that would endear her to the Irish people. I have introduced the conflicts that Lady Wilde

faced not only as a Victorian woman engaging in political matters, but also as a member of the Protestant ascendancy who nevertheless needed to connect to an Irish Catholic population that would not necessarily be sympathetic towards her. The next chapter of this thesis will trace more fully the historical context which informed Lady Wilde's experience and which moved her to assume the role of Sovereignty as she called for Irish independence.

## CHAPTER 2

## THE CHAOS OF VICTORIAN IRELAND

The previous chapter introduced Lady Wilde or Speranza as a popular nationalist writer who relied on her Celtic heritage to establish herself as a trustworthy voice in famine-ravaged Ireland. This chapter more thoroughly investigates the struggles of the Victorian Irish and explores the historical forces that gave rise to Lady Wilde's nationalist cause. Particular attention is paid to the anti-Catholic Penal laws which caused significant division among the Irish people and to the Great Famine and England's inadequate relief efforts on behalf of the Irish people.

In 1859, Englishman Charles Dickens published his famous novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. Of course, this novel is set during the late eighteenth century French Revolution, in Paris and London. However, Dickens encapsulated a sentiment commonly attributed to Victorian Britain in general when he penned his famous opening line: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" (1). And yet, under Queen Victoria's rule, the Irish could scarcely agree that they had seen the "best of times" anytime in living memory. The previous decade's Great Famine had exacted a heavy price on the struggling nation: between 1845 and 1849, Ireland saw nearly two million of her sons and daughters—roughly 20-25% of her population—either die of starvation, or flee Ireland's shores in search of food and jobs that could not be found at home (Kinealy 257). At the same time, England exported Ireland's grain crops and beef while British absentee landlords evicted her people from their meager cottages: starvation and exposure to the elements relentlessly endangered the lives of the Irish poor. Among the Irish, political and

religious strife swept over the island in unyielding waves of violence and oppression, staining the land with some of the bloodiest battles any country has ever endured.

But Ireland is nothing if not resilient. The country's seminal historical text, the *Leabhar Gabhála Éireann* (literally, *The Book of the Taking of Ireland*) recounts a history of invasion and conquering that began when the world was created and continued through the Middle Ages, when the document was compiled. Although this text is largely Judeo-Christian in nature, serving as a quasi-biblical account of the Irish in much the same way that the Old Testament preserves the history of the Israelites, it nevertheless also draws on pagan Celtic mythology to develop not just a history but an identity that defines Ireland even today.

The *Leabhar Gabhála Éireann* (hereafter referred to simply as the “*Gabhála*”) is an assemblage of poems and stories that had for centuries been passed among the Irish through oral tradition. Extant texts written during the seventh and eighth centuries B.C. offer only a scattered sampling of the stories that had survived orally. The oldest existing text recounting Ireland's history is the *Historia Brittonum* (*History of the Britons*) written by the Welsh monk Nennius early in the ninth century. Over the next three hundred years, Irish poets produced myriad historical poems—most of which are lost today. But in the late eleventh century, an anonymous scholar undertook to weave the historical poetry into a tapestry of prose that organized Ireland's history into a series of invasions and “takings.” This enterprise marked the birth of the *Gabhála*.

The *Gabhála* can be divided into ten “books,” each recounting a different historical period, and a different “taking” by an invading tribe. Interestingly, the *Gabhála* records that the first of the “seed of Adam” (section 29) to take Ireland was a

woman—Noah’s granddaughter Cessair—whom Noah sent before the flood to the western edge of the world where perhaps she might be spared the impending disaster. According to the *Gabhála*, Noah’s hope was unrealized, but Cessair and her fifty handmaidens survived in an underwater cave for a year until the flood waters receded. The record relates that unfortunately, two of the three men who had accompanied Cessair and her handmaidens on their journey to Ireland had died; the third, overwhelmed at the task of servicing fifty-one women, turned into a salmon and swam away. Soon thereafter, Cessair and her all-female tribe passed away. The *Gabhála* recounts that after Cessair died, Ireland lay in waste for three hundred years until the next “taking.” Cessair’s possession of the land marks a long and important history of women in Ireland.

Though the *Gabhála* was largely influenced by Judeo-Christian values and even patterned after several fifth- and sixth-century Christian texts, it nevertheless preserved some of the original Celtic mythology that pervaded Ireland’s oral tradition. Most significantly, the *Gabhála* recounts some of the affairs of Celtic goddesses who played fundamental roles in Ireland’s protection, defense, and fertility. These goddesses, manifest in their most positive, Ireland-protecting aspects, are individually known as Sovereignty, who generally by way of adultery and bloodshed, promised autonomy and victory to various Celtic tribes that invaded Ireland. Descriptions of the goddess Sovereignty (with a capital “S”) are tempered in the *Gabhála* to reflect more appropriate Christian female behaviors; additional depictions of Sovereignty are corroborated through other extant historical documents and persist in oral histories.

However, between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries, as Christianity more thoroughly pervaded Ireland, Celtic deities began to disappear or metamorphose into

Saints and other religious figures. Sovereignty, too, saw her prominence fade and her power to grant sovereignty—unchallenged possession—of Ireland diminish in Irish literature. Then, after England formed a union with Ireland in 1542, Sovereignty was reborn in the Aisling poetry of the early seventeenth century. Aisling poetry sprung up as the great Irish bard tradition dwindled, and the tone and theme of Irish poetry changed. Without an Irish king or aristocracy to support them, the bards were suddenly part of the common people, and so there emerged a style of poems in which the poet is portrayed as lost in a dream, wandering through Ireland when he meets the *Spéir-bhean*—a “sky-woman” from the fairy Otherworld who appears to the despondent poet to offer hope and encourage nationalism. The *Spéir-bhean* is Sovereignty. Disempowered, she could no longer promise possession of Ireland, but she offered hope that a true king would come, and she called on her Irish sons to fight on her behalf. Sovereignty’s development and incarnations are explored further in the next chapter of this thesis. Important, however, is that Celtic mythology has always been and continues to be a predominant facet of Irish culture.

By the nineteenth century, Ireland was a country in chaos. The 1542 Crown of Ireland Act, formally titled, *An Act that the King of England, his Heirs and Successors, be Kings of Ireland*, established a personal union in which the two separate entities of Ireland and England shared England’s monarch as their respective heads of state. But Ireland’s relationship with England was cemented when the 1801 Act of Union, passed by the English government and Ireland’s all-Protestant parliament, merged the Kingdom of Ireland into the Kingdom of Great Britain with a finality that enraged the Irish

commoners—particularly the Irish Catholics, who constituted more than 75 percent of Ireland’s population and had already suffered severe persecution under the Penal Laws.

The Penal Laws in Ireland were a series of discriminatory laws passed by British authority during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that were designed to strip Irish Catholics of their wealth and power in Ireland and shift political power towards the State Church (Jackson). These laws included such provisions as exclusion of all Catholics from holding public office, a ban on marriages between Catholics and Protestants, a disenfranchisement of all Catholics, an exclusion of Catholics from all legal and judicial professions, a fine charged against Catholics who did not attend Protestant services each Sunday, a ban against Catholics bearing firearms or joining the military, a ban against Catholics owning a horse valued at more than £5, and so on.

The Catholic Relief Acts began to repeal some of these discriminatory laws as early as 1771, when the Catholic Holy See recognized England’s George I as a legitimate successor to the English throne. These Acts marked a small degree of progress towards Catholic emancipation when the 1801 Act of Union was established. For instance, Catholics again had the right to vote, though they still could not hold public office, and Catholics could again bear arms and join the military, but not hold high-ranking positions. Thus hostilities endured between Protestants and Catholics; this religious turmoil only fueled the fires of hatred burning between those who sought Irish independence, or Nationalists, and those who favored life as an English colony, or Unionists.

The Act of Union forced the English Crown and parliament to consider for perhaps the first time, the “Irish Question”: What were they to do with a population that,

according to Cecil Woodham-Smith, was “on the verge of starvation, her population rapidly increasing, three-quarters of her labourers unemployed, housing conditions appalling and the standard of living unbelievably low” (31)? Tragically, England’s response to the Irish Question was one which would cost the lives of a million Irish residents, drive millions more away from Ireland in search of life’s basic necessities, and cause a rift in English-Irish relations that lingers even today.

Less than fifty years after claiming Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom, England was confronted with a colony facing a catastrophe. The Great Famine came upon the Irish with the destructive force of a Biblical plague. The Irish were no strangers to famine. Irish census records indicate that between 1728 and 1844, Ireland faced seventeen famines of varying severity (Woodham-Smith 32-33). But the Great Famine which began in 1845 and lasted for nearly five years was remarkable for both its vastness and its duration.

The nineteenth-century Irish commoners survived on a diet of potato and milk. Historian K. H. Connell notes: “The great mass of the population [of Ireland] had, in effect, a single solid foodstuff: stir-about, or an oatmeal loaf, was an occasional treat: weeks or months separated the red-letter occasions when meat was eaten: day after day, three times a day, people ate salted, boiled potatoes, probably washing them down with milk” (110). Connell added that the most fortunate of the Irish were able to flavor their potatoes “with an onion or a bit of lard, with boiled seaweed or a scrap of salted fish” (110). Such a restricted diet was not always the traditional fare of the Irish; pre-sixteenth-century Irish were a pastoral people who enjoyed a menu of meat, milk, and grains (Connell 111).

However, the Irish peasantry increasingly came to rely on the potato as their primary food staple for a variety of reasons, all of which were tied to the issue of land. In *History of Ireland*, Eleanor Hull remarks that “the main trouble of this period [the Famine years] was the long and bitter land war, arising out of conditions of old standing between owners and tenants” (310). She notes that the Irish poor lived on small plots of land and had little incentive to improve them. In fact, many landlords saw improvements to their properties as reason to raise the rents which the tenants were already scarcely able to pay. The Irish learned that growing grains and thus improving their rented land would likely do them more harm than good.

Central to the land problem in Ireland, too, was the constant threat of eviction. Unlike in England, where law required landowners to renew their leases with tenants who were current on their rents, landowners in Ireland—usually absentee Englishmen who lived in England and had never set foot on their Irish holdings—could rent their properties to the highest bidder as soon as a previous tenant’s lease expired. In addition, if a tenant’s rent fell into arrears, the landlord could seize his livestock and evict him without notice. And so, such instability “favoured the potato: it had a briefer growing season; it remained relatively safe underground while grain might be carried away, burned, or trampled underfoot; and when people took to the hills with their cattle, potatoes they might grow, but hardly grain” (Connell 111).

Moreover, Irish peasants lacked sufficient space to grow enough grains to provide for a family’s nutritional needs. The common Irish lived on smaller and smaller pieces of land as they “gavelled” out—divided among all their sons, according to anti-Catholic Penal law requirements—portions of their leased property to their sons and grandsons,

sharing only the pasture land in common. However, as the *Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland* asserts, “Tiny, subdivided holdings could feed a family on potatoes” (201). And, even if the Irish had found sufficient space to grow grains, they lacked the means to process them. Connell remarked, “An impoverished people, ill-provided with granaries, mills, and ovens, welcomed a food that could be stored in earthen clamps and made edible simply by boiling” (111).

Thus was the stage set for tragedy when the potato crop failed in the Great Famine. The first reports of potato blight came in mid-September 1845; a month later, the whole of Ireland saw failure of its potato crops, and by mid-November, half of Ireland’s life-giving potato harvest had already been destroyed (Woodham-Smith 51). In 1846, the potato crop failed entirely; the death toll began to climb; 1847 brought with it an unusually bitter winter and an outbreak of typhus. Ironically, the small potato crop of 1847 was mostly a healthy one; however, so few seed potatoes had been spared the blight in the previous year that the 1847 crop was not enough to bring relief to the starving nation. The death toll continued to climb while tens of thousands of Irish began to emigrate on “coffin ships”—so called because of the high number of lives each ship claimed during passage across the sea; some of these rickety ships even sank while still within sight of the Irish coast.

While some of the emigration from Ireland on these ships was voluntary, much was forced by landowners who wanted to clear their lands. An 1837 British report on the condition of the Irish poor recommended: “State-aided emigration, drainage, the destruction of unwholesome cabins, and improvements on the farms. . .all which expedients were resorted to on a large scale during the famine with both good and evil

results” (Hull, *History* 317). Robert Scally compared the involuntary emigration of the Irish on these ships to the African slave trade and the trains of the holocaust, calling them “similar and related historical events” (6). And Eleanor Hull has noted, “The emigrant vessels to the United States were becoming plague-ships, in which the victims, closely packed and already weakened by hunger, succumbed long before they reached the shores of the New World” (*History* 319).

Emigration, then, offered little escape from the horrors of the Great Famine, which seemed to finally be nearing its end in 1847. But in 1848, the potato blight returned, and with it, widespread outbreaks of cholera. The potato crop failed yet again in 1849, accompanied by more cholera outbreaks. Finally, 1850 brought with it a healthy crop of potatoes. But the damage was done. Conservative estimates acknowledge the death or emigration of 1.6 million Irish within the Famine’s five-year span; most reports, though, place the number closer to two million, with a continued population decline due to emigration for another century (David Ross 312-313).

England’s Prime Minister Robert Peel responded immediately to the impending calamity in 1845 by calling for the repeal of the Corn Laws, which were high taxes imposed on the importation of foreign corn that essentially eliminated corn imports in Britain. Peel also purchased £100,000 of Indian corn from North America to be sold in Ireland at the cost of a penny per pound. The economic impact of the Corn Laws in Britain was to set the price of imported grain at so high a price that it really had no market. Thus the English essentially held a monopoly on grains throughout the United Kingdom. Ostensibly, Peel’s call to lift the Corn Laws would bring grain into Ireland at a

competitive price. However, Peel's efforts in regard to both the Corn Laws and the importation of Indian corn wholly failed the Irish on multiple counts.

Political economist Michael Lusztiig contends that Peel opposed the Corn Laws for economic and political reasons, and merely capitalized on the Irish famine as a means to push his own political agenda: “[T]he Irish crisis served a purpose for Peel. It provided a pretext for emergency debate on the Corn Laws. Peel undoubtedly sought to use the specter of popular agitation in Ireland in order to frighten parliament into repealing the Corn Laws” (400). Lusztiig offers three claims in support of his argument that Peel's call for reform had little to do with helping the Irish. First, Lusztiig notes that Peel's proposed legislation phased out the Corn Laws over a three year period—hardly a time frame reflective of emergency response to a rapidly unfolding crisis. Second, Lusztiig points out that opening the Irish ports to grain imports would not have helped the Irish: “The peasantry relied largely on the potato crop for subsistence and, with the failure of the potato crop, had very limited purchasing power for wheat at any price” (400). Finally, even with an immediate and total recall of the Corn Laws, which Peel did not advocate, the wheat market would nevertheless take some time to fall. Again, time was not on the side of the starving Irish.

Besides, Ireland already had corn. “Corn” in Ireland is the grain that Americans call wheat. And Ireland was growing plenty of wheat, oats, and barley, as well as raising cattle, pigs, sheep, and other livestock that could have fed the nation. Joel Mokyr and Cormac O'Grada note that Ireland “was, above all, an agricultural economy catering for its own growing population and for the rapidly increasing British market” (210). Instead of halting the Corn Laws, Peel might more effectively have called a halt to England's

export of Ireland's grains and meat; Eleanor Hull remarks: "In similar extremities the usual trade regulations had been occasionally suspended and special means taken to preserve the food grown in the country for the famishing inhabitants" (*History* 318). Hull acknowledges that suspending mandated exports would not have wholly averted the calamity in Ireland, but she asserts: "The wheat crop in Ireland was hardly up to average, and the barley and oats were deficient; yet it is undoubted that if the corn had been kept in the country a multitude of lives might have been saved. . . .in this instance the prevention of corn leaving the country would have been a more effective means of preserving life" (*History* 318).

Equally ineffective was Peel's plan to bring Indian corn from the United States to Ireland. In the first place, some historians argue that Britain's importation of Indian corn, both by Peel and by the Whig government that replaced him, was again an effort driven by politics and ideology—not by sincere interest in helping the suffering Irish. Mohamed Harzallah remarks that with the importation of Indian corn, "the British government gave priority to ideological concerns over the urgent need to help the paupers in Ireland" (307). Britain's *laissez-faire* policy drove the decision to import a grain that would not compete with the existing British cereal market, and underscored England's unwillingness to do more than import the grain and quickly put it in the hands of local aid agencies. By not milling the grain into useable meal or offering it in the public market, the British government honored its allegiance to the principal of noninterference with the invisible workings of national economics (Harzallah 312).

Indian corn—especially in its dried kernel form—was fraught with problems, and the starving Irish found little relief from it. First, the grain was largely unfamiliar to the

Irish, except as feed for livestock. Between 1799 and 1827, maize, from which Indian corn is derived, was imported into Ireland in limited quantities to soften the effects of lesser food shortages. However, Indian corn is harder and drier than maize, and demands thorough grinding to create a usable cereal. The first shipments of Indian corn imported from America at the time of the Great Famine were even more unwieldy than usual. The *Encyclopedia of Irish History and Culture* reports that at least preliminary shipments of the Indian corn “were stale and improperly ground, and cooking was inadequate” (Crawford 314).

The hard, dry kernels of Indian corn demanded several passes through a steel grinder before they were refined enough to produce a usable meal. But such grinders were not available to the Irish paupers, and English economic ideology restricted Britain’s help with such endeavors. As a result of the grain’s improper preparation, those who ate it suffered from a variety of painful stomach and digestive ailments. The corn’s bright yellow color led angry Irish to name it “Peel’s brimstone” (Kinealy 38).

Since the 1950s, some historians have argued that England’s disengagement from effective Famine relief amounted to genocide as it is defined by the 1948 Hague Genocide Convention. For example, Francis Boyle, a law professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, reported in 1996 that Ireland’s suffering during the Great Famine was caused by “a policy of mass starvation in Ireland that constituted acts of genocide against the Irish people” (Ritschel 2). Others have likened it to the treatment of the Jews during the Holocaust (for example, Donnelly). Revisionist historians, on the other hand, attribute the Famine’s disastrous consequences to natural disaster, or even to God’s will, but not to any action or inaction on the part of the British government. But

despite the causes of English inaction, the effects are clear: the Irish suffered dearly, and the fires of the Irish nationalists were unprecedentedly stoked.

This chapter, then, has explored many of the historical factors that contributed to the robust nationalist cause of which Lady Wilde was a part. But Ireland also has a deep-rooted mythological tradition grounded in its Celtic heritage that equally influenced Lady Wilde. The next chapter will introduce that heritage; in particular, the development of the Sovereignty goddess from the Great Mother archetype is traced from the earliest prehistoric incarnations of Mother Earth through the sixteenth century rise of the *Spéir-bhean* in the Irish Aisling poetry tradition.

## CHAPTER 3

## THE GREAT MOTHER AND CELTIC SOVEREIGNTY

The previous chapter summarized the historical context within which Lady Jane Wilde thrived as an Irish Nationalist. This chapter turns to the Celtic mythological tradition which, I argue in Chapter 4, richly influenced Lady Wilde's social carriage and poetic voice. Because the concept of myth, and particularly Celtic myth, is derived from deeply ancient notions that pervade diverse global cultures, it is nearly impossible, and might even be irresponsible, to discuss the rise of ancient myth, especially within Ireland, without also talking about Jung's theories surrounding archetype. Although Jungian theory is often brushed aside, particularly in modern criticism, as being too far-flung and lacking empirical foundation, Jung is a persuasive psychologist who laid out an elegant explanation to account for similar mythologies that rose among diverse cultural tribes in ancient history. Therefore, this chapter begins with a discussion of the Jungian Mother Archetype, and then traces that archetype through several goddess manifestations, including those of the mythological figures associated with the "Celtic Sovereignty"—the goddess image to whom Lady Wilde turned for help in building her own ethos among the Irish commoners.

Jung's concept of the Mother Archetype figures prominently in a mid-twentieth century children's book. In 1960, children's author P. D. Eastman published the story of a little bird that hatched from his egg to find himself alone. The hatchling immediately set out in the world to look for his mother. Along his way he encountered a kitten, a hen, a dog, a cow, a car, a boat, a plane, and finally a terrifying tractor; in every instance he asked the same title question: "Are you my mother?" Evocatively, without any

environmental influence, Eastman's little bird seemed to instinctively understand that somewhere there must be a creative, nurturing being—and he longed to be with her.

Eastman's story about the little bird's quest to find his mother—a mother he had never met and had no reason to believe even existed—illustrates the concept of archetype as defined by Carl Jung: “[T]here are present in every psyche [apparently this includes birds!] forms which are unconscious but nonetheless active—living dispositions, ideas in the Platonic sense, that perform and continually influence our thoughts and feelings and actions” (79). Indeed, in creating a popular character who knows *a priori* that somewhere in the world he will find his mother, Eastman taps into one of Jung's primary archetypal forms: “The Mother Archetype.”

Jung contends that the Mother Archetype is manifested in many ways, including mythological figures (5). In his 1938 lecture, “The Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype,” he identifies the characteristic traits of the Mother. In her most positive aspects, these include fertility, fruitfulness, redemption, fate, “maternal solicitude and sympathy,” wisdom, “any helpful instinct or impulse,” and “all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility” (82). At the same time, the Mother Archetype has an alter-aspect that includes “anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate” (82). And so the Mother Archetype is dual-natured, she both gives and takes life; she fosters growth while condemning her children to “inescapable” fates.

In *Myths of the Female Divine Goddess*, mythologists David Leeming and Jake Page trace manifestations of Jung's Mother Archetype from her earliest appearances in Paleolithic figurines and cave drawings dating as early as 30,000 B.C., through a

multitude of goddess incarnations traversing the globe and spanning the rise of “male-oriented religious pantheons” (133), to our current day. These authors speculate that the Mother Archetype first appeared throughout world cultures in prehistoric eras as the Earth Goddess: “She seems to have been absolute and parthenogenetic—born of herself—the foundation of all being. She was the All-Giving and the All-Taking, the source of life and death and regeneration. More than a mother goddess or fertility goddess, she appears to have been earth and nature itself, an immense organic, ecological, and conscious whole” (7). Significantly, this Earth Goddess described by Leeming and Page manifests the dual nature of the Mother Archetype: she is both life-giving and life-taking.

The Great Mother goddesses appeared in the early Neolithic period, around 6500 B.C., as distinct from Mother Earth (Leeming and Page 19). These goddesses included Nunkwi in Peru, Kali in India and Turkey, Oya in Africa, and Danu, the original Great Mother goddess in Ireland. The Great Mother or Divine Mother was a central figure throughout the days of the Roman Empire in Greek and Roman mythology. In her diverse manifestations, she was honored throughout all of northern Europe as the *Matres* or *Matrones*—plural names which signified her status as a triple goddess and mirrored the mythology of the Greek Fates, the Roman Furies, and other triplistic deities. Between the first and fifth centuries A.D., several monuments were erected to honor the *Deae Matrones* that remain intact today (see Wood; Cannon and Henig). The *Deae Matrones* typically represented motherhood and fertility. However, inasmuch as worshippers of the Mother Goddess were spread throughout Europe, her attributes varied from region to region, as did the names by which she was called. For example, in a region near

Provence in southern France, the *Matrones* were known as *Glanicae* and were associated with healing (Markale 95); in locations throughout Germany they were known as the *Aufanie* and associated with both fertility and protection (Green 196-197).

The three life stages represented by the *Deae Matrones* establish a pattern that is typical of many triple-goddess deities; that is, they manifest in the three life stages of maiden, mother, and crone. In his controversial book-length essay *The White Goddess*, poet Robert Graves, focusing primarily on Welsh and Irish deities, proposes that all triple-goddesses in early Celtic mythology are really manifestations of a single deity called by multiple names, and each manifestation is marked by her chronological representation as a maiden, a mother, or a crone/hag. Graves' theory is commonly embraced today by those involved in goddess worship who associate the goddesses with the phases of the moon: a waxing moon is the Maiden goddess; a full moon is the Mother goddess; a waning moon is the Crone goddess. Some modern scholarship criticizes Graves' approach, however, suggesting that it does not fully account for the varied cultures and traditions which influence the rise of various mythological cycles, nor does it accurately represent the goddesses of Irish mythology, who often are tripled not because of their ages but because of their functions. This notion will be explored later in this chapter.

Even when not tripled, however, the Celtic Mother goddesses share common characteristics which reflect Jung's original Mother Archetype. For instance, Carolyn Larrington describes the Celtic goddess as a "dual-natured female figure, beautiful and hag-like by turns in whose gift was great power" (122). Mary Condren argues that even the warlike goddesses honored the human life cycle in their sexual appetites and respect

for death. She states: "The relationship with motherhood was the central element of the social fabric; the society was held together by common allegiance to the customs of the tribe loosely organized around the traditions of the goddess" (28).

Ireland's Celtic traditions offer maybe the most ancient and substantial examples of the Mother Archetype. Perhaps this is due to the consistency with which these traditions were passed from generation to generation. Through most of Ireland's history, Celtic mythological traditions were preserved only orally until the introduction of Christianity in about the fifth century. In fact, the name Celt is derived from the Greek "Keltoi," meaning "hidden people," which the Celtic tribes were called by the Greeks because they kept no written records (Caldecott 4). Their poet-priests, the Druids, were required to study for twenty years or more, committing the lore of the Celtic people to memory, before they could join the ranks of honored bards who preserved the people's oral tradition. So reliable was the oral transmission of stories that it has been hailed in modern times for its "astonishing fidelity and persistence" (Anne Ross 40).

Written accounts of the Celtic lore did not appear in Ireland until Christianity swept across the island in the fifth century B.C. But unlike the reliability of the oral tradition, these new written accounts intentionally altered the ancient stories in ways that made them more palatable to Christian authority. Christian priests and scholars who first transcribed the Celtic folklore were unsettled by Ireland's pagan accounts of war, bloodshed, sexual appetite, and non-Christian gods and goddesses. And so, these writers took generous poetic license with the oral tradition, softening the most pagan elements and relegating many of the Celtic deities to Christian saints or fanciful folkloric faeries. Describing these early Christian efforts to transcribe and transform the Celtic folklore,

Matthew Arnold opines that the medieval author who took such liberties with the oral tradition is “like a peasant building his hut on the site of Halicarnassus or Ephesus; he builds, but what he builds is full of materials of which he knows not the history, or knows by a glimmering tradition merely: stones ‘not of this building,’ but of an older architecture, greater, cunninger, more majestic” (322).

Fortunately, although the oldest Celtic legends were softened to better fit with Christian doctrine, they were not entirely stripped of the ancient mythologies that informed them. Enough manuscripts and parchments survive today that modern scholars have managed to piece together rather consistent renderings of these earliest Celtic myths; these surviving texts include the *Leabhar Gabhála Éireann* and the *Historia Brittonum* mentioned in the previous chapter, the eleventh century *Lebor na hUidre* (*Book of the Dun Cow*), the twelfth century *Book of Leinster*, and a smattering of manuscripts found throughout Scotland, Wales, and England (Slavin).

According to the *Gabhála*, the earliest Irish tribes first came to Ireland forty years before the Biblical flood. As with other prehistoric tribes, these ancient settlers also honored the Divine Mother in their worship of Mother Earth; the Mother Earth was recognized by the early Celts as a tripartite goddess in what T.W. Rolleston calls “the usual Irish fashion of conceiving the divine power in triads” (86). Juliette Wood also notes that “Mother-Goddesses are often depicted in threes. Triplication is undoubtedly a Celtic element” (122). Mother Earth reflects Graves’ taxonomy of the triple goddess as a beautiful maiden in the spring, a nurturing mother during summer months, and a wise elderly woman/Death Goddess in the winter (French 12). Thus, even this antediluvian

Celtic incarnation of the Mother Archetype emerges with both positive, life-giving characteristics and also with darker, deadly facets that typify the Mother Archetype.

The Mother goddesses in Celtic mythology are varied, and fill a wide array of functions. By way of reference, a table of Ireland's major Mother goddesses appears on the following page of this thesis, as Table 3.1. In some aspects, these goddesses are nurturers and protectors; in other manifestations, though, and in keeping with Jung's dual-natured archetype, they fill the darker roles of warrior and destroyer as they also serve as goddesses of sovereignty. Nevertheless, extant Celtic documents all confirm the presence and importance of Jung's Mother Archetype, manifested as the Mother Earth in the earliest Celtic traditions, and then arising as Danu, the Divine Mother goddess. But the mythology consistently reflects Jung's pattern of duality; while Danu, Brigit, Étaín, Éiru, and many other goddesses are life-giving and protective, other Divine Mother goddesses, particularly those embodied by the Morrigan and Macha, are more difficult to locate within the Mother goddess tradition because they leave pain and death in their wake. Nevertheless, all these figures, and others as well, characterize the body of deities who represent Sovereignty goddesses within Celtic mythology. This chapter will look at many of the Sovereignty goddesses listed in Table 3.1. and underscore their position as Divine Mothers and as Sovereignty. As sources for this information, consult the Works Cited pages of this thesis, but specifically see Caldecott, Clark, Loomis, MacKillop, Rolleston, Squire, and Wood.

**Table 3.1: Irish Celtic Goddesses**

While Irish Celtic mythology is replete with deities, some play a more prominent role in Irish folklore than others. The central Irish goddesses are listed below.

Name	Pronunciation	Multiple Goddess?	Alternate Names/Spellings	Function
Áine	“AWN-ya”	Dual: Paired with Grian		Goddess of love, growth, and cattle
Anu	“AH-noo”	Triple: Joined with Danu, Tailtiu		Goddess of prosperity and nurturance; the Great Mother
Badb	“BOV”	Triple: Joined with Macha and Mórrigan	Bodb	Goddess of war and sovereignty
Banba	“BAHN-ba”	Triple: Joined with Fodla and Ériu		Patron Goddess of Ireland; originally may have been Goddess of war and fertility
Brigit	“BREET”	Triple Joined with her two sisters, also named Brigit	Brigan, Brigid, Brigantis, Brigidu, Bride	Goddess of healing, craftsmanship (especially blacksmithing), and creativity (art)
Danu	“DAH-noo”	Triple: Joined with Anu, Tailtiu		Goddess of movement, tides, process
Ériu	“AY-reh”	Triple: Joined with Fódla and Banba	Éire, Erin	Goddess of Ireland
Étaín	“EE-den”	Triple: Joined with maiden and crone named Étaín	Edain, Aideen, Etaoin, Éadaoin, Aedin	Sun Goddess
Fódla	“FOOD-lah”	Triple: Joined with Banba and Ériu	Fótla, Fódhla Fóla	Patron Goddess of Ireland; originally Goddess of war and sovereignty
Grian	“GREEN”	Dual: Paired with Áine		
Macha	“MOH-ka”	Triple: Joined with Badb and Mórrigan		Goddess of war, horses, and sovereignty
Medb	“MAYV”		Medb, Medhbh, Meadhbh, Meab, Meabh, Maeve, Maev	Goddess of sovereignty
Mórrigan	“MOR-RE-GAN”	Triple: Joined with Macha and Badb	Morrígu, Morrighan, Mor-Rioghain, Nemain, Fea, Anann	Goddess of sovereignty, prophecy, war, and death
Tailtiu	“DAL-tya”	Triple: Joined with Anu, Danu		Goddess of the earth

Before discussing the deities referenced on the previous page, a more general examination of the Sovereignty figure is warranted. There is not any one specific goddess named Sovereignty. Instead, the name is applied to any of a number of Celtic female deities who have the power to protect Ireland, and transfer rights of leadership to various kings and queens as they see fit. Often the Sovereignty figures are associated with war, since war is the primary means by which invading tribes achieved ownership of Ireland. In keeping with Jung's dual-natured Mother Archetype, the Sovereignty goddesses also present contrasts; for example, the Mórrigan, who will be discussed more fully later, plays both protective and destructive roles. Physically the Sovereignty goddesses also reflect duality as they typically appear in both haggardly and beautiful manifestations. Perhaps the most current example of a Sovereignty figure who presents herself as both beautiful and haggardly appears in a 1902 play written by William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory: *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*.

The title character of the play, Cathleen Ni Houlihan appears at the doorstep of a young Irish groom-to-be who with his family is engaged in the flurry of wedding preparations. Cathleen sings her sorrowful story of loss, occasionally recounting the stories of other heroes who have fought and died trying to save her and her four green fields or provinces or Ireland. She finally convinces the groom to go and fight for her as well. He, too, ultimately dies in the effort. However, as he leaves to fight, his brother makes a statement that emphasizes Sovereignty's dual appearance. Asked if he had seen the old woman, he responds, "I did not, but I saw a young girl and she had the walk of a queen" (Yeats 88).

Lyn Innes, a professor of post-colonial literature at the University of Kent, acknowledges the conflation of characters like Cathleen Ni Houlihan with Ireland itself. She asserts that these figures rose as a consequence of “anti-colonialist and nationalist movements” (10). However, she also acknowledges that “the representation of the country [Ireland] as Motherland has a much longer history,” as embodied in Ireland’s “important myths (and sometimes political structures) which give women power and significance, and often the power to grant sovereignty” (10).

Alexander Krappe argues that the notion of Irish Sovereignty as personified by a beautiful woman “is very ancient” (444). In support of this argument, he cites the story of “Lugaidh Laigde” from the twelfth-century *Book of Leinster*, which recounts the tale of the sons of the King of Ulster who become separated from their father during a deer hunt. The sons stumble upon the house of an old hag who demands that one of the brothers lie with her, or else she will “transform” all of them. One of the brothers agrees, whereupon the hag turns into a beautiful woman who introduces herself as the Sovereignty of Ireland and Scotland. Krappe also cites the story of the sons of Eochaid which appears in the fourteenth century text, the *Book of Ballymote*. This story, too, tells of hunters, Eochaid’s sons, who stumble upon an old hag by a lake. She demands a kiss from them; when one finally complies, she transforms into a beautiful woman and promises that this son, Niall, shall become a great king of Ireland, which he eventually does. Finally, Krappe references a story that is mentioned in ancient texts at least as early as 1056, called “*Baile in Scail*” or “Champion’s Ecstasy.” This tale, too, personifies Ireland as a beautiful maiden who gives ale to the next Irish king.

In contrast, Juliette Wood contends that the notion of the Sovereignty figure is “one of the more far-reaching suggestions yet made about the nature of Celtic goddesses” (130). Wood argues that while some ancient goddesses certainly did grant kingship or protection as part of their “multi-functional” (131) natures, nevertheless the notion of a Sovereignty goddess is a much more recent construct—an adaptation by storytellers who used “ancient mythological themes[ . . .]to validate contemporary historical reality” (130). Wood adds that particularly in the context of war goddesses and their association with Sovereignty, “The powerful war/death female with its strongly sexual overtones may be more specifically Celtic; while the symbolism associated with the sovereignty queen may be a later aspect of the tradition, and characteristic of the learned/literary context rather than the all-enveloping pan-Celtic goddess figure” (131).

Regardless, however, of whether the earliest Celtic druids intentionally developed figures specifically assigned the function of sovereignty, or whether that function became more prominent in later texts, the mythology unarguably includes—and always has included—stories of goddesses who promise sovereign rule to aspiring kings of Ireland. In analyzing the stories contained in the most ancient Celtic texts, Claire French summarizes the most widely held view of the Sovereignty figure: “[T]he Goddess who is identified with the land, Lady Sovereignty, always holds centre stage and she often appears in her triple manifestation: Eriu, Banba, and Fodla, the Three Morrighans (plural Morrigna), or the Three Machas” (36). Patricia Lysaght agrees: “The theme of the marriage of the land-goddess to the proper ruler of a territory, thus ensuring his sovereignty, is a perennial one in Irish tradition. . . Thus the king of Tara (or Ireland) was

symbolically espoused to the land-goddess Ériu, representing the sovereignty of the whole of Ireland” (158).

Charles Squire calls the goddess Danu “[t]he most ancient divinity of whom we have any knowledge. . .the goddess from whom the whole hierarchy of gods received its name. . .she was the universal mother” (50-51). Danu—the Mother Goddess of the “Tuatha de Danann” tribe that was the fifth “taker” of Ireland—is the first named goddess in the *Gabhála*. As a triple-goddess, Danu is typically coupled with the goddesses Anu and Tailtiu to oversee the life force. Of course, mythological characters are defined in multiple stories preserved in different texts, and never seem to possess all of the same traits in every story. Thus it is impossible to claim definitively that any particular goddess always bears only one name, or pairs with only one or two other specific deities. Danu is no exception. For example, Charles Squire argues that Danu and Anu are the same goddess and asserts further that Danu/Anu may be the same as the goddess Ainé (245). T. W. Rolleston links Danu with Brigit (68); Patricia Lysaght suggests that Danu/Anu is often associated with the Celtic war goddess, the Mórrigan (162). However, regardless of the names by which she is called among various Celtic scholars, Danu is always identified as a triple goddess with ties to the land and life of Ireland.

Danu’s name, derived from the proto-Celtic language, connotes abundance and fertility. She is the Goddess of movement, tides, and process (Whitsel), and gives her name to the Danube River. Danu is perhaps the most ancient of the Celtic goddesses and fills the role of the Maiden in Graves’s categorization of the triple-goddess as distinct by her ages of Maiden, Mother, and Crone. Danu’s Mother aspect is usually manifest as “Anu.” She is the Goddess of prosperity, and throughout Celtic culture, “[s]he was the

universal mother” (Squire 51). She oversees nurturance, sustenance, and abundance; her name is given to twin hills outside of Killarney in Ireland: Dá Chích Anann or “The paps of Anu.” The Christian Saint Anne—revered as the mother of the Virgin Mary—is derived from the Celtic Anu (Doan 29). And then, in her third aspect of crone/hag, this Mother Goddess sometimes manifests as Tailtiu. Not all scholars associate Tailtiu with Danu/Anu; nevertheless, all seem to agree that Tailtiu is Goddess of the earth, and represents self-sacrifice and nurturing. Tailtiu is chronologically older than both Danu and Anu. Mythologically, she sacrificed her life serving her tribe. Because she is associated with death, she represents the darker aspect present in the dual-natured Jungian Mother archetype, and in Graves’ taxonomy, she represents the Crone aspect of this triple-goddess.

In addition to Danu, the *Gabhála* introduces Brigit, who is also a triplistic deity and who Rolleston argues may be the same figure as Danu. But Brigit typically differs in some ways from Danu. Brigit is a classic triple-goddess who defies Graves’ maiden-mother-crone taxonomy. Her triplistic aspects reflect her various functions, not her age. In one manifestation, Brigit is the goddess of fire, hearth, and poetry, and according to Claire French, “Of all the Celtic goddesses Brigit was perhaps the best loved” (37). This Brigit has two sisters, also named Brigit, who are goddesses of healing and smithing, respectively (McKenna 1053). When Christianity came to Ireland, Brigit was far too popular, and too widely worshipped, to be ignored by the church. Thus she was quickly absorbed into the religious canon as Saint Bridget (Leeming and Page 152) and remains a prominent Christian figure today.

Along with Brigit, the *Gabhála* introduces the Mórrígan—yet another triplistic deity who not only represents the Mother Archetype but also is perhaps the oldest Celtic deity to represent Sovereignty. The Mórrígan, the earliest Sovereignty goddess depicted in the *Gabhála*, appears in Latin texts as early as the eighth century A.D. and dominates early Irish folklore (Herbert 142). She is the greatest warrior goddess of Celtic lore. Her name has traditionally been translated to mean “Great Queen” (Herbert 142), though current scholarship questions the placement of the diacritic over the “o” in Mórrígan, and leans instead toward placing it over the “i” (Morrígan), thus changing the name’s translation to mean “Phantom Queen” (Clark). In this thesis, I will use the more traditional spelling.

Like Danu, the Mórrígan is commonly considered a triple goddess, usually affiliated with the war goddesses Badb and Macha, though she is also known in some lore as Nemain, Fea, and/or Anann. Amy Varin notes, “The Morrigan is one of a trinity of war goddesses who sometimes appear as distinct but whose names can be used more or less interchangeably. Confusingly, they have more than three names between them” (173). Like Brigit, the Mórrígan in her triple aspect does not reflect Graves’ maiden/mother/crone pattern. Instead, her various aspects reflect different elements of war—they are separated by function, but not by age. Graves’ critics often point to the Mórrígan as evidence that Graves’ assumptions are wrong.

The Mórrígan “appears to embody all that is perverse and horrible among supernatural powers” (Rolleston 87); Rosalind Clark comments that the Mórrígan “is a powerful, sinister goddess who plays an important role in the Ulster and mythological cycles” (21). Moyra Caldecott, too, calls the Mórrígan “the most fearsome of the three

war goddesses of Ireland” (137). Because of the Mórrigan’s close association with death, violence, and destruction, she is often ignored as a Mother goddess. However, not all Mother goddesses are solely nurturing and protective. Juliette Wood explains: “[T]his presentation of the female as physically strong and morally forceful is quite consistent with the contrasting war-like and maternal nature attributed to a Celtic mother-goddess” (124). In keeping with the dual nature of Jung’s Mother Archetype, the Mórrigan as a war goddess is also dual-natured. She is destructive, yet she nevertheless embodies protectiveness and strength. Máire Herbert asserts that the Mórrigan’s relationship to war is overplayed and argues that the Mórrigan is “a multi-pected deity whose very name implies a role of power and guardianship” (149). Herbert states: “Whatever her *alter ego*, the evidence so far indicates that war *per se* is not a primary aspect of the role of [the Mórrigan]. She has significant associations with the earth and with the cattle-resources of a pastoral people. Her activities have a tutelary character. She oversees the land, its stock, and its society” (145).

Rosalind Clark traces the emergence of Sovereignty goddesses directly from the Mórrigan folklore. Clark suggests: “In early Irish literature, the war goddess is also a goddess of sex and fertility” (4). She explains that mythologically, the war goddess slept with the king of the land to confer victory and prosperity on him; through her sexuality, she conferred sovereignty of the land. But as Christianity swept through Britain, Sovereignty (a pagan symbol) could no longer be worshipped as a goddess; social and moral standards deprived her of her sexual functions (Clark 4). And so the Mórrigan’s sexual role which, in turn, reflected Sovereignty dissipated as Judeo-Christian influences

stripped her of such pagan responsibilities—leaving her with few positive traits and emphasizing primarily her roles in war and death.

When Claire French identified the Mórrígan as a “centre stage” Sovereignty goddess, she also identified two other significant triple goddesses who filled the function of Sovereignty through the Celtic mythological cycles. The first, as noted above, is Ireland herself: the triple deities of Ériu, Banba, and Fodla. The eighth book of the *Gabhála* relates that at the time of the invasion of the Milesians, Ireland was ruled by three kings. According to the account, as the Milesians advanced on Tara, the royal seat of the land, to demand surrender, they were met along the way by the three queens of the land: Ériu, Banba, and Fodla. Banba and Fodla met the invaders first, and when they ascertained that the Milesians intended to conquer Ireland, they requested only that the island be called by their respective names. The Milesians agreed to these requests. However, when they met Ériu, she welcomed them and promised them victory, then asked, too, that the land be called after her. As Charles Squire notes, “And so it has happened. Of the three ancient names of Ireland—Banba, Fotla, and Eriu—the last, in its genitive form of “Erinn,” is the one that has survived” (126). Thus at a time of war, the young, beautiful goddess offered and ultimately granted sovereign rule of the land.

The three Machas, also mentioned by Clare French, are often entangled with the Mórrígan in Celtic texts. Indeed, one of the Mórrígan triad is called Macha. But Macha herself is also tripled. Georges Dumézil explores the tripartation of the Machas in the context of the triple functions of priest, warrior, and herder-cultivator in Indo-European folklore (Littleton 156). Jaan Puhvel also states: “[T]he triple goddess can be split into three synonymous heroines, such as the three Machas of Ulster in Irish saga, one being a

druidess, one a warrior- queen, and the third a peasant wife who died in childbirth” (358). The Macha legends are interesting because of the way they portray the function of Sovereignty. Instead of granting sovereignty, the Macha goddesses deny it from those who withhold their affections.

Perhaps the best known Macha tale is that associated with the curse of Macha, in which Macha, in the capacity of peasant wife, is forced by the king to run a footrace against his fastest horses while she is in labor with twins. She begs for mercy but is granted none. Immediately upon winning the race, she gives birth and then places a curse upon the men of Ulster that for nine succeeding generations, they shall all suffer the pangs of childbirth for five days and four nights whenever they most need their strength (Caldecott 128-130). Thus it was, according to legend, that the armies of Ulster could not prevail in war for almost a millennium; the kings of Ulster were stripped of their ability to retain sovereign rule of Ireland. In his *History of Ireland*, Standish O’Grady remarks: “The underlying idea of all this class of legend is that if men cannot master war, war will master them; and that those who aspired to the Ard-Reiship [High Kingship] of all Erin must have the war-gods on their side” (Rolleston 109).

As centuries passed and Christianity stripped the goddess of her sexual, creative, dominating roles, her archetype—Jung’s Mother archetype—nevertheless persisted in Irish literature. But some scholars argue that as the woman’s place in Ireland became increasingly subjugated under patriarchal Catholic and then Protestant structures, so too did representations of the original archetype become increasingly powerless, dejected, and often even violent and vengeful (Ogden-Korus). This is attributed largely to the fact

that for centuries, the scribes of Celtic lore were clerics of the church, and so post-Christian texts place women in a feeble position within the male-dominated culture.

Watered-down, post-Christian manifestations of the once-powerful Divine Mother goddesses are not surprising. In fact, they strongly support Jung's argument that, while archetypes are primordial and universal, as soon as they are manifest in folklore or myth, they become reflective of the society and culture from which they arise. He explains: "They [the conscious expression of the archetype] are no longer contents of the unconscious, but have already been changed into conscious formulae taught according to tradition, generally in the form of esoteric teaching" (5). In other words, the Mother Archetype's manifestations will change according to the time and culture in which they are created.

Such was the case when Ireland became wholly subject to English rule. At a time when political forces might have exterminated Sovereignty altogether, she nevertheless persisted in a new poetical form with as much force as ever. In the sixteenth century, not long after the enactment of the 1542 Crown of Ireland Act which made King Henry VIII the first king of Ireland in 500 years, Ireland's bardic tradition collapsed. Ireland's bards no longer had a king to honor, nor a noble class to support them in their work. Rosalind Clark notes: "No one remained to pay for panegyric poems or to support the bards with the generosity so admired in the ancient kings. Also, there remained no kingship for them to praise" (154). Poets became themselves part of the impoverished people, and the tone of their poetry changed. According to Clark, "One would assume that the image of the Sovereignty would no longer be relevant, but would fade into oblivion. Strangely enough, however, the Sovereignty became more the central figure of the poetical tradition

than she had ever been[...]. She became the symbol of Ireland's past glory, present suffering, and future hope" (154). It was at this time that Sovereignty arose as the *spéir-bhean* of the Aisling poetry tradition.

Daniel Corkery's *The Hidden Ireland* is considered among scholars to be a seminal text exploring the Aisling poetry tradition. He defines "Aisling" as "vision" or "dream" and observes that the first Aisling poems emerged in the mid-seventeenth century. They all follow the same theme: a poet, despondent over the fall of Ireland to England, falls asleep and dreams he is walking through the countryside when he is approached by a beautiful woman. He asks the woman who she is and offers up several names from both Greek and Irish mythology in inquiry. The woman eventually tells him that she is Ireland herself, sorrowing for the return of the true king. The woman, who is from the Otherworld and is a "*Spéir-bhean*" (sky-woman"), offers hope to the poet and urges him forward to fight for her cause (Corkery 129). Significantly, the Aisling incarnation of Sovereignty has lost her own power to grant sovereignty. What she offers instead is hope and inspiration to the Irish people.

In the two hundred years following the Aisling poetic tradition, Irish folksongs and stories began to talk of the mythical *Sean-bhean bhocht*, anglicized as "Shan-van vocht." The *Sean-bhean bhocht*, like the *Spéir-bhean*, is a personification of Ireland. However, unlike the young, beautiful *Spéir-bhean*, the *Sean-bhean bhocht*, which literally means "poor old woman," is an old, haggard crone who, dispossessed of her home, requires willing young Irishmen to fight and die on her behalf (MacKillop). The Cathleen Ni Houlihan figure is an incarnation of this deity-turned-beggar.

But even the *Sean-bhean bhocht*—a late eighteenth century construct—is rooted in a much more ancient mythology. That is, she is derived from the pre-Norman figure of the *Cailleach Bhéirre*—a figure of Irish sovereignty that likely emerged in the late tenth or early eleventh century (Hull, *Legends*, 226). The *Cailleach Bhéirre*, according to legend, is the original Mother of Ireland. She is recorded to have lived through seven generations of youth, and her offspring formed tribes and races throughout Ireland (Merwin 541). The *Cailleach Bhéirre*'s story is primarily regaled in “The Lament of the Hag (Or Nun) of Beare,” in which she laments the loss of her youth. Her story appears in its entirety in Kuno Meyer's translations in *Selections from Ancient Irish Poetry*. However, numerous legends and folklore surround this ancient deity; these stories lead mythologist Eleanor Hull to conclude that the *Cailleach Bhéirre* “impersonates Ireland herself” (*Legends* 253).

This chapter has traced the Mother Archetype through the annals of Celtic mythology. This archetype was manifested in prehistoric times, throughout numerous cultures, as Mother Earth and then as the Great Mother Goddess. In Celtic mythology, many of the Great Mother goddesses offered sovereignty to invading tribes as one of their functions. These goddesses, collectively known as the Sovereignty goddesses, were a fundamental part of the pre-Christian pagan, Celtic lore. However, Christianity censored the pagan goddesses who had violent and/or sexual functions. By the mid-sixteenth century, Sovereignty goddesses gave way to the less powerful *Spéir-bhean* and the *Sean-bhean bhocht* figures, who could no longer promise Irish sovereignty but could give hope and urge the Irish to fight for freedom.

Thus chapters two and three of this thesis have explored both the historical and mythological contexts within which Lady Wilde lived and wrote. The historical underpinnings of her nationalist cause have been explored, and the mythological foundations for her self-fashioned identity have been discussed. The next chapter of this thesis will explore the ways by which she gained ethos among the Irish peasantry through her appeal to the Celtic Sovereignty figure.

## CHAPTER 4

## LADY WILDE AS SOVEREIGNTY

In the first chapter of this thesis, I explored the notion that even from childhood, Lady Wilde was not content to be merely Jane Frances Elgee, but instead developed a persona for herself that better suited her personality and interests. I also established that she possessed a thorough knowledge of the Irish history, literature, mythology, and lore that was discussed in chapters two and three of this paper. In this chapter, then, I explore the ways in which Lady Wilde used her extensive knowledge of Ireland's legends and mythology to create ethos among the Irish commoners by fashioning herself as the Celtic Sovereignty.

First, Lady Wilde echoed the multi-function, triple-goddess pattern that typifies the Sovereignty goddesses. As surveyed in the previous chapter, many of the Celtic goddesses—particularly those associated with Sovereignty—were triplistic deities; that is, they generally carried three names which denoted their various functions or stages in life. Examples include Eriu, Banba, and Fodla; the three Morrigan; and the three Machas. Lady Wilde, too, fashioned for herself a triple identity. According to Wyndham's biography, she adopted for herself the motto: "Fidanza, Costanza, Speranza." Translated from Italian, this motto means "faith, constancy, hope." In constructing this motto, she created a triplistic identity for herself that reflected the multifaceted Sovereignty: she was one who encouraged faith, urged constancy, and offered hope. These qualities are particularly reminiscent of the *Spéir-bhean* incarnation of Sovereignty.

By the sixteenth century, Sovereignty goddesses manifested as the *Spéir-bhean* no longer had power to grant dominion of the land, partly because Christian influences since the fifth century had stripped them of the sexual functions by which they granted sovereign rule, but also because, politically, Ireland as a nation had lost her own sense of autonomy and independence from at least as early as the 1542 Crown of Ireland Act. But the *Spéir-bhean* assured the Irish that a Stuart king would return to defend them, rallied her Irish sons to fight for her, and offered hope that a better future was on the horizon. Thus, the *Spéir-bhean* embodied precisely those functions that Lady Wilde adopted in her own motto: faith, constancy, hope.

Moreover, the third aspect of Lady Wilde's triple identity and the name under which she published her poetry, "Speranza," carries even more significance when considered in the framework of the Aisling tradition. Not only is "Speranza" alliterative with *Spéir-bhean*, but it sounds very similar in English pronunciation. In English, *Spéir-bhean* is pronounced "spayr-VAHN," and sometimes the word is even extended to "*Spéir-bhruinneal*," or "spayr-VRAHN-ayl," which imitates not only the sound of Lady Wilde's pseudonym, but also mirrors it syllabically. And more noteworthy still is the meaning of Lady Wilde's chosen *nom de plume*. As mentioned, "Speranza" is Italian for "hope"; hope is exactly the function of the *Spéir-bhean*. As Rosalind Clark has noted, "[S]he is the prophet of hope for the future: she urges the poet not to despair but to trust that God will bring the exiled Stuarts back across the seas" (7).

Clark's description of the function of the *Spéir-bhean* is accurately represented in Lady Wilde's poetry; in this thesis, I quote from the first edition of *Poems by Speranza*, published in 1864 in Dublin and have reproduced quoted poems in full in Appendix 1.

Consider, for example, the sixth stanza from “Signs of the Times”: “By our patriots and martyrs, who, for Freedom's holy law, | Have hearts to dare, a hand to burn, like Mutius Scævola. | Then, courage, Brothers! lock your shields, like the old Spartan band, | Advance! and be your watchword ever--God for Ireland!” (lines 44-48). In these lines, Lady Wilde urges the patriots of the land to have courage and place their faith in God’s providence. In so doing, she does precisely what the *Spéir-bhean* is expected to do: encourage patriotism and instill hope and faith that God will restore sovereignty to Ireland.

Interestingly, though, while Rosalind Clark comments that the *Spéir-bhean* offers hope that a Stuart king will return to Ireland, Lady Wilde as Sovereignty promises redemption from suffering through Jesus Christ—a king with whom the Catholic poor of the mid-nineteenth century might more readily identify. For example, in “Man’s Mission” she encourages, “We must bend our thoughts to earnest, | Would we strike the idols down; | With a purpose of the sternest | Take the Cross, and wait the Crown” (lines 51-54). Again in “The Parable of Life” she assures, “But Christ, with His meek and holy brow, | Shuns not the deadly strife; | For His soul is strong in the armour of faith, | And His sword is the Word of Life” (lines 113-116).

The conflation of kings with Christian deity is not unique to Lady Wilde. For instance, the tenth century text *Annales Cambriae* speaks of King Arthur carrying the cross of Jesus Christ into battle as a source of protection (Williams 75-76); carrying the cross as a means of salvation, King Arthur symbolizes Christ. In the sixteenth century, Charles I of Spain, who concurrently ruled over most of Europe as Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, was esteemed as a Messiah, as was his son, Phillip II of Spain (Parker

169-173). And when James I ascended to the English throne in 1603, many of his contemporaries hailed him, too, as a manifestation of God on earth because of his abiding interest in religious poetry and his facility in the arts (Doelman 23). However, while history is replete with examples of political kings honored as deity, Lady Wilde reverses this pattern when she suggests that deity will stand in the place of the political king who, Sovereignty assures the Irish people, is coming to restore independence to Ireland.

Through her name and her functions of urging faith, constancy, and hope to the Irish people, Lady Wilde mirrors the Sovereignty figure, and perhaps specifically Sovereignty manifested as the *Spéir-bhean*. But in her dress and physical appearance, too, she seemingly undertook to mimic Sovereignty. Daniel Corkery describes the *Spéir-bhean* as “beautiful everyway, in every feature, even if these features never combine into the dazzling perfection of consummate vision—one blinding flash” (137). The Aisling heroine is usually described as having long, flowing golden hair, white skin, and vivid eyes. When she speaks, “[h]er conversation is nobly-trained, cultured, is keen and gentle” (Corkery 137). The Aisling poetry itself is described as “decorative,” “bright,” and “musical” (Corkery 138).

Just as the *Spéir-bhean*'s appearance is a prominent theme in texts describing her, Lady Wilde's physical appearance is also a recurrent theme in her biographies. Charles Duffy, the editor of the *Nation* newspaper, was first drawn to her “stately carriage and figure, flashing brown eyes and features cast in an heroic mould” (Melville 19). Anna, Comtesse de Bremont, also noted Lady Wilde's eyes, describing them as “lustrous,” and described her voice as “rich, vibrating” (45). Another physical characteristic often

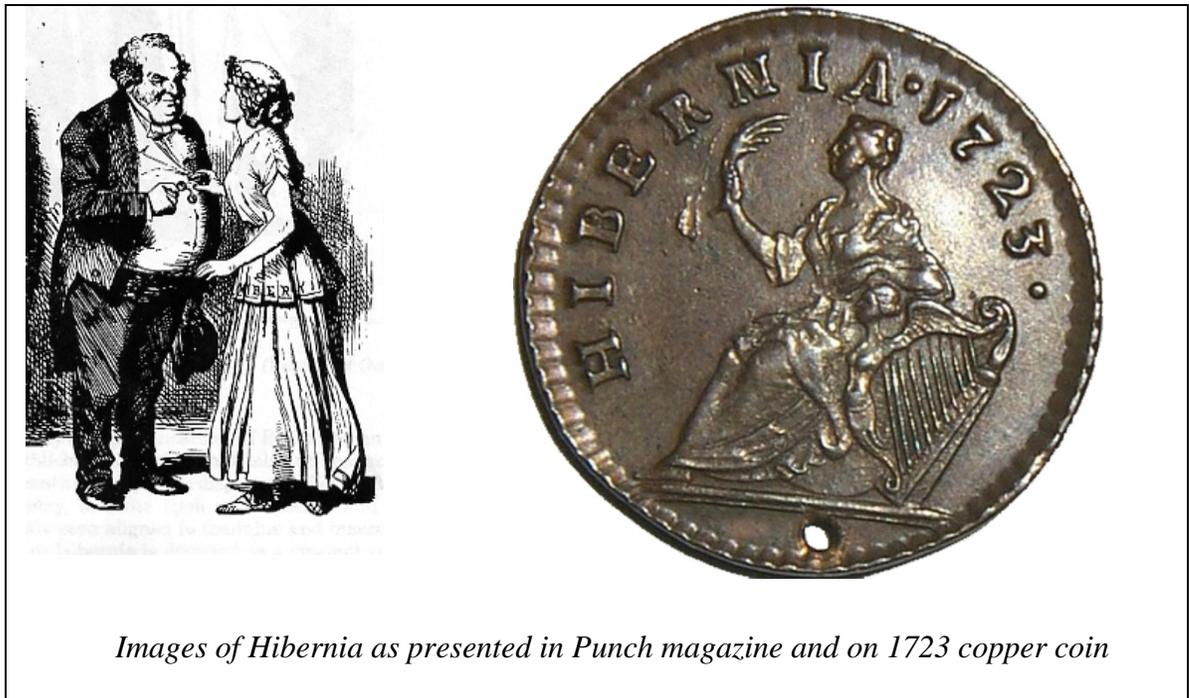
mentioned when describing Lady Wilde is her hair, which she always wore long, even in her old age—much to the chagrin of some of her contemporaries.

Horace Wyndham describes Lady Wilde's attire as "certainly distinctive[...]. She habitually wore two crinolines under a silk gown that swept the floor, and with it affected an oriental scarf, flounces of lace, a number of rings and brooches, and, as a finishing touch, would crown her head of blue black hair with a gilded laurel wreath" (119). Lady Wilde's appearance can indeed be said to be "decorative," and as noted earlier, her eccentric choice of attire was a conscious choice she made to reflect her true nature—which, I argue, was Sovereignty. Tipper cites a passage from Lady Wilde's "Early Irish Art" essay wherein she describes the appeal of illuminated manuscripts: "The love of gorgeous colouring, the tendency to express ideas by symbol, and the vivid imagination that delights in the strange and unusual, often fantastic and grotesque, in place of the absolute and real, combined with the patient and minute elaboration of detail, so truly Oriental in its spirit, especially mark Irish ornamentation" (267). Of this quotation Tipper says, "[Lady Wilde's] description of what appeals to her in illuminated manuscripts is also revelatory of her character, which she manifested in dramatic unconventional behavior and dress" (16). Thus Lady Wilde asserts that Ireland herself is expressed through vivid colors and "strange and unusual," even Oriental, details. Such a description is astonishingly reflective of Wyndham's observations about Lady Wilde's own costuming—even so far as to mention that she always wore an "oriental scarf."

An evocative illustration appeared in *Punch* magazine in 1867. This cartoon shows "Hibernia," or Ireland, receiving a promise of protection from John Bull, or England. However, what is important about this image for the purposes of this thesis is

the characterization of Hibernia. She wears a long flowing gown, her hair is long and fastened at her neck in a bun, and she wears a laurel wreath on her head. Another representation of Hibernia appears on copper coins produced between 1722 and 1724. These again depict Hibernia in a long flowing gown, with hair pulled behind her and a laurel wreath about her head. Such an image of Hibernia would likely have been as familiar to the Irish as Uncle Sam is to Americans. What is striking about this portrayal of Hibernia, though, is another illustration which also appeared in *Punch*. The exact date is unknown. Lady Wilde is portrayed as a middle-aged woman, so the image is likely around 1865; this illustration depicts Lady Wilde in a long flowing gown, with her hair fastened in a bun at her neck, and a laurel wreath around her head. A portrait of Lady Wilde, attributed to Dublin portrait artist George Morosini likewise portrays Lady Wilde in formal gown with a laurel wreath encircling her head. And Joy Melville's biography of Lady Wilde includes a photograph of Lady Wilde who again is wearing a formal gown, with hair tied behind her and head wreathed in laurel leaves. The similarities between Lady Wilde's appearance and that of Hibernia personified are striking. All these images are reproduced on the following page as Figure 4.1. A comparison of these images strengthens further the notion that Lady Wilde made efforts to cast her physical appearance, as much as she could, in the manner of traditional personifications of Ireland.

**Figure 4.1: Images of Hibernia and Lady Wilde**



*Images of Hibernia as presented in Punch magazine and on 1723 copper coin*



*Images of Lady Wilde taken from Punch magazine and a contemporary portrait*

Thus far I have suggested that Lady Wilde dressed and groomed herself to mirror the Sovereignty figure of Celtic mythology and have also suggested that she chose her motto and name to reflect the name and functions of the Aisling *Spéir-bhean*. But poetically, she positioned herself as Sovereignty, as well, in the way that she engendered Ireland and then established a relationship with her. Sociologist John Sorenson summarizes prevailing nationalist theory when he says, “As a social construct, nationalism is also gendered: nations are characteristically imagined as fatherlands or motherlands that demand filial piety from their subject-children...Typically, narratives of national identity depend on stereotyped images of masculinity and femininity” (Blackwell, Smith, and Sorenson 35). And so the question arises: Is Ireland a Motherland, or a Fatherland?

Irish editorialist Cormac MacConnell, writing for *The Irish Emigrant* newspaper in 1999, explores this very question. His answer reflects the most popularly held opinion on the issue: “Ireland, though superficially a Fatherland is, in fact, and always has been, a Motherland. Control and power, essentially from the family units of the island, has always been subtly exercised most by the great matriarchs who, from the hearths, effectively controlled and dominated all matters of the household and all persons under the roof” (para. 6). MacConnell explains that female politicians in Ireland have historically been few in number, “because the great sisterhood of Irishwomen did not need to go into politics at all to lay their hands on power. They had it already through the men who, effectively...they have always controlled. The image of Ireland...has always been Kathleen Ni Houlihan, yes definitely, we have always been a Motherland” (para. 7). So figures discussed in the previous chapter like Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the *Sean-bhean*

*bhocht*, the Aisling *Spéir-bhean*, and even the pre-Norman *Cailleach Bhéirre* personify Ireland as a female. Ireland is, by all sociological and mythological standards, a Motherland.

Nevertheless, in three of her Famine poems, Lady Wilde refers to Ireland as a “Fatherland.” For example, her poem “The Brothers” declares: “They feel not the deep grief that moves the others, | For they die for Fatherland” (lines 15-16). In “To a Despondent Nationalist,” Lady Wilde declares: “Who has doomed, or can dare ‘doom us to silence?’ | In the conscious pride of truth and right we stand; | Let them rave like the ocean round the islands, | Firm as they we stand unmoved for Fatherland” (lines 9-12). And “The Enigma” repeatedly refers to Ireland as a Fatherland: “Pale victims, where is your Fatherland?” (line 1); “What! Are there no men in your Fatherland?” (line 31); “Are there no swords in your Fatherland?” (line 37); “Go in the conquering Godhead’s might— | And save or avenge your Fatherland!” (lines 50-51).

In addition to these direct references to Ireland as a Fatherland, Lady Wilde also genders Ireland as male—an old man—in a fourth poem, “The Old Man’s Blessing.” In this poem, Ireland is not the female *Sean-bhean bhocht*, but is instead an old man who calls on his sons to fight and die for him: “**MINE** eye is dull, my hair is white, | This arm is powerless for the fight, | Alas! alas! the battle’s van | Suits not a weak and aged man. | Thine eye is bright, thine arm is strong-- | 'Tis Youth must right our country’s wrong. | Arise, my son, and proudly bear | This sword that I was wont to wear” (lines 1-8).

Lady Wilde’s personification of Ireland in these poems as a fatherland is puzzling. Indeed, she just as frequently genders Ireland as female in her poetry as she does male. In “A Supplication” she calls Ireland “our mourning mother” (line 51); in

“Who Will Show Us Any Good?” Lady Wilde refers to Ireland as “Desolate Ireland! Saddest of mothers” (line 19); in “The New Path” she notes that the Irish are “Still breathing the prayer for their Motherland” (line 77). So why this inconsistency in the way Ireland is gendered in Lady Wilde’s poetry? Perhaps she is struggling to reconcile her role as Sovereignty with the lack of a king to whom Sovereignty might wed; by engendering Ireland as male, she could be positioned to wed Ireland itself. Or, she might have simply made different stylistic choices for each poem, deeming some to be better if Ireland is a Fatherland than others. Yet another possibility is that Lady Wilde was not thinking about engendering Ireland at all as she wrote her poetry. This is a puzzle that may not be readily resolved, but it is certainly an interesting question to consider.

Lady Wilde’s poetry, though, does yield additional insight into her efforts to fashion herself after the Celtic Sovereignty when evaluated through discourse analysis. Rhetorician Mary Sue MacNealy asserts that “[s]tudying discourse enables scholars to add to a body of knowledge in a particular discipline by making data-based inferences about the person who created the discourse” (124). Thus it seems that a discourse analysis of Lady Wilde’s poems might offer some insights about Lady Wilde herself and her efforts to create ethos through alignment with the Celtic Sovereignty and Aisling traditions. The full study is reiterated in Appendix 2 of this thesis, but a summary of the results is included here.

In 1864 Lady Wilde published a compilation of the poems she had published as *Speranza* during the famine years, 1845-1849, in *The Nation* newspaper. Also included in the book were many translations of poems from other European languages. A second edition of the book, released in 1871, includes these poems and several others; some are

Speranza's original work, and more are translations of works from other languages. In this discourse analysis, only those poems written by Lady Wilde herself during the years of the Great Famine were examined; her translations were excluded. Then, Daniel Corkery's list of themes that typified the responsibilities of the *Aisling Spéir-bhean* was compared against the narrative position that Lady Wilde took in her own poetry. Those themes were (1) poems in which the speaker directly addresses the poet and reminds him of his responsibilities to speak truth on behalf of Ireland; (2) poems which offer hope for the future of Ireland; and (3) poems which call on the sons of Ireland to fight and die for their country. The results of this analysis demonstrate that Lady Wilde relied heavily on *Aisling* themes in her own poetry, and positioned herself squarely as the *Spéir-bhean*.

The first theme included in the discourse analysis is that of poems in which the speaker directly addresses the poet and reminds him of his responsibilities to Ireland. Eleven of Lady Wilde's Famine poems include this theme. For example, the speaker in "Ruins" says, "Poet wanderer, hast thou bent thee | O'er such ruins of the soul? | Pray to God that some Nepenthe | May efface that hour of dole" (lines 137-140). This particular passage is especially reminiscent of the *Aisling* tradition in two ways. First, the speaker, like the *Spéir-bhean*, addresses the poet as a wanderer. In *Aisling* tradition, the poet is always wandering through the land as part of his dream. Second, Lady Wilde's speaker makes reference to the Greek figure of Nepenthe—the goddess of forgetfulness. This allusion to Greek mythology is typical of the *Aisling* tradition, as well.

This passage from "A Remonstrance" is another which expresses the theme of addressing the poet: "STAND on the heights, O Poet! nor come down | Amid the wise old serpents, coiled around | The Tree of Knowledge in Academics. | The Poet's place is

by the Tree of Life, | Whose fruit turns men to Gods, and makes them live” (lines 1-5).

In this poem, too, the speaker calls upon the poet to stand in his rightful place as a bearer not just of truth, but of life itself. This speaker, who assumes the role of one who has an omniscient view of the world, is also typical of the *Spéir-bhean*, who, because she is a Goddess, has a clearer view of the world than those who live in it.

The second theme, offering hope for the future of Ireland, appears in twelve of Lady Wilde’s poems; an example is this passage from “To a Despondent Nationalist”:  
 “True, the path is dark, but ever sunward, | In faith, and love, and hope we journey on; |  
 We may pause in the desert passing onward, | Lay our weary heads to rest upon the stone;  
 | But ever in our visions, low and faintly, | Come the voices of the far-off angel band, | To  
 earnest souls, in prophecy all saintly, | That the good cause will yet triumph in the land”  
 (lines 25-32). This passage, in typical Aisling fashion, acknowledges that the Irish are suffering, but assures the listener that victory is on the horizon. This poem also alludes to the fact that such promise of victory is found in “visions”—the very definition of Aisling poetry.

Another example of a poem which offers the theme of hope is the twelfth stanza from “Foreshadowings”: “The Christian may shrink from the last scenes of trial, | And the woes yet unknown of each mystical vial; | But the hosts of Jehovah will gather beside him, | The rainbow-crowned angel stoop downward to guide him; | And to him, who as hero and martyr hath striven, | Will the Crown, and the Throne, and the Palm-branch be given” (lines 67-72). In this passage, the speaker offers hope to those who are suffering from the Famine, which is mentioned earlier in the poem. Lady Wilde alludes to the return of the king to bring peace and salvation, which is precisely what the *Spéir-bhean* is

expected to do. But in this case, as mentioned above, the king who will return to restore sovereignty to Ireland is not a political king, but a king with whom the Catholic poor would more closely identify: Jesus Christ.

Finally, there are sixteen poems that rely on the theme of calling on the sons of Ireland to fight for their country. This passage from the opening stanza of “The Old Man’s Blessing” illustrates this theme: “Firm grasp the hilt, fling down the sheath-- | A thousand years their wrongs bequeath | To thy young heart, thy hot revenge-- | Kneel down, and swear thou wilt avenge” (lines 9-12). In this same poem, the speaker further exemplifies the *Spéir-bhean*’s call to arms when she urges the young Irish sons to “fear not death | but fear dishonor” (lines 31-32); a hallmark of Sovereignty’s call—not just as the *Spéir-bhean*, but even more prominently in her manifestations as Cathleen Ni Houlihan and the *Sean-bhean bhocht*—is her insistence that her young warrior sons be willing to die for their country.

This same call to fight and die recurs again in “Forward!,” when after calling on the “young hearts of the nation” (line 24) the speaker exclaims, “Hand to hand with them confronted, | Looking death and danger gravely | In the face, with brow undaunted; | Doing nobly, dying bravely, | Stern as men resolved to conquer or to perish in their woe” (lines 26-30). As noted before, one of Sovereignty’s most notable characteristics is her expectation that the sons of Ireland will willingly forfeit their lives on her behalf, and a significant number of Lady Wilde’s poems express this same theme.

This chapter has drawn up a body of evidence suggesting that Lady Wilde fashioned herself after the Celtic Sovereignty as she strove to be true to what she perceived to be her own nature and as she worked to gain ethos among a people from

whom she was politically, socially, religiously, and economically quite disconnected. In her chosen motto and name, in her dress and grooming, and in her narrative position throughout her Famine poems, Lady Wilde mirrored many essential aspects of the Sovereignty figure. No amount of evidence, of course, can prove conclusively that Lady Wilde consciously positioned herself as Sovereignty. Jung argued that all humans are influenced by unconscious archetypes—primordial, universal figures that shape our expectations (Jung 79). If this is true, then perhaps Lady Wilde merely yielded to the promptings of the collective Celtic unconscious as she fashioned herself after Sovereignty.

On the other hand, the discourse analysis reveals that, in most of the poems Speranza produced during the Famine years, she positioned herself thematically in ways that are reflective of the Aisling tradition. She calls on the sons of Ireland to die for their country; she hails the poet as a wanderer whose birthright it is to redeem Irish souls; she offers hope that the true king would soon return and restore freedom and liberty to Ireland. Interestingly, the king Speranza refers to is not a political being, but is instead a king with whom the Irish Catholic would most closely identify: Jesus Christ. What is more, Lady Wilde dressed in a remarkably unconventional style for her time, reflecting the persona of Hibernia in her long flowing gowns and laurel-wreathed hair. She chose a triple motto for herself and used a pen name that marked the most essential function of Sovereignty: offering hope.

These individual pieces of evidence point strongly to the notion that Lady Wilde did indeed fashion herself after the Celtic goddess Sovereignty in an effort to be trusted and respected among the Irish poor, at a time when Victorian women were expected to

focus their attentions away from the public sphere and on their homes and families. But in so doing, she not only connected with the Irish peasantry, but she also played an important inceptive role in a movement that had barely begun to take root in Ireland: the Irish Literary Revival. In the next chapter of this thesis, I will examine this movement from the perspective of the Nationalist cause, and explore Lady Wilde's role in launching this endeavor.

## CHAPTER 5

## SPERANZA, SOVEREIGNTY, AND IRISH REVIVALISM

Previous chapters of this thesis explored the historical and mythological contexts that informed Lady Wilde's education and writing, and underscored the ways in which she fashioned herself after the Celtic Sovereignty in order to gain ethos among Irish commoners. Lady Wilde's adoption of a mythological persona had implications that reached beyond the boundaries of Famine-ravaged, mid-nineteenth century Ireland. In fact, by reaching into the Celtic past to connect with the Irish people, she seems to have played an unsung role in the inception of the Irish Literary Revival which itself played a formative role in shaping Ireland's current political and social character.

The separatist movement of which Lady Wilde was so ardently a part was the nursing grounds of a number of subsequent organizations that themselves have been called "the cradle of the modern Irish nation" (Van de Kamp and Jeffares 40). These organizations included "The Land League," an organization that used boycotts to fight for tenant rights and enable tenants to own the land they worked on; "The Gaelic Athletic Association," a sports organization that promoted traditional Irish and Celtic games; "The Gaelic Revival," an organization advocating for all literature and arts to be created in the Gaelic language rather than in English; and the "The Irish Literary Renaissance," sometimes called the "Irish Literary Revival," which is to be the focus of this chapter. The Irish Literary Revival was a movement to create an Irish identity within Irish literature by appealing to Ireland's Celtic heritage.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the 1801 Act of Union that merged Ireland into the United Kingdom of Great Britain sparked fervor among the Irish people—particularly

among Catholics who had been promised emancipation once the Union was finalized. However, this promise was never fulfilled, and as V. G. Kiernan notes, “Mass unrest exhaled in an atmosphere where nationalism, with many windings and turnings, could emerge” (36). Thus the stage was set for Catholic uprisings in demand of an independent Irish nation.

This does not mean, of course, that only Irish Catholics raised the cry for separatism. Indeed, as Oliver Rafferty suggests, “This is not to say that there was no explicit ‘Irish identity’ before the nineteenth century, nor is it to imply that there was a ready and easy equation between Irish nationalism and the profession of the Catholic faith” (24). Even Daniel O’Connell, affectionately nicknamed “The Defender” among Irish Catholics for his passionate efforts to restore independence to Ireland, is quoted by Eleanor Hull as saying, “If the Premier were to offer me to-morrow the repeal of the Union upon the terms of re-enacting the entire Penal Code, I declare from my heart and in the presence of my God that I would most cheerfully embrace his offer” (History 293). Thus did O’Connell reframe the issue of nationalism away from a case of religious unrest to a case of national autonomy. The efforts of Lady Wilde, an educated Protestant, provide further evidence that the cause of nationalism was not exclusive to Irish Catholics. Nearly all uprisings before the 1916 Easter Rising were led by Protestant nationalists.

In exploring issues of nationalism, the question raised at the beginning of this thesis is raised again: What defines a nation? This question becomes particularly salient when considered within the context of colonialism and loss by a nation of its political identity. However, nationalism is not necessarily linked exclusively to political

sovereignty. Mary Bromage contends: “For the Irish are a people to whom independence means not only political sovereignty but artistic and literary individuality as well” (226). Accordingly, as the Irish sought an identity independent of England, Irish patriots turned to their Celtic heritage. V.G. Kiernan opines: “To find an Ireland they could really belong to or naturalize themselves in, they had to retrace ancestral steps very far into the past” (43). And so the Irish Literary Revival was born, marking the dawn of efforts to create an Irish national literature (Beckett 111).

The Irish Literary Revival, sometimes called the Irish Literary Renaissance or the Celtic Revival, is commonly linked to the founding of the Irish Literary Theatre by William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory in 1898. However, as Clare Hutton explores in *Joyce and the Institutions of Revivalism*, the Revival is shrouded in questions. She questions when the revival actually began, how it might best be described, what it really involved, for whom it was truly important, and towards what goals did it aspire (117)? Answers to Hutton’s questions are as varied as the criticisms and historical accounts which raise them. However, as noted above, Yeats and Lady Gregory are always associated with the Irish Literary Revival movement, and are most frequently credited with its inception.

Declan Kibard notes in Foster’s *Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland* that Yeats founded a national theater as a way to reconcile Ireland to herself and her own identity: “Yeats’ solution to this dilemma [of national identity] was to gather a native Irish audience and to create a native Irish Theatre in Dublin—to express Ireland to herself rather than exploit her for the foreigner” (316). Strangely, though the Irish Literary Revival is generally perceived to be an extension of the nationalist movement, its

strongest founding voices—Yeats and Lady Gregory—were both part of the Protestant Ascendancy. In fact, many historians argue that the Literary Revival and other Gaelic cultural movements were actually “manifestations of the attempt by the Anglo-Irish to regain leadership in a changing social, economic, and political environment” (Lane 166). These critics assert that the Protestant Ascendancy which had enjoyed such dominance throughout Ireland’s history introduced various cultural movements in an effort to restore traditional hierarchal structures in the land, from the lowly and dominated peasant to the wealthy and powerful Protestant (Hutton 117).

Much of the Irish Literary Revival, then, focuses on the Irish peasantry. Ostensibly in an effort to return Ireland to her folkloric and mythological roots, Yeats, Lady Gregory, and other playwrights and authors set out to construct Ireland as the home of an “ancient idealism” rooted within the lives and culture of the Irish peasantry (Hirsch 1120). And according to Edward Hirsch, “[t]hat ‘ancient idealism’ was located in the notion of a traditional, unchanging, ‘natural’ Irish populace” (1120). However, as Hirsch has noted, rural Irish peasants were hardly a homogeneous group. Instead, the countryside was “nearly infinite in its social and economic gradations, that comprised small farmers, laborer-landholders, landless laborers, and itinerant workers” (Hirsch 1117). But revivalist literature turned the variegated rural poor into a “myth of a timeless peasantry[. . .]noted for Christian stoicism and endurance” (Foster 316). The strategy of Yeats and his fellow Revivalists was not to present a realistic picture of rural Ireland, but instead to create a “vision of an ahistorical peasantry unaffected by social change” (Foster 319). Hence, as penned by the Revivalists, the Irish peasantry symbolized an ancient Irish culture that spoke directly to English stereotypes of the Irish as savage and

barbaric: “By idealizing peasants—and by defining them as the essence of an ancient, dignified Irish culture—the Revivalists were specifically countering the English stereotype” (Hirsch 1120). But the revivalists did more than counter a stereotype; they also created a reverence for the Irish peasantry that would make such a social position seem appealing and desirable.

And yet, the Revival did not focus exclusively on veneration of the rural Irish. As Mary Bromage notes, “The old epics became a part of the whole tapestry of cultural recreation. . . The reclaiming of a lost legacy appealed to the unquenched pride of all true-born Irishmen” (231). Indeed, Yeats and Lady Gregory’s first production in their new theatre was Yeats’ play *The Countess Cathleen*: the story of a woman who sells her soul to the devil in order to redeem her Irish tenants from starvation and eternal damnation. This play was a precursor to *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, which came ten years later. In the former, Cathleen sacrifices herself for the salvation of her people; in the latter, Cathleen calls upon her people to sacrifice for her. However, both plays are rooted in “all things Celtic and Irish,” as related in traditional Irish folklore (Ure 16).

As Clare Hutton identified, though, Yeats and his fellow Revivalists were not the first Irish voices to call for cultural sovereignty. J. C. Beckett asserts that the *Nation* newspaper—Lady Wilde’s own poetic venue—published “a great deal of patriotic verse” (110), and states that Thomas Davis, one of the *Nation*’s editors, “had some conception of a cultural as well as a political nationalism” (110). Hirsch, too, notes that “the idea that peasants embodied ‘true’ Irish culture had both political and literary currency in the 1840s, when Thomas Davis founded the *Nation* and directed his readers to the folksongs and folkways of their native heritage” (1122).

Lady Wilde, writing her own patriotic verse for the *Nation* and also fashioning herself after the Celtic Sovereignty, thus engaged in the call for a national literature as well as a return to ancient Celtic roots long before the Irish Literary Revival was formally recognized. Why then is she excluded from all historical accounts of this movement? In “‘I Won’t Go Back To It’: Irish Women Poets and the Iconic Feminine,” Lia Mills makes some compelling arguments about women poets in general which aptly apply to Lady Wilde’s obvious omission from historical accounts of the Revival. First, Mills notes that “the new republic was not especially sympathetic to women. Or, indeed, to alternative versions of the mythology” (73). Lady Wilde thus is marginalized on both counts: she is a woman, and by placing herself in the position of Sovereignty, she contemporizes the mythology in ways that may have put off both her nationalist peers and contemporary Literary Revival scholars.

Mills also argues that “Celtic mythology holds a number of distinctive legendary female figures, many of them strong, overtly sexual, active and independent. None fitted comfortably within a modern agenda that defined the family rather than the individual as the unit of the society and recorded in its constitution that a woman’s place should be in the home” (73-74). Lady Wilde, both individually and in her self-constructed role of Sovereignty, epitomizes the “active and independent” female. Again, by so doing, she carves out a space for herself in the historical record that is somewhat unbecoming a Victorian Irish woman. And so rather than place Lady Wilde within the context of the Revival, historians may find it simpler to sideline her as an eccentric anomaly.

Finally, the nationalist and Revivalist movements were about autonomy and individuality—a new Irish people grounded in an ancient Celtic heritage. In this vein,

Mills honors a modern poet, Susan Connolly, saying, “[T]he persona of the poet is always present while invoking the mythical figure: the two are not fused. In the process, the specific female figure contained within each legend is named and reclaimed, with the effect of overcoming the stifling homogeneity of the overarching Mother Ireland image” (76). Similar to Mills’ assessment of Connolly, Lady Gregory remains a separate and distinct voice from Cathleen ni Houlihan. Lady Gregory revives the mythological figure without becoming confusingly tangled up with her. However, Lady Wilde does not maintain such a distinction. In fashioning herself as Sovereignty, she sacrifices her own identity in order to connect more broadly with the Irish poor. And so, as Lady Wilde, she has lost her own voice when the Revivalist roll call is taken. Ironically, though, in sacrificing her own identity for the good of popular Ireland, Lady Wilde essentially becomes Yeats’ Countess Cathleen. And in calling on the sons of Ireland to fight and die for their country, she also embodies Yeats’ Cathleen ni Houlihan. Without ever receiving credit, Lady Wilde successfully centers herself within some of the Literary Revival’s most influential texts.

The exclusion of Lady Wilde from histories of the Irish Literary Revival may offer support, though, to those historians who contend that the Revival was an effort on the part of the Protestant Ascendancy to regain political power in Ireland. Lady Wilde, Yeats, and Lady Gregory were all Protestant. And yet, Lady Wilde’s involvement with the nationalist cause is critically uncontested. Her life’s work was dedicated to the goal of Irish sovereignty and dissolution of the union that bound Ireland to English rule. On the other hand, Yeats and Lady Gregory seldom engaged with nationalism on a political level. Their involvement remained primarily cultural. Though Yeats knew Lady Wilde

and was familiar with her writing, he did not cite her as a source of inspiration for his own revivalist work. His hesitancy to engage in overt political nationalism, contrasted to Lady Wilde's lifelong commitment to the same, hints that perhaps Yeats pushed a Revivalist cause for different reasons from Lady Wilde's.

Nationalism has been an Irish watchword for centuries. Even today, it marks the critical disagreement between Ireland and Northern Ireland, and fuels continued hostilities between political and religious parties across the island. Lady Wilde engaged in this cause despite her social and religious standing, and found ways to achieve a credible—even heralded—status among the Irish Catholic poor by turning to her Celtic heritage in true Irish Literary Revival fashion. Lady Wilde dressed herself to resemble the Celtic Sovereignty. She chose a personal motto that reflected the tripartite nature of the Mother Goddess and took a name that reflected the role of the *Spéir-bhean*—Sovereignty's seventeenth century Aisling poetic incarnation. She wrote her poetry in the narrative role of Sovereignty, addressing the wandering poet, offering hope, and calling her Irish sons to rise up and die for their Motherland.

In short, Lady Wilde fashioned herself as the Celtic Sovereignty. In so doing, she built credibility among the Irish poor; unfortunately, she also seems to have marginalized herself so much that she has not been recognized in modern scholarship for her role in establishing the Irish Literary Revival. Throughout the twentieth century, in fact, only a handful of texts even recognize Lady Wilde as an Irish writer. She is all but a footnote in the major Irish anthologies and critical histories. The good news is that in recent years, as women's studies have turned their focus toward Ireland, Lady Wilde's work at least has begun to stir some interest, though her role as a nationalist is still largely ignored. In

2002, Karen Tipper devoted an extensive volume to her biography. And the 2007 edition of the two-volume anthology, *Irish Literature: The Nineteenth Century*, also dedicates a large section to Lady Wilde, including several of her poems and other writings. So it seems that perhaps Lady Wilde may finally be acknowledged in contemporary scholarship for her notable contributions to Irish literature. Perhaps the time is not too far off, then, when she will also be credited with her role in the inception of the Irish Literary Revival.

## APPENDIX 1

## REPRODUCTION OF LADY WILDE'S POETRY

The following selection of poems, reproduced here, appear without alteration in both the first and second editions of *Poetry by Speranza*.

THE FAMINE YEAR.

## I.

WEARY men, what reap ye?--Golden corn for the stranger.  
 What sow ye?--Human corpses that wait for the avenger.  
 Fainting forms, hunger-stricken, what see you in the offing?  
 Stately ships to bear our food away, amid the stranger's scoffing.  
 There's a proud array of soldiers--what do they round your door?  
 They guard our masters' granaries from the thin hands of the poor.  
 Pale mothers, wherefore weeping?--Would to God that we were dead--  
 Our children swoon before us, and we cannot give them bread.

## II.

Little children, tears are strange upon your infant faces,  
 God meant you but to smile within your mother's soft embraces.  
 Oh! we know not what is smiling, and we know not what is dying;  
 But we're hungry, very hungry, and we cannot stop our crying.  
 And some of us grow cold and white--we know not what it means;  
 But, as they lie beside us, we tremble in our dreams.  
 There's a gaunt crowd on the highway--are ye come to pray to man,  
 With hollow eyes that cannot weep, and for words your faces wan?

## III.

No; the blood is dead within our veins--we care not now for life;  
 Let us die hid in the ditches, far from children and from wife;  
 We cannot stay and listen to their raving, famished cries--  
 Bread! Bread! Bread! and none to still their agonies.  
 We left our infants playing with their dead mother's hand:  
 We left our maidens maddened by the fever's scorching brand:  
 Better, maiden, thou were strangled in thy own dark-twisted tresses--  
 Better, infant, thou wert smothered in thy mother's first caresses.

## IV.

We are fainting in our misery, but God will hear our groan;  
 Yet, if fellow-men desert us, will He hearken from His Throne?  
 Accursed are we in our own land, yet toil we still and toil;  
 But the stranger reaps our harvest--the alien owns our soil.

O Christ! how have we sinned, that on our native plains  
 We perish houseless, naked, starved, with branded brow, like Cain's?  
 Dying, dying wearily, with a torture sure and slow--  
 Dying, as a dog would die, by the wayside as we go.

V.

One by one they're falling round us, their pale faces to the sky;  
 We've no strength left to dig them graves--there let them lie.  
 The wild bird, if he's stricken, is mourned by the others,  
 But we--we die in Christian land--we die amid our brothers,  
 In the land which God has given, like a wild beast in his cave,  
 Without a tear, a prayer, a shroud, a coffin, or a grave.  
 Ha! but think ye the contortions on each livid face ye see,  
 Will not be read on judgment-day by eyes of Deity?

VI.

We are wretches, famished, scorned, human tools to build your pride,  
 But God will yet take vengeance for the souls for whom Christ died.  
 Now is your hour of pleasure--bask ye in the world's caress;  
 But our whitening bones against ye will rise as witnesses,  
 From the cabins and the ditches, in their charred, uncoffin'd masses,  
 For the Angel of the Trumpet will know them as he passes.  
 A ghastly, spectral army, before the great God we'll stand,  
 And arraign ye as our murderers, the spoilers of our land.

### THE ENIGMA.

PALE victims, where is your Fatherland?  
 Where oppression is law from age to age,  
 Where the death-plague, and hunger, and misery rage,  
 And tyrants a godless warfare wage  
     'Gainst the holiest rights of an ancient land.

Where the corn waves green on the fair hillside,  
 But each sheaf by the serfs and slavelings tied  
 Is taken to pamper a foreigner's pride--  
     There is our suffering Fatherland.

Where broad rivers flow 'neath a glorious sky,  
 And the valleys like gems of emerald lie;  
 Yet, the young men, and strong men, starve and die,  
     For want of bread in their own rich land.

And we pile up their corpses, heap on heap,  
 While the pale mothers faint, and the children weep;  
 Yet, the living might envy the dead their sleep,  
 So bitter is life in that mourning land.

Oh! Heaven ne'er looked on a sadder scene;  
 Earth shuddered to hear that such woe had been;  
 Then we prayed, in despair, to a foreign queen,  
 For leave to live on our own fair land.

We have wept till our faces are pale and wan;  
 We have knelt to a throne till our strength is gone;  
 We prayed to our masters, but, one by one,  
 They laughed to scorn our suffering land;

And sent forth their minions, with cannon and steel,  
 Swearing with fierce, unholy zeal,  
 To trample us down with an iron heel,  
 If we dared but to murmur our just demand.--  
 Know ye not now our Fatherland?

What! are there no MEN in your Fatherland,  
 To confront the tyrant's stormy glare,  
 With a scorn as deep as the wrongs ye bear,  
 With defiance as fierce as the oaths they swear,  
 With vengeance as wild as the cries of despair,  
 That rise from your suffering Fatherland?

Are there no SWORDS in your Fatherland,  
 To smite down the proud, insulting foe,  
 With the strength of despair give blow for blow  
 Till the blood of the baffled murderers flow  
 On the trampled soil of your outraged land?

Are your right arms weak in that land of slaves,  
 That ye stand by your murdered brothers' graves,  
 Yet tremble like coward and crouching knaves,  
 To strike for freedom and Fatherland?

Oh! had ye faith in your Fatherland,  
 In God, your Cause, and your own right hand,  
 Ye would go forth as saints to the holy fight,  
 Go in the strength of eternal right,  
 Go in the conquering Godhead's might--  
 And save or AVENGE your Fatherland!

FORESHADOWINGS.

I.

OREMUS! Oremus! Look down on us, Father!  
 Like visions of Patmos Thy last judgments gather  
 The angels of doom, in bright, terrible beauty,  
 Rise up from their thrones to fulfil their stern duty.  
 Woe to us, woe! the thunders have spoken,  
 The first of the mystical seals hath been broken.

II.

Through the cleft thunder-cloud the weird coursers are rushing--  
 Their hoofs will strike deep in the hearts they are crushing;  
 And the crown'd and the proud of the old kingly races  
 Fall down at the vision, like stars from their places:  
 Oremus! Oremus! The pale earth is heark'ning;  
 Already the spirit-steeds round us are dark'ning.

III.

With crown and with bow, on his white steed immortal,  
 The Angel of Wrath passes first through the portal;  
 But faces grow paler, and hush'd is earth's laughter,  
 When on his pale steed comes the Plague Spirit after.  
 Oremus! Oremus! His poison-breath slayeth;  
 The red will soon fade from each bright lip that prayeth.

IV.

Now, with nostrils dilated and thunder hoofs crashing,  
 On rushes the war-steed, his lurid eyes flashing;  
 There is blood on the track where his long mane is streaming,  
 There is death where the sword of his rider is gleaming.  
 Woe to the lands where that red steed is flying!  
 There tyrants are warring, and heroes are dying.

V.

Oh! the golden-hair'd children reck nought but their playing,  
 Thro' the rich fields of corn with their young mothers straying;  
 And the strong-hearted men, with their muscles of iron,  
 What reck they of ills that their pathway environ?  
 There's a tramp like a knell--a cold shadow gloometh--  
 Woe! 'tis the black steed of Famine that cometh

VI.

At the breath of its rider the green earth is blasted,  
 And childhood's frail form droops down pallid, and wasted;  
 The soft sunny hair falleth dank on the arm

Of the mother, whose love shields no longer from harm:  
 For strength is scarce left her to weep o'er the dying,  
 Ere dead by the loved one the mother is lying.

## VII.

But can we only weep, when above us thus lour  
 The death-bearing wings of the angels of power;  
 When around are the arrows of pestilence flying--  
 Around, the pale heaps of the famine-struck lying  
 --No, brother of sorrow, when life's light is weakest,  
 Look up, it is nigh the redemption thou seekest.

## VIII.

Still WORK, though the tramp of the weird spirit-horses,  
 Fall dull on the ear, like the clay upon corses;  
 Still Freedom must send forth her young heroes glowing,  
 Though her standard be red with their life-current flowing;  
 Still the preacher must cast forth the seed, as God's sower,  
 Though he perish like grass at the scythe of the mower.

## IX.

Still do the Lord's work through life's tragical drama,  
 Though weeping goes upward like weeping at Rama;  
 The path may be thorny, but Spirit eyes see us;  
 The cross may be heavy, but Death will soon free us:  
 Still, strong in Christ's power we'll chant the Hosanna,  
 Fling down Christ's defiance—Υπαγε Σμτανοσ!

## X.

I see in a vision the shadowy portal,  
 That leadeth to regions of glory immortal;  
 I see the pale forms from the seven wounds bleeding,  
 Which up to God's Throne the bright angels are leading;  
 I see the crown placed on each saint bending lowly,  
 While sounds the Trisagion--Holy, thrice Holy!

## XI.

I have Paradise dreams of a band with palm-branches,  
 Whose wavings give back their gold harps' resonances,  
 And a jewelled-walled city, where walketh in splendour  
 Each one who his life for God's truth did surrender.  
 Who would weep their death-doom, if such bliss we inherit,  
 When the veil of the human falls off from the spirit?

## XII.

The Christian may shrink from the last scenes of trial,  
 And the woes yet unknown of each mystical vial;  
 But the hosts of Jehovah will gather beside him,  
 The rainbow-crowned angel stoop downward to guide him;  
 And to him, who as hero and martyr hath striven,  
 Will the Crown, and the Throne, and the Palm-branch be given.

TO A DESPONDENT NATIONALIST.

## I.

WHEREFORE wail you for the harp? Is it broken?  
 Have the bold hands that once struck it weaker grown?  
 Can false words, by false traitors spoken,  
 Blight a cause which we know is God's own?  
 No coward hearts are with us that would falter,  
 Tho' a thousand tyrants strove to crush us low;  
 No coward pen the daring words to alter,  
 That we fling in haughty scorn 'gainst the foe.

## II.

Who has doomed, or can dare "doom us to silence?"  
 In the conscious pride of truth and right we stand;  
 Let them rave like the ocean round the islands,  
 Firm as they we stand unmoved for Fatherland.  
 Ay, we'll "till," spite of banded foes who hate us--  
 But to rear the tree of Freedom God hath given;  
 Ay, we'll toil--but for triumphs that await us,  
 If not leading to the Capital--to Heaven.

## III.

Shall we mourn if we're martyrs for the truth?  
 God has ever tried His noblest by the cross--  
 Let us bless Him that we're worthy in our youth,  
 For Country, truth, and right to suffer loss.  
 So the word that we have spoken be immortal,  
 Little reck we tho' no glory may be won;  
 If of God, it will scorn ban of mortal--  
 Standing ever as the archetypal sun.

## IV.

True, the path is dark, but ever sunward,  
 In faith, and love, and hope we journey on;  
 We may pause in the desert passing onward,  
 Lay our weary heads to rest upon the stone;  
 But ever in our visions, low and faintly,  
 Come the voices of the far-off angel band,  
 To earnest souls, in prophecy all saintly,  
 That the good cause will yet triumph in the land.

## V.

Fear not, oh! my brother, then, that any  
 Will hush Ierne's harp at man's command;  
 For phylacteries of misery too many,  
 Are bound upon all foreheads in the land.  
 Let others bow in abject genuflexion--  
 Sue from Pity what they ought to claim as right;  
 By God's grace we'll stand by our election--  
 Freedom, Knowledge, Independence, Truth, and Light!

SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

## I.

WHEN mighty passions, surging, heave the depth of life's great ocean--  
 When the people sway, like forest trees, to and fro in wild commotion--  
 When the world-old kingdoms, rent and riven, quiver in their place,  
 As the human central fire is upheaving at their base,  
 And throbbing hearts, and flashing eyes, speak a language deep and cryptic;  
 Yet he who runs may read aright these signs apocalyptic:  
 Then rise, ye crownéd Elohim!<sup>1</sup>--rise trembling from your thrones;  
 Soon shall cease the eternal rhythm betwixt them and human groans.

## II.

Ah! ye thought the nations, faint and weary, lay for ever bound;  
 They were sleeping like Orestes, with the Furies watching round;  
 Soon they'll spring to vengeance, maddened by the whisperings divine,  
 That breathed of human freedom, as they knelt before God's shrine.  
 See you not a form advancing, as the shadow of the Gnomon,  
 Step by step, in darkness, onward--can ye read the fatal omen!  
 Coarse the hand, and rude the raiment, and the brow is dark to see,  
 But flashes fierce the eye as those of vengeful Zinçali.

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<sup>1</sup> "Kings--The Earthly Elohim." --SIR THOMAS BROWNE

## III.

On its brow a name is written--France read it once before,  
 And like a demon's compact, it was written in her gore--  
 A fearful name--thrones trembled as the murmur passed along--  
 RETRIBUTION, proud oppressors, for your centuries of wrong.  
 From the orient to the ocean, from the palm-tree to the pine,  
 From Innisfail, by Tagus, to the lordly Appenine--  
 From Indus to the river by which pale Warsaw bleeds--  
 Souls are wakening--hands are arming--God is blessing noble deeds.

## IV.

Bravely done, ye Roman Eagles, ye are fluttering at last;  
 Spread your broad wings brave and proudly, as in old times, to the blast;  
 Never furl them--never flag, till with the Austrian's slaughter,  
 Ye crimson the full tide of the Danube's rolling water.  
 Who will falter now? Who'll stand like a trembling coward dumb!  
 Plaudite! Freedom stands again on the Janiculum!  
 From the Tiber to the Adige her vatic words are waking,  
 Italy! fair Italy! arise the dawn is breaking!

## V.

The Russian breathed on Poland, and she changed to a Zahara;  
 The jewels of her ancient crown adorn the Czar's tiara.  
 Her princes, and her nobles, tread the land with footsteps weary,  
 And her people cry to Heaven with ceaseless Miserere.  
 On her pale brow, thorn crownéd, ye may read her shame and loss;  
 See, foreign rule has branded there the fatal Thanatos.  
 But her agony and bloody sweat the Lord from Heaven will see,  
 And a resurrection morn heal the wounds of Calvary.

## VI.

By our prophets God is speaking, in Sinai's awful thunders,  
 By pestilence and famine, in fearful signs and wonders;  
 By our great poet-priesthood, the sacred race immortal,  
 Whose words go forth triumphant, as through a golden portal;  
 By our patriots and martyrs, who, for Freedom's holy law,  
 Have hearts to dare, a hand to burn, like Mutius Scævola.  
 Then, courage, Brothers! lock your shields, like the old Spartan band,  
 Advance! and be your watchword ever--God for Ireland!

THE OLD MAN'S BLESSING.

MINE eye is dull, my hair is white,  
 This arm is powerless for the fight,  
 Alas! alas! the battle's van  
 Suits not a weak and aged man.  
 Thine eye is bright, thine arm is strong--  
 'Tis Youth must right our country's wrong.  
 Arise, my son, and proudly bear  
 This sword that I was wont to wear;  
 Firm grasp the hilt, fling down the sheath--  
 A thousand years their wrongs bequeath  
 To thy young heart, thy hot revenge—

Kneel down, and swear thou wilt avenge.  
 May thy hand be fierce as Até's,  
 Fighting for our old Penates;  
 May thy glance be lightning flashes,  
 May thy words be thunder crashes,  
 May that earnest, haughty frown,  
 Like weapon, strike the foeman down.  
 May thy smile of scorn be  
 Blasting as the Upas tree;  
 Boldly like Olympian God,  
 Hurl the tyrants from our sod,  
 Let their wail be Ichabod!

Be to them destruction glooming--  
 Be to them a vengeance looming,  
 Hair-suspended o'er their race,  
 Like the sword of Damoclés,  
 Let thy daring right hand free us,  
 Like that son of old Ægeus,  
 Who purged his land for evermore  
 From the blood-stained Minotaur.  
 Fear not death, but fear dishonour;  
 Yield thy country all but honour.  
 What more fitting warrior's shroud  
 Than the foeman's standard proud?

Heed ye not their glozing words;  
 Fear ye not their myriad swords;  
 Never make ye peace with them  
 'Till ye chant their requiem.  
 Ha! I hear thy heart's pulsation  
 Throbbing vengeance for our nation;

Ha! I see thy dark eyes shine  
 With a fury leonine—

Burning brow and clenched hand--  
 Quivering lip and naked brand--  
 Arise! arise! my patriot son,  
 By hearts like thine is Freedom won!

MAN'S MISSION.

I.  
 HUMAN lives are silent teaching,  
     Be they earnest, mild, and true--  
 Noble deeds are noblest preaching  
     From the consecrated Few.  
 Poet-Priests their anthems singing,  
 Hero-sword on corslet ringing,  
     When Truth's banner is unfurled;  
 Youthful preachers, genius-gifted,  
 Pouring forth their souls uplifted,  
     Till their preaching stirs the world;

II.  
 Each must work as God has given  
     Hero hand or poet soul;  
 Work is duty while we live in  
     This weird world of sin and dole.  
 Gentle spirits, lowly kneeling,  
 Lift their white hands up appealing  
     To the Throne of Heaven's King--  
 Stronger natures, culminating,  
 In great actions incarnating  
     What another can but sing.

III.  
 Pure and meek-eyed as an angel,  
     We must strive--must agonise;  
 We must preach the saints' evangel  
     Ere we claim the saintly prize.  
 Work for all, for work is holy,  
 We fulfil our mission solely  
     When, like Heaven's arch above,  
 Blend our souls in one emblazon,

And the social diapason  
 Sounds the perfect chord of love.

IV.

Life is combat, life is striving,  
 Such our destiny below;  
 Like a scythéd chariot driving  
 Through an onward pressing foe.  
 Deepest sorrow, scorn, and trial  
 Will but teach us self-denial;  
 Like the alchymists of old,  
 Pass the ore through cleansing fire  
 If our spirits would aspire  
 To be God's refinéd gold.

V.

We are struggling in the morning  
 With the spirit of the night;  
 But we trample on it scorning--  
 Lo! the eastern sky is bright.  
 We must watch. The day is breaking;  
 Soon, like Memnon's statue waking  
 With the sunrise into sound,  
 We shall raise our voice to Heaven,  
 Chant a hymn for conquest given,  
 Seize the palm, nor heed the wound.

VI.

We must bend our thoughts to earnest,  
 Would we strike the idols down;  
 With a purpose of the sternest  
 Take the Cross, and wait the Crown.  
 Sufferings human life can hallow,  
 Sufferings lead to God's Valhalla;  
 Meekly bear, but nobly try,  
 Like a man with soft tears flowing,  
 Like a God with conquest glowing  
 So to love, and work, and die!

FORWARD!

I.

WHAT though Freedom's hosts are parted,  
 Yet, beneath one banner fighting,  
 Strong in love and hero-hearted,  
 All, their Country's wrongs are righting  
 With the weapon that each deemeth best to strike oppression down.

II.

And one battle-cry resoundeth  
 From your ranks, success presaging;  
 And one heart within you boundeth  
 With a martyr's faith, engaging  
 Each to bind upon his forehead cypress wreath or laurel crown.

III.

For a power without you urges  
 That can brook no more delaying,  
 And the heaving myriad surges,  
 To and fro in tumult swaying,  
 Threaten death to all who vainly would oppose them in their might.

IV.

Thrilling words, that burn like fire,  
 Ye have preached to hut and hovel,  
 Till they leap up in their ire  
 From the death-dust where they grovel,  
 These men of many sufferings, to die or win their right.

V.

Pass the word that bands together--  
 Word of mystic conjuration--  
 And, as fire consumes the heather,  
 So the young hearts of the nation  
 Fierce will blaze up, quick and scathing, 'gainst the stranger and the foe.

VI.

Hand to hand with them confronted,  
 Looking death and danger gravely  
 In the face, with brow undaunted;  
 Doing nobly, dying bravely,  
 Stern as men resolved to conquer or to perish in their woe.

VII.

For the God-breath speaketh in you,  
 Dare ye not belie your mission;  
 And the beck'ning angels win you  
 On with many a radiant vision,  
 Up the thorny path of glory, where the hero gains his crown.

VIII.

Fling abroad our Country's banner,  
 Foremost march to Freedom leading,  
 Let the breath of millions fan her,  
 Not alone the wine-press treading,  
 For a Nation is arising from her long and ghastly swoon.

IX.

Go with lips that dare not falter,  
 Offer up, with exaltations,  
 On your country's holy altar,  
 Youth, with all its fervid passions,  
 And your life, if she demands it--Can a patriot fear to die?

X.

What is life that ye should love it  
 More than manlike deeds of duty?  
 There's a glory far above it  
 Crowns your brow with nobler beauty--  
 'Tis to die, with cheers heroic, lifting Freedom's standard high.

XI.

Through the darkness and the dunlight,  
 Of this sorrow-night of weeping,  
 Ye shall trail the radiant sunlight,  
 And, like strong men armed, leaping  
 Forth to wondrous deeds of glory, make Humanity sublime.

XII.

Rising higher still, and higher,  
 Till the Angel who stands nighest  
 To the Throne shall tune his lyre  
 To your praise before the Highest,  
 And the Crown of Fame Immortal shall be yours throughout all time.

RUINS.

I.  
 SHALL we tread the dust of ages,  
   Musing, dreamlike, on the past,  
 Seeking on the broad earth's pages  
   For the shadows Time hath cast;  
 Waking up some ancient story,  
   From each prostrate shrine or hall,  
 Old traditions of a glory  
   Earth may never more recall?

II.  
 Poets thoughts of sadness breathing,  
   For the temples overthrown;  
 Where no incense now is wreathing,  
   And the gods are turned to stone.  
 Wandering by the graves of heroes,  
   Shrouded deep in classic gloom,  
 Or the tombs where Egypt's Pharaohs  
   Wait the trumpet and the doom.

III.  
 By the city, desert-hidden<sup>2</sup>  
   Which Judea's mighty king  
 Made the Genii, at his bidding,  
   Raise by magic of his ring;  
 By the Lake Asphaltian wander,  
   While the crimson sunset glow  
 Flings its radiance, as we ponder  
   On the buried towns below.

IV.  
 By the Cromleach, sloping downward,  
   Where the Druid's victim bled;  
 By those Towers, pointing sunward,  
   Hieroglyphics none have read:  
 In their mystic symbols seeking,  
   Of past creeds and rites o'erthrown,  
 If the truths they shrined are speaking  
   Yet in Litanies of Stone.

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<sup>2</sup> \* Palmyra, or Tadmer

V.  
 By the Temple of the Muses,  
   Where the climbers of the mount  
 Learned the soul's diviner uses  
   From the Heliconian fount.  
 By the banks of dark Illyssus,  
   Where the Parcae walked of old,  
 In their crowns of white narcissus,  
   And their garments starred with gold

VI.  
 By the tomb of queenly Isis,  
   Where her fallen prophets wail,  
 Yet no hand has dared the crisis  
   Of the lifting of the veil.  
 By the altar which the Grecian  
   Raised to God without a name;  
 By the stately shrine Ephesian,  
   Erostratus burned for fame.

VII.  
 By the Libyan shrine of Ammon,  
   Where the sands are trod with care,  
 Lest we, bending to examine,  
   Start the lion from his lair.  
 Shall we tread the halls Assyrian,  
   Where the Arab tents are set;  
 Trace the glory of the Tyrian,  
   Where the fisher spreads his net?

VIII.  
 Shall we seek the "Mene, mene,"  
   Wrote by God upon the wall,  
 While the proud son of Mandane  
   Strode across the fated hall?  
 Shall we mourn the Loxian's lyre,  
   Or the Pythian priestess mute?  
 Shall we seek the Delphic fire,  
   Though we've lost Apollo's lute?

IX.  
 Ah! the world has sadder ruins  
   Than these wrecks of things sublime;  
 For the touch of man's misdoings  
   Leaves more blighted tracks than Time.  
 Ancient lore gives no examples

Of the ruins here we find--  
 Prostrate souls for fallen temples,  
 Mighty ruins of the mind.

X.  
 We had hopes that rose as proudly  
     As each sculptured marble shrine;  
 And our prophets spake as loudly  
     As their oracles divine.  
 Grand resolves of giant daring,  
     Such as Titans breathed of old;  
 Brilliant aims their front uprearing,  
     Like a temple roofed with gold.

XI.  
 Souls of fire, like columns pointing,  
     Flamelike, upward to the skies;  
 Glorious brows, which God's anointing  
     Consecrated altar-wise.  
 Stainless hearts, like temples olden,  
     None but priest hath ever trod;  
 Hands as pure as were the golden  
     Staves which bore the ark of God.

XII.  
 Oh! they built up radiant visions,  
     Like an iris after rain;  
 How all Paradise traditions  
     Might be made to live again.  
 Of Humanity's sad story,  
     How their hand should turn the page,  
 And the ancient primal glory,  
     Fling upon this latter age.

XIII.  
 How with Godlike aspirations,  
     Up the souls of men would climb,  
 Till the fallen, enslavéd nations  
     Trod in rhythmic march sublime;  
 Reaching heights the people knew not,  
     Till their Prophet Leaders led--  
 Bathed in light that mortals view not,  
     While the spirit life lies dead.

## XIV.

How the pallid sons of labour,  
 They should toil, and toil to raise,  
 Till a glory, like to Tabor,  
 Once again should meet earth's gaze.  
 How the poor, no longer keeping  
 Count of life alone by groans,  
 With the strong cry of their weeping,  
 Start the angels on their thrones.

## XV.

Ah! that vision's bright ideal,  
 Must it fade and perish thus?  
 Must its fall alone be real?  
 Are its ruins trod by us?  
 Ah! they dreamed an Eldorado,  
 Given not to mortal sight;  
 Yet the souls that walk in shadow,  
 Still bend forward to its light.

## XVI.

Earnest dreamers, sooth we blame not  
 If ye failed to reach the goal--  
 If the glorious Real came not  
 At the strong prayer of each soul.  
 By the path ye've trod to duty,  
 Blessings yet to man may flow,  
 Though the proud and stately beauty  
 Of your structure lieth low.

## XVII.

Low as that which Salem mourneth,  
 On Moriah's holy hill;  
 While the heathen proudly scorneth,  
 Yet the wrecks are glorious still:  
 Like the seven columns frowning,  
 On the desert city down;  
 Or the seven cedars crowning  
 Lofty Lebanon.

## XVIII.

Poet wanderer, hast thou bent thee  
 O'er such ruins of the soul?  
 Pray to God that some Nepenthe  
 May efface that hour of dole.  
 We may lift the shrine and column,

From the dust which Time hath cast;  
Choral chants may mingle solemn,  
Once again where silence passed;

XIX.

But the stately, radiant palace,  
We had built up in our dreams,  
With Hope's rainbow-woven trellis,  
And Truth's glorious sunrise beams;  
Our aims of towering stature,  
Our aspirations vain,  
And our prostrate human nature--  
Who will raise them up again?

## APPENDIX 2

## LADY JANE WILDE AS THE IRISH SPÉIR-BHEAN:

## A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

A summary of this study is contained in Chapter 3 of this thesis. However, the report of this study is reproduced in full here for the interested reader.

## Introduction

Lady Jane Wilde (mother of the famous playwright Oscar) is not a well-known name today, even among Victorian scholars. But in mid-nineteenth century Ireland, her popularity as the famous “Speranza” was virtually unparalleled. Indeed, so great was her fame that when Oscar first travelled to the United States, the Irish immigrants there hailed him not for his own literary renown, but as the “Son of Speranza.”

Lady Wilde began her writing career as a poet, contributing her original verses to the *Nation*—a newspaper dedicated to the Irish Nationalist cause. She wrote initially under the pen name “John Fanshaw Ellis,” but soon adopted the *nom de plume* of Speranza (Italian for “hope”). However, Lady Wilde’s political position was precarious. After all, although throughout Celtic history the woman was hailed for her strength and political power, with the introduction of traditional Christian values came a diminishment of the female’s social status: According to one scholar, “By the nineteenth century, the Victorian ideal of docile, delicate women, happy in a life of deference and submission informed the rhetoric of the church as well as Irish literature” (Conley 801). The ideal Victorian woman did not foray into the world of politics, but instead focused her attentions on hearth and home.

Furthermore, Lady Wilde—well-bred, wealthy, and Protestant—needed to convince the common Irish people, who were predominately uneducated, poor, and Catholic, and who suffered most severely the effects of the Great Famine, that she understood their suffering and wanted to help. She was frequently criticized by her contemporaries for her prominent eccentricities, and in current scholarship, is also criticized for demanding an energy and optimism from the Irish people that, because of the hardships of the Great Famine, they were wholly unable to give. Lady Wilde is accused of being ultimately disconnected from the common Irish people and their desperate experience (Lambert 64). And so she faced a daunting task; how could Lady Wilde create ethos among a people from whom she seemed entirely disconnected?

I believe that the answer lies in her alignment with Celtic mythology. While the Irish poor knew little of scholarship and formal education, they were a people entrenched in Irish tradition and folklore. They found identity as a people through their Celtic heritage and its stories of goddesses and fairies. And central to that mythology is the archetype of the Great Mother, often reflected as the Celtic goddess Sovereignty.

Sovereignty appears in various incarnations from as early as the fifth century B.C., when the first written texts appear in Irish history. Initially associated with war and sexuality, Sovereignty's identity changed over the centuries, particularly when Christianity was introduced in Ireland and pagan traditions were denounced and modified to better align with Christian values. Thus Sovereignty's name changed and her powers diminished, but her association with Irish freedom did not.

Sovereignty's most recent incarnation is found in the "Aisling," pronounced "ash-leen," poetry of the mid-seventeenth century. The beginning of the seventeenth century

saw England's conquest over Ireland, and with it, the decline of the bard tradition which had pervaded Ireland in past centuries: "No one remained to pay for panegyric poems or to support the bards with the generosity so admired in the ancient kings. Also, there remained no kingship for them to praise" (Clark 154). Poets became themselves part of the impoverished people, and the tone of their poetry changed. Rosalind Clark notes: "One would assume that the image of the Sovereignty would no longer be relevant, but would fade into oblivion. Strangely enough, however, the Sovereignty became more the central figure of the poetical tradition than she had ever been[. . .]She became the symbol of Ireland's past glory, present suffering, and future hope" (154).

Daniel Corkery's *The Hidden Ireland* is considered the seminal text exploring the Aisling poetry tradition. He defines "Aisling" as "vision" or "dream," and observes that the first Aisling poems emerged in the mid-seventeenth century. These poems all follow the same theme: a poet, despondent over the fall of Ireland to England, falls asleep and dreams he is wandering through the countryside when he is approached by a beautiful woman. He asks the woman who she is and offers up several names from both Greek and Irish mythology in inquiry. The woman eventually tells him that she is Ireland sorrowing for the return of the true king. The woman, who is from the Otherworld and is a "*Spéir-bhean*" (sky-woman," pronounced "spayr-vahn"), offers hope to the poet and urges him forward to fight for her cause (Corkery 129).

Thus the *Spéir-bhean* came to symbolize freedom for the Irish people; Irish freedom is precisely what Lady Wilde demanded through her involvement with the Nationalist cause. And so, by fashioning herself as this beloved and hopeful figure of Celtic tradition, Lady Wilde could create ethos for herself among the Irish poor in ways

that she herself, as a wealthy, educated, Protestant woman, could not. Consider, for instance, the pen name she chose for herself: Speranza. It is phonetically as close to the Irish pronunciation of *Spéir-bhean* as any name could be. More significantly, “Speranza” is Italian for “hope.” And hope is exactly the function of the *Spéir-bhean*: “[S]he is the prophet of hope for the future: she urges the poet not to despair but to trust that God will bring the exiled Stuarts back across the seas” (Clark 7). In addition, contemporary portraits drawn of Lady Wilde demonstrate that she mirrored in her dress and hair style the traditional look of personified Ireland (an image that would have been as familiar to her as Uncle Sam is to Americans today).

And so, like an archaeologist who digs up bits of pottery and pieces of bone to construct a more complete understanding of an entire society, I have begun to compile pieces of information that suggest that Lady Wilde fashioned herself as the Celtic *Spéir-bhean*. My purpose in conducting this discourse analysis is to assess whether and the degree to which Lady Wilde may have attempted this through her poetry.

## Methodology

### The Study

Mary Sue MacNealy asserts that “[s]tudying discourse enables scholars to add to a body of knowledge in a particular discipline by making data-based inferences about the person[s] who created the discourse” (124). Thus it seems that a discourse analysis of Lady Wilde’s poems might offer some insights about Lady Wilde herself and her efforts to create ethos through alignment with the Irish Aisling tradition.

Lady Wilde published a volume of poetry in 1864 which was a compilation of the poems she had published as Speranza during the famine years (1846-1849), in the *Nation*

newspaper. Also included in the book were many translations of poems from other European languages. A second edition of the book, released in 1871, includes these poems and several others; some are Speranza's original work, and more are translations of works from other languages.

I first determined which of Lady Wilde's poems I would use to conduct this study. I excluded immediately the translations, since these are not Lady Wilde's own work and therefore may or may not fully represent her efforts to connect with the Irish poor. I then decided to focus only on those poems that were directed at her target audience; that is, the Irish poor who had little formal education but would have known of the Sovereignty tradition. So that meant that I was looking only at her earlier works—those published during the famine years. In total, after excluding translations and poems included only in the second edition of the book, I was left with thirty-one poems to include as subjects for my research.

My next task was to identify those categories that might link Lady Wilde's poetry to the Aisling poetry tradition. Specifically, I wanted to identify poems that positioned Lady Wilde as the *Spéir-bhean*. Using Daniel Corkery's analysis of Aisling poetry as my guide, I focused on three specific themes that are typical of the *Spéir-bhean* (the incarnation of Sovereignty): (1) Poems in which the speaker directly addresses the poet and reminds him of his responsibilities to speak truth on behalf of Ireland; (2) Poems which offer hope for the future of Ireland; and (3) Poems which call on the sons of Ireland to fight and die for their country.

I created a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel which allowed me to record each poem's name, and identify whether it contained any of the three themes identified above.

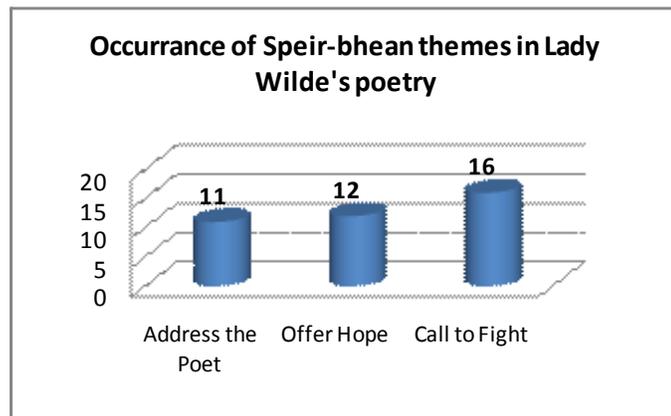
Finally, I conducted a close reading of each of the thirty-one poems, and recorded my analysis of the discourse.

### Limitations

Time did not permit me to find a second rater who could assess Speranza's poetry for specific themes; thus, reliability of my results could be affected. While it seems a simple thing to identify themes in a body of literature, it is nonetheless possible that my own expectations colored my interpretation of the texts. Certainly, future exploration of this topic would want to increase the number of evaluators to at least two, and perhaps even three.

### Results

Of the thirty-one poems included in my study, only five did not contain any of the three themes I was looking for in my analysis. The remaining twenty-six poems contained at least one of those themes that marked it as representative of the Aisling tradition.



Many of the poems (n=6) include two of these themes, and another three include all three of the themes I examined in this study.

Figure 2

Figure 1 represents the number of times that each theme occurred within these twenty-six poems.

In eleven (11) of the thirty-one subject poems, themes that reflected “addressing the poet” were represented by such passages as this from “Ruins”:

Poet wanderer, hast thou bent thee  
 O'er such ruins of the soul?  
 Pray to God that some Nepenthe  
 May efface that hour of dole. (137-140)

This particular passage is especially reminiscent of the Aisling tradition in that the speaker (the *Spéir-bhean*) not only addresses the poet as a wanderer (as all poets are in Aisling poetry), but she also makes reference to the Greek figure of Nepenthe (the goddess of forgetfulness). This allusion to Greek mythology is typical of the Aisling tradition, as well.

This passage from “A Remonstrance” is another which expresses the theme of addressing the poet:

STAND on the heights, O Poet! nor come down  
 Amid the wise old serpents, coiled around  
 The Tree of Knowledge in Academics.  
 The Poet's place is by the Tree of Life,  
 Whose fruit turns men to Gods, and makes them live. (1-5)

In this poem, too, the speaker calls upon the poet to stand in his rightful place as a bearer not just of truth, but of life itself. This speaker, who assumes the role of one who has an

omniscient view of the world, is also typical of the *Spéir-bhean*, who, as a Goddess, has a clearer view of the world than those who live in it.

The second theme, offering hope for the future of Ireland, appears in twelve (12) of the thirty-one poems; an example is this passage from “To a Despondent Nationalist”:

True, the path is dark, but ever sunward,  
 In faith, and love, and hope we journey on;  
 We may pause in the desert passing onward,  
 Lay our weary heads to rest upon the stone;  
 But ever in our visions, low and faintly,  
 Come the voices of the far-off angel band,  
 To earnest souls, in prophecy all saintly,  
 That the good cause will yet triumph in the land. (25-32)

This passage, in typical *Spéir-bhean* fashion, acknowledges that the Irish are suffering, but assures her listener that victory is on the horizon. This poem also alludes to the fact that such promise of victory is found in “visions”—the very definition of Aisling poetry.

Another example of a poem which offers the theme of hope is this twelfth stanza from “Foreshadowings”:

The Christian may shrink from the last scenes of trial,  
 And the woes yet unknown of each mystical vial;  
 But the hosts of Jehovah will gather beside him,  
 The rainbow-crowned angel stoop downward to guide him;

And to him, who as hero and martyr hath striven,

Will the Crown, and the Throne, and the Palm-branch be given. (67-72)

In this passage, the speaker offers hope to those who are suffering from the Famine (she mentions the Famine earlier in the poem). Interestingly, she alludes to the return of the king to bring peace and salvation, which is precisely what the *Spéir-bhean* is expected to do. But in this case, the king who will return to restore sovereignty to Ireland is not a political king, but a king with whom the Catholic poor would more closely identify: Jesus Christ.

Finally, there are sixteen (16) poems in this study—more than half of the subject sample—that rely on the theme of calling on the sons of Ireland to fight for their country. This passage from the opening stanza of “The Old Man’s Blessing” illustrates this theme:

Firm grasp the hilt, fling down the sheath--

A thousand years their wrongs bequeath

To thy young heart, thy hot revenge--

Kneel down, and swear thou wilt avenge. (9-12)

In this same poem, the speaker further exemplifies the *Spéir-bhean*’s call to arms when she urges the young Irish sons to “fear not death | but fear dishonor” (32); a hallmark of Sovereignty’s call is her insistence that the young warriors be willing to die for their country.

This call to fight or die recurs again in “Forward!,” when after calling on the “young hearts of the nation” (24) the speaker exclaims:

Hand to hand with them confronted,

Looking death and danger gravely  
 In the face, with brow undaunted;  
 Doing nobly, dying bravely,  
 Stern as men resolved to conquer or to perish in their woe. (26-30)

One of Sovereignty's most notable characteristics is her expectation that the sons of Ireland will willingly forfeit their lives on her behalf; more than half of the poems in this study express this theme.

### Discussion

Admittedly, this quantitative, empirical analysis of such emotion-laden poetry feels much like evaluating a cherry pie based not on its presentation, texture, or overall taste, but simply by how many teaspoons of baking soda went into the crust. Quantitative studies are often shunned in the study of English and literature for just this reason; the results seem cold, detached, and ineffective as a means of describing the deeper significance and impact of a literary work. It's hard for me, an avowed process theorist as I teach my composition classes, to disagree with Peter Elbow when he contends that reducing a piece of writing—any writing—down to a single number or statistic produces “untrustworthy” results (Elbow 251). But Cindy Johaneck makes a compelling argument:

We must be careful not to dismiss particular methods—especially those that rely on numerical evidence[. . .]for to do so would be to blame the vehicle for having had a lot of bad drivers. Research relying on numerical data is still a dependable vehicle for getting us to some of the places we need to go, *and we need all possible vehicles in order to convey the most valuable and diverse body of knowledge possible.* (83, emphasis added)

So while this analytical look at Speranza's poems may not yield a comprehensive, conclusive overview of her work, it nevertheless provides one source of information—no less valuable than any other source—that can be evaluated in tandem with the results of other evaluative methods.

The data produced from this discourse analysis do seem to support the notion that Speranza at least toyed with the concept of the *Spéir-bhean* and the Aisling tradition in her Famine poetry. Of course, whether this was intentional, subliminal, or just plain archetypal, no one could say without knowing Speranza's conscious objective—and unfortunately, this does not seem to have been committed to paper or preserved through the years.

Much has been said about Jung's postulate that all humans are influenced by unconscious archetypes—primordial, universal figures that shape our expectations (Jung 79). Because Speranza's writing process is unknown, I cannot deny the possibility that Speranza positioned herself as the Celtic Sovereignty quite by chance, and with no conscious intent to create ethos among the Catholic poor by doing so. Perhaps she merely yielded to the promptings of the collective Celtic unconscious, which seems to have influenced Irish literature since the earliest oral tradition.

To support the notion that Lady Wilde did intend to include these specific themes in her own poetry, though, we might fairly consider in this context her translations of poetry from other languages. She selected particular poems for translation; she likely chose those which would represent themes that were important to her. And so, while these translations were excluded from this study because they might not have approached

Speranza's themes creatively in the way she did in her own work, they nevertheless offer some insight into her thematic concerns.

Returning to the original book of poetry, themes consistent with the findings of this study readily emerge. For example, "Le Réveille" (translated from the French, original author unknown) disparages the song of the nightingale for its romanticism, while hailing the sound of the lark that calls a weary people to fight for liberty. "For Norge," translated from the Danish, calls on the country's "brothers" to "guard old Norway's Freedom!" (8). "The Poet at Court" (origin unknown) hails the poet as a "God-made King" (24). A large number of Speranza's translations seem ostensibly to portray that theme of love and romance; however, closer reading reveals that all these "love" poems depict an innocent young girl who is longing for the return of her true lover while fending off the advances of less noble characters. This image is consistent with the symbolic portrayal of Ireland as a dominated woman awaiting the return of her true king.

This discourse analysis reveals that in most of the poems Speranza produced during the Famine years, she positioned herself thematically in ways that are reflective of the Aisling tradition. She called on the sons of Ireland to die for their country; she hailed the poet as a wanderer whose birthright it was to redeem Irish souls; she offered hope in the notion that the true king would soon return and restore freedom and liberty to Ireland. It is interesting that the king Speranza refers to is not a political being, but is instead a king with whom the Irish Catholic would most closely identify: Jesus Christ. Still, the results of this study add one more bit of support to an increasing body of evidence suggesting that Lady Jane Wilde fashioned herself after the Celtic goddess Sovereignty as she tried to gain popularity and reliability among the Irish poor, at a time when Victorian

women were expected to focus their attentions away from the public sphere and on their homes and families.

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