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HACI BAYRAM VELİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ
LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ

**A MYTHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF 'THE WELL' AS
REPRESENTED IN J. M. SYNGE'S *THE WELL OF THE
SAINTS* AND W. B. YEATS' *AT THE HAWK'S WELL***

Melike Belkıs KEMİKLİ

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nazlı GÜNDÜZ

**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
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IN
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A MYTHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ‘THE WELL’ AS REPRESENTED IN J. M.
SYNGE’S *THE WELL OF THE SAINTS* AND W. B. YEATS’ *AT THE HAWK’S WELL*
(M.Sc. Thesis)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze mythological elements, taking as a priority “the well” image that comes to the fore in J.M. Synge’s *The Well of Saints* and W.B. Yeats’s *At the Hawk’s Well*. The main purpose of the study is to distinguish that the well figure and other mythological elements in these plays were written adhering to a nationalist perspective and that the mythological elements are mostly specific to Celtic mythology. In addition, the fact that J.M. Synge and W.B. Yeats, known as Irish nationalist writers, used Irish folklore and Celtic Mythology from a nationalist perspective in their plays to distinguish the Irish Theater from others, is explained by Mircea Eliade’s “eternal return” theory. The well figure is explained through Eliade’s theory of the “duality of water” through the representation of the sacred water it contains. In addition, adhering to Eliade’s mythological understanding that mythological and religious beliefs are similar and emerged to understand the universe, the sacred beliefs and symbols in the play are discussed by showing examples from the Qur’an and the Bible. As a result of this study, based on the depiction of holy water and other mythological elements used in the plays, it is determined that the nationalist and mythological sides of these two plays emerged simultaneously and that the mythological elements they contained were similar to the Abrahamic religions, especially Christianity, which Ireland later adopted.

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J.M SYNGE'İN *AZİZLER ÇEŞMESİ* VE W.B YEATS'İN *ATMACANIN KUYUSUNDA* 'DA
TEMSİL EDİLEN KUYU'NUN MİTOLOJİK ANALİZİ
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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, J.M Synge'in *Azizler Çeşmesi* ile W.B. Yeats'in *Atmacanın Kuyusunda* adlı tiyatro oyunlarında ön plana çıkan kuyu imgesini öncelik alarak mitolojik öğeleri analiz etmeyi amaçlar. Çalışmanın asıl amacı bu oyunlardaki kuyu figürünün ve diğer mitolojik öğelerin milliyetçi bir bakış açısına sadık kalarak yazıldığı ve mitolojik öğelerin çoğunlukla Kelt mitolojisine özgü olduğunun ayırt edilmesidir. Ayrıca İrlandalı milliyetçi yazarlar olarak bilinen J.M Synge ile W.B.Yeats İrlanda Tiyatrosu'nu diğerlerinden ayırmak üzere İrlanda folklorunu ve Kelt Mitolojisini oyunlarında milliyetçi bir bakış açısıyla kullanmaları Mircae Eliade'ın "ebedi dönüş" teorisi ile açıklanmıştır. Oyunlarda ön plana çıkan kuyu figürü ise içerdiği kutsal su temsili üzerinden Eliade'ın suyun ikililiği teorisi üzerinden açıklanmıştır. Ayrıca mitolojik ve dini inanışların benzerlik gösterdiği ve evreni anlamak üzere ortaya çıktığı Eliade'ın mitolojik anlayışına bağlı kalınarak oyundaki kutsal inanışlar ve semboller aracılığıyla Kur'an ve İncil'den örnekler gösterilerek tartışılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın sonucunda kutsal su tasvirinden ve oyunlarda kullanılan diğer mitolojik öğelerden hareketle, bu iki oyunun milliyetçi ve mitolojik taraflarının eş zamanlı ortaya çıktığı ve içerdikleri mitolojik öğelerin İbrahimi dinlerle, özellikle İrlanda'nın sonradan benimsediği Hristiyanlıkla benzer yanlarının olduğu belirlenmiştir.

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Dedicated to a precious soul - my grandfather (RIP)

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages, drama is mostly preferred for expressing political or religious beliefs, ideas, or traditions by depicting them on a stage. In ancient times, for example, it was used for showing people the workings of the human mind and soul, in other words, human nature, through the intricate plots of plays, especially tragedies. Though largely forbidden, it served in the medieval period to present religious thoughts such as biblical doctrines of the church or mysterious stories to the people. It would not be wrong to say that drama has served the priorities of the ruling class or those with power. It has always been a great way to convey political or religious messages or tell epic stories to people through a plot, setting, and characters who are the mirrors of real characters in life itself. At this very juncture, the paths of myths, which have emerged from the perennial human desire to explain the universe and nature, intersect with that of drama. Humanity, in its pursuit to make sense of natural phenomena, has attributed supernatural powers to them over centuries. Furthermore, humans, employing drama as a means of conveying ideas or themes, have incorporated myths into drama directly or indirectly. Brunel (1992), whose ideas on mythological criticism will dominate this thesis, assumes that myths cannot be dissociated from literature, and he adds,

And just as it is necessary to study history to understand prehistory, so it is only from the starting point of literary texts or traditions that we can move on to hypotheses concerning what preceded them. It follows from this that myth reaches us completely swathed in literature and is already literary, whether we like it or not. It also follows that literary analysis will inevitably at some point come up against myth. Recent attempts at 'myth-analysis' or 'mytho-criticism' have in fact demonstrated that they constitute a fruitful approach to the interpretation of texts. However, literary historians and theorists have also taken an interest in literary myth in its own right. Rather than studying it about a single text (for example Prometheus in *Le Temps Retrouve*) or a single author (for example Orpheus in Nerval), they have confronted it head-on, seeing it as a unified mass, and unravelling it throughout its linguistic evolution (xiii).

In drama, this artistic discipline offers a range of benefits for both performers and audiences, and it can have an impact on various aspects of life. In this context, Harvie (2009) describes the significance of theatre in each sphere of life and its influence on individuals with the following words:

The theatre is everywhere, from entertainment districts to the fringes, from rituals of government to the ceremony of the courtroom, from the spectacle of

the sporting arena to the theatres of war. Across these many forms stretches a theatrical continuum through which cultures both assert and question themselves. Theatre and performance have been developed as key metaphors and practices with which to rethink gender, economics, war, language, the fine arts, culture, and one's self (7).

Derived from this excerpt, drama not only encompasses its historical context and myths but also pervades all aspects of life. Within this study, while acknowledging drama's multifaceted roles, deliberate avoidance will be exercised concerning domains such as politics and economics. Instead, emphasis will be placed on the enigmatic realm, exploring the contributions of myths to theatrical productions and characters. In this context, the concept of "myth" conjures up a range of narratives and mythical characters, which could possess national resonance or evoke distinct connotations for every culture. For instance, in literary texts, an old woman living alone always connotes being a witch and arouses fear in the reader. On the contrary, regardless of the culture in mythology, the body of a woman, namely a goddess, is mostly associated with birth and abundance. "Demeter" is the well-known name for this in Greek mythology and "Danu" in Celtic mythology. In addition to this, the body of a woman is usually associated with beauty, seduction, and sexual desire but speculative at the same time through the term "femme fatale". Even history has recorded many women, starting from the first woman in Abrahamic religions as it is stated in holy books such as Bible and Qur'an, namely Eve, to figures like Lilith and Salome. In this regard Boyer (2015) asserts:

Myths in literature do indeed constitute exemplary stories, which are themselves usually crystallized into a prestigious and dynamic form because they condense or sum up the most profound spirit of a culture. But any tale or image worthy of literary expression can ultimately be linked to one or more archetypes. Eve lies behind every woman, since every woman is, by definition, a *femme fatale* (110).

Besides being universal, the archetypes of a mythological story within the same culture in different years might connote different phenomena but they may be modified. Here are several scholars studying and interpreting myths. Kolakowski (1972) is the one who argues that myths provide readers with absolutes in the place of ephemeral values and with a comforting perception of the world that is necessary to make the insecurity and terror of existence bearable. Before Kolakowski, Freud (1964), on the other hand, places another dimension on myths; to him, myths echo people's waking efforts to systematise the incoherent visions and impulses of their

sleep world. Jung (2014) is another name that deserves to be mentioned in this study on myths as he interprets the myths as a projection of the collective unconscious of a race, a term which he invents. With the adjective “collective”, he refers to the political and social issues related to a group or community, stressing that myths contain images or archetypes as traditional expressions of symbols’ collective dreams developed over thousands of years on which the society as a whole has come to depend. Furthermore, Jung viewed myths as a means of personal growth and spiritual transformation. By comprehending and internalising myths, individuals can progress on the path of self-realization. The archetypal symbols embedded in myths can aid individuals in attaining psychological equilibrium, discovering their identities, and actualising their potential. Jung emphasises the profound impact of myths on the human psyche and the importance of employing psychology to understand their meaning. Myths establish a connection with the collective unconscious, and by understanding and internalising myths, individuals can embark on personal development and spiritual transformation journeys (Jung, 2014: 66).

The Irish dramatic movement holds the traces of many different cultures that are found on Irish lands. To a certain extent, written or oral mythology develops in tandem with culture, existing within the same domain, and these two mutually contribute to the evolution of literature. In his work, *Myth, Ritual, and Oral*, Jack Goody (2010) emphasises the significant changes in the communication and transmission of myths and rituals with the emergence of writing. The development of writing has played a crucial role in recording, preserving, and disseminating myths and rituals as written texts have enabled the stabilisation and more consistent transmission of mythology and rituals. However, Goody (2010) also points out that the popularisation of written texts did not lead to the disappearance of the oral tradition of mythology. Oral communication persists in many cultures, and the oral transmission of myths and rituals continues to sustain connections between societies. Goody’s studies (2010) provide a perspective for understanding written and oral mythology’s interaction and transformation processes. They contribute significantly to understanding how mythology and rituals have changed, adapted, and interacted among different cultures with the advent of written texts. Namely, what composes mythology is crucial for literature and culture as well. This study also aims to reveal the traces of Celtic mythology as the germ of Irish nationalist ideas as well as to

correlate them in a common point by analysing the aforementioned plays of Yeats and Synge. The choice of stage plays instead of poems or novels for this study is attributable to the very idea, also suggested by Walsh (2012), that history and drama are intertwined since drama enacts a double re-vision: of history and the “culturally constituted” contemporary reality. The playwright imaginatively constructs a particular vision to represent a fictionalised version of a facet of human experience (9).

As already mentioned, at the centre of this study are the plays *At the Hawk's Well* and *The Well of the Saints* as they serve to develop nationalistic feelings and even euphoria in Irish audiences through their introduction and portrayal of Celtic mythology. It is a commonly accepted assumption that history is associated with culture and ideas, for which the perception of Irish nationalism can be accepted to owe much to the Celtic myths as the products of Celtic culture. In this matter, Deane (1990) attributes the ability of all nationalisms to emerge from the same essence and create their existence to the past, and he adds the following:

All nationalisms have a metaphysical dimension, for they are all driven by an ambition to realize their intrinsic essence in some specific and tangible form. The form may be a political structure or a literary tradition. Although the problems created by such an ambition are sufficiently intractable in themselves, they are intensified to the point of absurdity when a nationalist self-conception imagines itself to be the ideal model to which all others should conform. That is a characteristic of colonial and imperial nations. Because they universalize themselves, they regard any insurgency against them as necessarily provincial. In response, insurgent nationalisms attempt to create a version of history for themselves in which their intrinsic essence has always manifested itself, thereby producing readings of the past that are as monolithic as that which they are trying to supplant. They are usually, as in Ireland, under the additional disadvantage that much of their past has been destroyed, silenced, and erased. Therefore, the amalgam they produce is susceptible to attack and derision. (8)

Especially in ancient times, the drama stage was used to tell epic stories, mythological tales, or religious beliefs. The drama was instituted as a court, and it was able to “reflect the system of power” (Dickhaut, 2018: 96). The use of the stage as a mirror to life itself and its components, such as birth, death, love, justice, revolt, and struggle, expresses the dynamics of power within the system. In other words, what the power system emphasises is the cycle of life, which serves as the starting point of this study.

While experiencing conflicts in its political history, the Irish dramatic movement significantly contributed to distinguishing Irish culture from English culture. Despite being assimilated into English culture for a long time, Irish theatre takes a strong stance and aims to serve the purposes of its society. It explores numerous themes rooted in Celtic beliefs and successfully offers insights into history. In 350 BC, the Celts conquered Ireland by migrating from either Northern Ireland or Southern France in Central Europe (Çapan, 1966: 8). Thus, the Celts are considered the earliest ancestors of the Irish nation. The ancient Celts were diverse population groups living in various parts of Europe, north of the Mediterranean region, from the Late Bronze Age onward (Cartwright,2021).

On Collis' statement in *The Celts: Origins, Myths, and Inventions*, it is remarked that a Scotsman, a Breton, and a Welshman create the Celtic identity (2003: 27). Moreover, having its origins from multiple ethnicities leads to cultural diversity. In this regard, it is known that before Christianity, apart from idolatry, druidism, which is full of spells, magic, and many moral values, is one of the most known important features of Celtic identity. Fairy tales are one example of traditional oral literature; there were gleemen called *shanachie* and they had one job, which was to wander around and tell epic stories. Contrary to the essence of the society that is reflected by the Irish literary movement, the words of the *shanachie* were quite detached from reality. It is clear that not only was Celtic culture a hindrance to the development of the theatre movement at that time, but the times and people were not ready for a theatrical movement. The period of Ireland's conversion from paganism to Catholicism is a fascinating and complex part of Irish history. Ireland was primarily a pagan society until the arrival of Christianity in the 5th century AD. Saint Patrick is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland, but it was not an immediate or complete conversion. At the time of St. Patrick's arrival, the pagan religion in Ireland was based on a complex system of beliefs and practices that revolved around a pantheon of gods and goddesses, as well as ancestral spirits and sacred places. These beliefs were deeply ingrained in Irish society and culture, and the conversion to Christianity was a slow and gradual process that took centuries. The early Christian missionaries in Ireland adopted a strategy of adapting Christian practices and beliefs to fit existing pagan customs and traditions. For example, they incorporated pagan festivals and customs into Christian celebrations, such as the Spring festival of Imbolc becoming the Feast

of St. Brigid. Over time, Christianity gradually replaced pagan practices and beliefs, but the process was not always peaceful. Pagan resistance to Christianity was often met with force, and many pagan sacred sites were destroyed or converted into Christian churches. The transition from paganism to Catholicism in Ireland was also influenced by political factors. The Irish kings and chieftains played a significant role in the conversion process, and many converted to Christianity for political and strategic reasons. The support of powerful rulers helped to spread Christianity throughout Ireland. Today, Ireland is a predominantly Catholic country, but the influence of its pagan past can still be seen in many aspects of Irish culture and tradition, such as the belief in fairies and the reverence for sacred places like Tara and the Hill of Slane. The country that is governed by the parliament under the influence of English domination (after the unity of the English parliament) suffers from a scarcity of wars and political crises. Since most of the people in the country were converted to Catholicism, there arose some enmity among the people (Çapan,1966: 4).

As a Catholic leader, Daniel O’Connell (1775-1847) was also an Irish statesman and political leader who played a significant role in the movement for Catholic emancipation in Ireland and who was faithfully supported by his people. Additionally, the biggest characteristic of O’Connell was his preference for speaking the language of his people and addressing them as they wanted to hear. Nevertheless, he tried to inculcate into the minds of Irish native people the idea that they should keep fighting for their language, also he insisted that blood be shed for the sake of the holy cause if necessary (Quigley, 1970: 99-107). In this concept including the relationship between language and nationalism, Anderson (2006) explores the concept of nationalism and how modern nations emerge. According to him, a shared ideology is the most significant tool in keeping societies together in his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. He defines nationalism as the process of constructing an imagined community. In modern nation-states, nationalism creates a sense of national identity and unity by establishing a bond among the members of society. Anderson argues that these imagined communities are built upon common symbols and rituals, such as the use of language and writing. A shared language and cultural heritage enable individuals to form connections with each other, thereby fostering a nationalist consciousness and he emphasises the pivotal role of print media, books, newspapers, and other written materials in the formation of

nationalist consciousness. These materials encourage individuals to perceive themselves as part of an imagined community that shares the same language, culture, and territory. Furthermore, he claims that nations should be “imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6).

Considering this, it is obvious that the Irish people suffered from the neglect or abandonment of their language for their literature. However, people slowly began to create an awareness of the need to fight for their own identity. Throughout history, humankind instinctively believed that one needs another in order not only to survive but also to share common elements, which later constitute the national folklore such as beliefs, lifestyles, and traditions including many functions of myths and legends. This very preliminary view can be acknowledged as a glimpse into the idea of ‘nation’ and ‘identity’ which is later discussed with the nation as ‘national identity’ at the same time. *Cambridge Dictionary* (2023) defines the term ‘nation’ as “a country, especially when thought of as a large group of people living ‘race’ which is required for being a nation.” (“Cambridge Dictionary”, 2023). Grosby (2005) remarks that “humans have formed groups of various kinds around criteria that are used to distinguish ‘us’ from ‘them’ (1). That being the case, it is possible to say that humankind not only instinctively but also consciously tries to create a habitat on land on the lookout ‘one’ who is somehow connected with himself. In history, the strict line between ‘one’ from ‘another’ is drawn after analysis of the writings of ancient civilizations.

Writings from the Sumerian civilization of the area of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers from approximately 2500 BCE record beliefs that distinguished the ‘brothers of the sons of Sumer’, those of Sumerian ‘seed’, from foreigners. During the 16th century BCE, Egyptians thought themselves to be distinct from both the ‘Asiatics’ to their east and the Nubians to their south (Grosby, 2005: 1). These terms such as ‘foreigners’ and ‘brothers’ highlight the importance of belonging to a group. In addition to this, it is also noteworthy to declare that trying to find traces of the ancestors shows the significance of having an identity or finding the ancestor’s traces makes one proud and comfortable. From the ancient scripts to the modern ones such as Qur’an and the Bible, the strictly drawn line between ‘one’ and ‘other’ is noticeable. “We

dispersed them over the earth in separate communities, some are righteous and some less.” (Qur’an 7: 166). On the other hand, there is also a common belief that holy books suggest that all mankind derives from one man, namely Adam. “It is He who created you all from one soul, and from it made its mate’ (Qur’an 7: 189). Therefore, it can be concluded that, although human is a kind resembling each other in some physical functions, it is highly crucial for people to have sharings, common points, and elements in order to live together. In fact, this idea triggers the idea of ‘nation’, which later on needs many sacrifices in the field of battle. National identity has been defined by many different theorists. However, it is very briefly summarized in the Rethinking Irish History by O’Mahony and Delanty:

National identity is the cultural outcome of a discourse of the nation. This identity serves many purposes. Firstly, it provides a sense of collective belonging to a group of people who perceive themselves as bonded by common experience, and a reference system for distinguishing one group of people from another. Secondly, it is the basis for deciding who should be allowed to be full and acknowledged citizens of a nation-state. Thirdly, it influences the character and goals of this nation-state in a manner supposed to be in the collective interest of all the people. (1998: 2)

For Ireland, a nation that endured under the dominion of England, ‘national identity’ extends beyond the notion of freedom and self-expression. During the Enlightenment and Romantic periods, two key doctrines emerged. The first asserts that individuals have the capacity to determine their own destinies, while the second posits that nations, as collective entities, also possess this capability. These two doctrines are intricately intertwined, yet they hold distinct differences.

Under the rule of colonial powers, the ethnic diversities within a nation are compelled to concentrate on nationalistic and ethnic identities as a means of self-realization. While colonialism can incite nationalism, it’s argued that nationalism can also be viewed as an inverted manifestation of colonialism. The first doctrine, which underscores the importance of individuals determining their own fate, serves as a cornerstone for both modern democracy and socialism. Conversely, the second doctrine leans more towards romantic mystification, emphasizing that having a state is the sole means for ethnic groups to realize their identity. While ethnic groups can express themselves, having a free space to fully experience their culture is different. One commonality between both doctrines is the need for a space where people can live, speak, and think freely.

Another rationale for seeking nationhood can be the threat of genocide, a right worth fighting for. According to political nationalism, there's a cycle in which states evolve into nations and nations into ethnicities. However, this cycle runs counter to Kant's ideological perspective, which suggests it should be the opposite. Political nationalism aims to align ethnicities with the nation's objectives and reshape them accordingly. Politics must acknowledge cultural diversity, as modern nations are essentially reconfigured versions of pre-modern ethnicities, and cultures are to some extent influenced by politics. The cultures of ethnicities are reconstructed by political nationalism, requiring a nation, common law, and a centralized economy. Importantly, ethnicities, nations, and states do not necessarily need to share commonalities. For instance, a nation-state may comprise numerous ethnicities without a collective desire for statehood. In contrast, some ethnic groups, like pre-independence Ireland, harbor a strong aspiration for a state-specific to their ethnicity. Actions and movements led by young Irish individuals up to Sinn Fein can be seen as manifestations of nationalism rather than mere expressions of ethnic identity. These young Irish citizens subscribe to an ideology that transcends ethnicity, as they seek the establishment of a political state. Consequently, Ireland, like other traditional forms of nationalism, does not shy away from exposing the dark side of nationalism, which can encompass racism and animosity (Eagleton, 1990: 23-40). However, the conception of nationalism held by these two playwrights, Synge and Yeats, who are foundational figures at the Abbey Theatre, markedly diverges from the negative aspects often associated with it. Yeats (1911) provides the following insight in his article *Synge and the Ireland of His Time*:

Synge seemed by nature unfitted to think a political thought, and with the exception of one sentence, spoken when I first met him in Paris, that implied some sort of Nationalist conviction, I cannot remember that he spoke of politics or showed any interest in men in the mass, . . . Often for months together he and I and Lady Gregory would see no one outside the Abbey Theatre, and that life, lived as it were in a ship at sea, suited him, for unlike those whose habit of mind fits them to judge of men in the mass, he was wise in judging individual men, . . . but of their political thoughts he long understood nothing... Yet I doubt if he would have written at all if he did not write of Ireland, and for it, and I know that he thought creative art could only come from such preoccupation. (part VII)

Based on this, writing for Ireland Synge can be interpreted as being away from the dark side of nationalism. Synge's approach to nationalism touches on themes of Irish identity and cultural heritage, he is more concerned with exploring the cultural nuances and complexities of rural Ireland. His characters and dialogues capture the

unique language, customs, and traditions of the communities he depicts. Synge believes in the power of art and literature to convey the essence of Irish life and culture. He sees his role as an artist in shaping and preserving the cultural identity of the Irish people through his writing. In this sense, Synge (1907) depicts his thoughts about finding a dreamy place that has only the soul of pure Ireland with these words in the preface of *The Playboy of the Western World*:

For the last two or three years I have been wondering where in Ireland it would be possible to find amid modern conditions a life that had almost vanished from the world; to find a people who had become entirely alien to the thoughts and feelings of modern times, who still spoke an ancient language, and who had no wish to speak any other; to find a country that had no knowledge of the reforms of modern Europe, and no desire to learn of them; to find a mode of life that had almost passed away, and that was so remote from my own experience that it seemed to me to contain some essential part of the poetry of the world. (1)

The passage hints at the preservation of Irish culture and language. Synge's interest in finding a people who still spoke an ancient language and had no wish to speak any other reflects his commitment to preserving the Irish language, which was in decline during his time. This ties in with the broader cultural revivalist movement in Ireland, which aimed to revitalize and celebrate Irish language, literature, and folklore.

Similarly, W.B. Yeats often analyzes both as a distinctively Irish writer and as a figure who holds a special relationship with the Irish culture. Kitishat (2019) emphasizes Yeats' significance in using literature for national purposes, asserting that his efforts were instrumental in presenting the national cause of Ireland. However, Yeats' hybrid Anglo-Irish background has raised suspicion among subsequent critics and politicians. Some critics viewed him with scepticism, and politicians even disparaged his nationalistic endeavors. Due to his Anglo-Irish origins, he was sometimes perceived as representing the English stereotype of Irish identity rather than genuinely championing the Irish cause. Many Irish Nationalists questioned Yeats' commitment to Irish nationalism because of his Anglo-Irish heritage, accusing him of aligning with a "colonial class" associated with the English occupation. This viewpoint argued that despite some initial attempts to identify with the Irish people, Yeats ultimately reverted to colonial and authoritarian attitudes. This complex relationship between Yeats and Irish nationalism continues to be a subject of debate and analysis within literary and cultural studies (Kitishat, 2019: 484).

In this respect, Irish people who favoured their ideal for a better and happier Ireland were separated into two groups. One side comparatively thought and stated aloud that they were ready for a bloody war to get their independence, while the other were insistent on keeping alive the past that could and should be used as an effective means of distinguishing their culture from English culture.

Ireland had always sought a real and legendary past in its faith in future sovereignty. In this respect, sovereignty became a bloody wound for Ireland, which had long been under the rule of Ireland and which therefore dreamed of constituting a future over the past. The wounds of the past embodied the soul of the future. In this sense, it is important to mention the Home Rule of Ireland, which plays a crucial role in the history of Ireland. Home Rule was a political movement in Ireland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that aimed to secure a measure of self-government for Ireland within the United Kingdom. The movement was led by figures such as Charles Stewart Parnell and John Redmond, who believed that Irish interests would be better served by a local parliament in Dublin than by rule from London. The Home Rule Bill was introduced to the British Parliament several times, but it faced opposition from both Irish Unionists who feared that it would lead to separation from Britain, and from British politicians who were unwilling to grant Ireland more autonomy. The Home Rule crisis came to a head in 1914 when the Third Home Rule Bill was passed by Parliament but suspended due to the outbreak of World War I. The issue remained unresolved until the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, which granted Ireland a degree of self-government but fell short of the demands of the Home Rule Movement (O'Mahony & Delanty, 1998: 50-51).

It was mainly for the above reasons that from mythological stories to wars, the idea of Irish identity stood for the beliefs, passion, and even patriotism of the Irish. Based on the idea that art is for society's sake, it would not be surprising that patriotism, political beliefs, and economic or social challenges could be the main themes of the plays or books of Irish writers. Elbir (1992) discusses that the root of drama was not only the help of economic or social factors, but drama also emerged unprofessionally; it was not solely about either talent or economic/social factors. Indeed, it was more than this. In the nineteenth century, the drama was revived with a nationalist awareness that Irish theatre should break from English theatre, which was

on thin ice then (85). Thus, it is evident that the starting point of the revival of Irish drama, which had been under the guidance of England, is based on the idea that Irish playwrights should be able to tell the mythical and national stories of their culture in their language in their places (Çelik, 2012: 133).

The only way to recreate Ireland was to delve deeply into the resources of philosophy, art, epic stories, legends, and myths, just as Yeats believed. He attempted to reflect this idea in his plays. Furthermore, according to Yeats and his contemporaries, the dominance of England over Ireland could be purified through art, particularly drama. As Gregory (1913) puts it, their ultimate goal was to unearth the buried legends, tales, and myths of Ireland, which had remained dormant for centuries. In pursuit of this objective, Lady Augusta Gregory, William Butler Yeats, and Edward Martyn established the Abbey Theatre to bring their passion to life for their distinctive nation. The foundation of the Abbey Theatre occurred in three phases. In the initial endeavour, Lady Gregory, William Butler Yeats, and Edward Martyn demonstrated their intention to establish a national theatre by publishing *A Manifesto or Irish Literary Theatre* in 1897. Since they did not possess a dedicated building, Lady Gregory applied for a license to use the Ancient Concert Rooms in 1899 for the staging of their first play. However, this arrangement was temporary, and it became apparent that it was not a permanent solution for the revival of drama. The second phase involved the commitment of the Fay Brothers, two directors from Dublin. In the third phase, Annie Horniman, another key figure in the foundation, joined as a financial supporter. Lady Gregory expressed her appreciation for Miss Horniman's immense dedication to establishing the Abbey Theatre in her book titled *Our Irish Theatre*: "I am certain Miss Horniman is delighted that we have been able to demonstrate our gratitude by proving ourselves deserving of her tremendous and generous gift" (1913: 39). However, opening a new theatre in Dublin was a rare occurrence unless granted a patent by the crown. Although obtaining this patent caused some delays and incurred expenses, they eventually succeeded. In the end, "The Abbey Theatre opened on December 27, 1904, with three performances, including the premieres of *On Baile's Strand* by Yeats and *Spreading the News* by Lady Gregory" ("Abbey Theatre", 2022).

As highlighted above the most significant playwrights of Abbey in the early years were Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Synge. The first play in the Abbey Theatre was

Countess Cathleen by Yeats. As Lady Gregory could not attend the opening of the theatre, Yeats remarked in his letter describing the big night that “the players would play better if she was there” (Gregory, 1913: 44). More plays were staged from then on at Abbey Street until January 1907. However, Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World* provoked a reaction because of the content of the play based on the provoking themes of patricide, blood, and false heroism. Chris, the protagonist of *The Playboy of the Western World*, is a pusillanimous young man at the very beginning of the play, but he tries to find himself in his life journey throughout the play. He tells a story to the dwellers of the small village where he finds a shelter for himself that he has killed his father and run away from his village. After having spent some time in his new land, he confesses being the murderer of his father unwillingly at first; however, after finding out that he is gaining a reputation with it, he starts to colour and embellish his story with striking details and points about how and why he has committed this murder. His exaggerated and ornamented portrayal of himself is quick to raise him to the status of a hero in the eyes of the dwellers of the village, especially the young women there. However, his father appears and things get weird as his story is discovered to be a lie invented by him. Being afraid of losing his fame, he attempts to kill his father who comes to fetch him to the village. After he has shown himself in the neighbourhood, people not only condemn but also criticise him harshly (Synge, 2009: 43). Briefly, as the play includes apparent patricide, it offends the Nationalists who believed with blind confidence that the theatre had not served for the ideals of the nation because the play obtruded upon public hostility. Unfortunately, this was neither the first challenge Abbey Theatre had faced nor the last one. Yeats’ *Countess Cathleen* had also received an unfavourable and remonstrating reaction before Abbey; even further, a journalist published an article under the blaming title of *Souls for Sale*. Despite these obstacles, Abbey managed to extend its horizons. While it had only amateur players who had ideals, it turned into a theatre with a worldwide reputation in a short period. With the help of the playwrights and their superior ability in writing, Abbey lived its golden age till the riots in 1916.

The distinguishing factor between Abbey and other theatre groups was the ideals of the playwrights. It is evident that while other theatre groups focused on the political fluctuations of the time, Abbey aimed to showcase the artistic abilities of its playwrights. The other theatre groups lacked the power, sensitivity, and passion

necessary to effectively perform the plays, making them distinct from Abbey Theatre. Furthermore, the founders and writers of Abbey strongly believed that theatre should be more independent compared to other art forms. They based their belief on the potential of theatre to connect with a larger audience through visual and auditory means, particularly through face-to-face interactions, which enhances the impact and power of theatrical performances. Through the directors' policy of promoting freedom, Abbey staged purely Irish plays rooted in Irish folklore, performed in the Irish language, and set in Irish settings. Their intentional and persistent focus on all things of Irish origin brought attention to the long-neglected historical connections and realities of Ireland, including cultural codes and the collective unconscious of the Irish people. This, in turn, fuelled the momentum of Ireland's struggle for independence from England starting in the late 1890s.

One of the pioneering and influential figures of the Irish National Theatre, Yeats divided the Irish society into two groups; one was the upper class and the other was the peasants. This is quite synonymous with Benjamin Disraeli's conception of "two nations" as a subtitle to his novel *Sybil*:

Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws. The rich and the poor. (1888: 66)

What Disraeli described for English society in the 1840s was almost identical to the situation in Ireland in the early 1900s. Worse than all was that the villagers who were poor in Ireland outnumbered the wealthy class to a very large extent. With this huge inequality in mind, Yeats sought to create such a movement in a building by addressing the villagers more than the high society. He wanted to make and keep those people interested in his and his friends' writings about those underprivileged members of Irish society. He very well knew that imitating Elizabethan Age writers was quite useless, and so he chose to write in public language. As he intended to combine the Celtic culture and drama, he was sure that the language of the public would be the key to entering the mysterious mythical world of Celts. This is best illustrated in his famous recommendation to Synge about the futility of writing in Paris about Ireland and the necessity of writing about Ireland by spending time among the real and primitive Irish

people, namely those untouched by the English government's policies in remote parts of the country, such as Mayo Island.

A nationalist author, Synge, who chose to learn the language of the local people from the inhabitants themselves by going to the Aran Islands, and Yeats, who suggested this very idea to him, prove their conception of the nationalism they embrace as returning to self, recognizing the culture and geography by returning to self, and understanding the nation among the public. The most prominent feature of the Irish people, particularly the countryside, is that their language is unique and reflects their culture. Besides, the mythological tales/stories and legends they attribute to the mysterious geography of Ireland provide them the opportunity to be unduplicated within their authentic selves/ to be authentic selves. These two playwrights, whose observation skills are highly developed, regarded this situation as the most crucial path to return to self and gave an important place to Celtic mythology. Another intriguing feature of Celtic mythology is that the rituals are very similar to those of Christianity, a religion that was adopted later, and even gets mixed up from time to time since these legends were first put down on paper by Christian priests. "It is to Christian monks that we owe the survival of the ancient oral traditions of the pagan Celts and a more lucid insight into the nature of their deities" (Jackson, 2014: 3). This is where the relationship between religion and myth comes into prominence. It is ambiguous which one is influenced by the other, but there are fundamental similarities. Celtic mythology is a type of cosmogonic mythology, and the four elements, air, water, fire, and earth, are significantly valuable by attributing great importance to nature within the impact of paganism in its mythology. Consequently, the sun, the sky, rivers, mountains, and many others constitute the stories underlying these beliefs. Especially the element of water is the element of the mythological story in Yeats' and Synge's plays, and it is the most vital element of nature that is indispensable to geography since it vivifies nature.

Not only in the rainy British Isles but also throughout the world, particularly in the desert regions in which the gift of water is most precious, water plays an essential role in myth, folk tales, fairy legends, and religious traditions. Water is associated with women in many cultures, including the Goddess, several goddesses, and various female nature spirits. According to Windling, the people of Botswana, for instance,

assign all women unique control over water in all its forms and credit the mythical origin of water to women. An Aboriginal tale from northern Australia claims that the All-mother came from the sea as a rainbow snake carrying offspring (the Ancestors) inside of her. Moreover, All-mother created lakes, rivers, and water holes on the ground by urinating on them to provide the ancient people with water to quench their thirst. In ancient mythical systems, women, fertility, and childbirth are strongly associated with the flowing water that is found in springs and natural fountains. Greek wells and fountains, like the one at Kanathos where Hera annually regained her virginity, were revered by several goddesses and possessed supernatural abilities. Water nymphs, elemental spirits shaped like pretty young girls, frequented Greek springs. According to Teutonic folktales, the wild wood-wife, a type of forest fairy who loves the story's main character Wolfdietrich, is baptised in a sacred fountain, where she becomes transformed into a human female. The Norse god Odin sacrifices one of his eyes to obtain a few priceless sips of the water from the spring of the nature spirit Mimir at which he seeks knowledge and cunning. According to a Celtic myth, the salmon of knowledge swims in a sacred spring or pool under a hazel tree; the fish takes in the wisdom of the world by consuming falling hazelnuts. Since the beginning of time, numerous religious systems have included ritual swimming or washing in water. Ancient Egyptian priests bathed themselves twice daily and twice at night. Shamanic ritual washing of the body in Siberia was (and still is) an essential component of shamanic rituals. Ghats are customary locations for Hindu ritual bathing in public, which is a way to accomplish both physical and spiritual cleanliness. Before praying and eating any food, even bread, in a devout Jewish family, one must wash one's hands. In Islam, mosques provide water for worshippers to wash their hands before each of the five daily prayers. In Christian tradition, baptism is a ritualised death and rebirth that imitates Christ's death and resurrection (2021). Moreover, in Turkish culture, according to a Sumerian myth, in the beginning there was only the sea (Kocabıyık, 2015: 295). Likewise, according to the Altai creation myth, there was neither earth nor sky in the beginning, the first thing that existed was the sea (Sepetçioğlu, 1969: 1). The sanctity of water, its fertility, its primary matter properties, its guidance, its symbol of abundance, its expression of vitality and continuity, its power, etc. Almost all of the symbolic features that are valid for world myths are also seen in Turkish mythology narratives and various practices of the Old Turkish religion.

Information about the water cult, which undoubtedly existed before, but was first noticed by the Asian Huns, has been told by various sources after the Turks adopted the religion of Islam (Uçar, 2020: 27).

Water and the term ‘well’, which has different or mostly similar associations for every religion and belief, attract great concentration in Celtic mythology. They hold great significance in the target mythology and culture of this study. They are often associated with themes of healing, transformation, and spiritual power. Wells, in particular, are considered sacred places in Celtic mythology and are believed to be portals between the physical world and the spiritual realm. After reviewing the tales about water and its sacredness in *Celtic Mythology, A to Z* (2004), the reasons why they are essential for this study are humbly listed by the author of this thesis study in the following ways:

1. **Healing and Transformation:** Wells in Celtic mythology are often believed to have healing properties. These wells are associated with specific deities or spirits believed to bestow healing and transformative powers to those who visited them. People come to these wells seeking physical healing, spiritual guidance, or personal transformation.
2. **Sacredness of Water:** Water itself is considered a sacred element in Celtic mythology. It represents the source of life, purification, and renewal. Many Celtic myths involve bodies of water such as rivers, lakes, and seas, often inhabited by mystical beings or deities.
3. **Connection to the Otherworld:** Wells were believed to serve as entry points to the Otherworld, a realm that exists alongside the physical world but is inhabited by supernatural beings and spirits. It was a place of magic, wisdom, and otherworldly experiences. In Celtic mythology, wells are sometimes depicted as gateways to this mystical realm.
4. **Divination and Prophecy:** Water, including wells, was often used as a medium for divination and receiving prophecies. Druids and seers would use the reflective and mystical qualities of water to gain insights into the future or to communicate with the spirit world.

5. Offerings and Rituals: People would often leave offerings at wells to honour the spirits or deities associated with them. These offerings could include coins, pieces of cloth, flowers, or even food. Rituals and prayers were performed at these wells to seek blessings, protection, or guidance.
6. Mythological Beings: Many Celtic myths feature water-related beings such as water nymphs, river spirits, and water horses. These beings are often considered as they play important roles in the stories and are connected to the themes of water's power and mystery.

Overall, the significance of water and wells in Celtic mythology reflects the deep reverence the Celts had for the natural world and the spiritual connections they saw between the physical and metaphysical realms. These beliefs and practices continue to influence Celtic-inspired spirituality and cultural traditions to this day.

All in all, the relationship between nationalism and drama, Irish drama and Celtic mythology, Celtic mythology and Irish nationalism, religion and mythology cannot be underestimated. The playwrights of the Irish National Theatre, Synge and Yeats, believe that respecting the past would bring an independent identity. Concerned with the role of myths and the process of mystification itself in the establishment of the mystique as a thematic and aesthetic phenomenon in the plays of Yeats and Synge, the study explores the role of myths in constructing Irish nationalism by indicating and identifying how the symbols of Celtic mythology were used. These plays have been chosen on purpose because not only do they bear nationalistic ideas in light of Irish history and the holy term "Irish identity", but they also embrace mythological and/or folkloric symbols, images, and messages that are conveyed by characters who feel the pulse of nationalism in focus. In both plays, mythological elements, particularly the representation of well and water, will be revealed with their similarities and differences in Celtic mythology through Eliade's mythological understanding. Using elements from Celtic mythology and explaining their contribution to Irish identity and nationalist thought will be elaborated through Synge and Yeats' plays. This study aims to determine whether the utilisation of Celtic mythology, which is an inseparable part of Irish identity by Synge and Yeats, serves the indirect purpose of evoking nationalist sentiments through language and culture. Besides, the term "well", which is in the name both of the plays, will be analysed through the duality of water.

This study consists of five main chapters, including the introduction and conclusion. In the second chapter following the introduction, to provide a basis for the upcoming analysis, the theoretical background of the study is handled with the various meanings of ‘myth’ by significant critics, in addition to this, Eliade’s understanding of mythology is explained in detail. The third chapter comprises the mythological analysis of Synge’s *The Well of the Saints*. Similarly, Yeats’ *At the Hawk’s Well* is analysed from a mythological perspective in the fourth chapter. In the conclusion chapter, the analysis of the two plays will be evaluated together to determine the similarities and the main aim of the use of mythological elements.





2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The limitations of what can be known through objective reasoning and the fact that humans are not entirely rational beings make myths an intriguing domain. Since complete abstraction is impossible, this phenomenon has an inevitable impact on all cultural fields, especially in literature. While looking in the dictionary to figure out the meaning of “myth”, which is derived from the word ‘mythos’ in Greek that means tale or story (“Encyclopedia Britannica”, 2023), it “can still be found, in its naïve or popular sense, as a synonym for ‘illusion’ or ‘legend’ or ‘false propaganda’” (Douglas, 1953: 232). However, myth represents more than fabricated stories as it also bears rituals and symbols. Douglas puts forward the very idea that myth is an alternative way to match the characters or actions with the classes or ideas (232). “Myths, both in primitive society and also today, wield great power” (Rowland, 1990: 102). Wheelwright states, “Myth is the expression of a profound sense of togetherness of feeling and action and of the wholeness of living” (11). While it is agreed on the power of myths, whether the function of myth is fulfilled or not is always open for debate.

For example, based on his study of Melanesian mythology, Bronislaw Malinowski argued that myths function as “a reality lived,” and serve as a pragmatic charter” or moral paradigm structuring society. In this view, myths are not an “intellectual explanation” of “a scientific interest,” but function as “a narrative resurrection of primeval reality.” By contrast, Lévi-Strauss argues that myth is precisely the sort of theoretical device to which Malinowski refers so critically. In his view, myths are not important primarily as stories justifying a social structure, “[m]ythology has no obvious practical function... (Rowland, 1990: 102)

In *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Smith (1986) discusses the fact that myths have a dual effect on groups or societies.

On the one hand, the myths of origins, the historical memories, cultures, and homelands of a given ethnicity were felt to be ‘natural’ and ‘proper’; they possessed ‘value’ and ‘holiness’, and therefore ‘our heritage’ was in some sense genuine. On the other hand, the myths, memories, cultures, and homelands of others somehow lacked value and truth and were therefore temporary and defective (48).

It is a fact that myths are attributed to a supernatural origin, and the reason for this, as explained by Lévi-Strauss & Wilcken (2013) lies in the process of each mythic narrative, or myth, being perceived as a myth, which enables its renewed embodiment. Lévi-Strauss & Wilcken emphasise that any listener receives a message that does not come directly from any particular source (221).

Moreover, the ultimate aim of creating a myth is to define the outside world and to make an explanation about what is happening around them. Mircea Eliade's comprehensive and clear definition of myths is important in this field. The Romanian historian of religion formulates this definition based on the axis of explaining the genesis of the universe and primordial time. According to Eliade, at its core, a myth, which is essentially a sacred narrative, recounts an event that took place in the extraordinary time of origin. These narratives explain the creation of the entire reality, that is, the cosmos, or a part of it, through characters that are undoubtedly supernatural beings. When a myth does not deal with the creation of the universe, the same structure repeats on a smaller scale, explaining the emergence of an island, a species of plant, a human behaviour, or an institution. In this sense, myths articulate the appearance of the sacred or the supernatural in the world. The relationship between the listener or reader and the myth is also of utmost importance since the narrative relates a series of events that determine their lived world and their current state. The listener or reader, as a consequence of these events, is a mortal, gendered, and cultural being (Eliade, 1963: 18-19).

Regardless of the possibility that myths are unconsciously created, they represent psychological, sociological, or even historical phenomena. They represent a question or an answer to a question in the literature. Needless to say, myths are acknowledged as stories to be told. In this story, there must be a hero as he attempts to come up with a solution to a problem. The hero must follow the motifs of destiny, and he must be in a fight with an evil that he gets the victory against him. According to Brunel's archetypal hero understanding, any hero can be perceived as a hero based on the model archetype, even if s/he has not engaged in heroic deeds in every instance (1992: 112).

Viewed in this way, what is also unique about myths is having archetypes, images, and symbols in them. According to Jung, "archetypes are not determined as regards their content, but only as regards their form and then only to a very limited degree" (2004:12). Jung developed deep psychology by claiming that humanity has a racial memory that retains repeated patterns of the behaviour of our ancestors as a type of "psychic residue" or collective unconscious, which is composed of archetypes or "primitive images". These archetypes are expressed in literary works as well as in

myths, religion, dreams, and personal fantasies. Archetypes can be defined as a series of universal and fundamental mental forms or patterns - e.g., recurring narrative plots, action patterns, character types, and images found in the diverse literary and oral traditions, myths, dreams, and ritualised social behaviour. Archetypes have been described as themes related to the cycle of seasons and the organic cycle of human life and death, such as the death-rebirth theme. Other archetypes include the sacrifice of the king, gods who die to be reborn (e.g., avatars), journeys to the underworld (e.g., to hell), ascent to heaven, scapegoat, earth goddess, search for the father, femme fatale, wise old man, divine child, cross, mandala, quest. Such archetypes express a mythical understanding of human life. Therefore, they cannot be understood by rational or logical methods or procedures; rather, archetypes are the material of dreams, the unconscious, ceremonies, trances, and rituals. The formation of myths is a reflection of social structures, the forces of nature, and human psychological responses. In the mythologies of almost all peoples, natural elements such as the sky, sun, earth, mountains, trees, water, and others are prominently portrayed with divine attributes. The relationships among these gods depicted in various ways, as well as their interactions with humans, are perceived as reflections of the social relationships during the era of myth formation.

It is worth noting that some theorists handle mythological criticism with archetypal criticism together. That is why it is more important to mention Jung and his archetypes stronger than before. Considering this issue, Jung draws forth the idea that there is a collective unconscious that all individuals share, and this is a whole of primal memories existing unconsciously in the human mind. Generally, these memories come from primordial phenomena such as the sun, moon, fire, night, and blood. Moreover, to Jung (2014), these archetypes trigger the collective unconscious.

On the other hand, the definition of archetypes by Northrop Frye is simpler than Jung's. To him, an archetype is "a symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole" (1982: 376). In this respect, it is possible to say that mythological criticism tries to explain literary works through symbols and images used.

Considering this issue, it can be said that myths depend on archetypal symbols. For example, two basic archetypes, water, and fire, are the most recognised

symbols. While water usually connotes serenity and peace, fire may represent danger. In most recent studies, the significance of myths is recognised that myths are inseparable parts of states as is their history. The myths and the term 'identity' are so intertwined with each other that identity cannot be completed without myths. "Current issues, myths, and its immersion in fiction give this beginning of the third-millennium extraordinary importance in the field of literary and comparative studies. The relationship between myth and identity deserves consideration" (Oancea & Mihăilă, 2019: 163). It is not wrong to say that myths are made up by humans to understand the happenings around them. With a primitive conception, they have to make sense of the world around them. In this respect, humankind would not explain the meaning of life and creation without the cause-and-effect idea. Although the formation of myths comes from making sense of creation, it does not keep them simple. Man makes myths, and myths start to form man's life in some way. Beyond its story, a myth not only tells the lifestyle of the people living at a particular time, but also the symbols in a myth consist of a whole tradition of them. That being the case, traditions that are building stones of culture can be read through mythological stories.

In large measure, myths and rituals have importance because they represent corporate significance, meanings that transcend individual needs, desires, and values. They provide a mechanism for enabling holistic interaction between individuals who otherwise might remain independent and disengaged. Hence myths and rituals mean culture, social structure, and interaction, and a socio-functional view stresses the ways they bring about and sustain the social worlds of their performers (Doty, 1986: 137).

It is therefore impossible to separate mythology from culture. Moreover, as a culture with its sub-branches, such as tradition, language, and lifestyle are part of a nation's identity, it is also not possible to cut the myths off from identity.

Mythology also affects religion because rituals and practices mostly derive from attaching credence to the metaphysical world. Mythology can serve as the foundation for religious beliefs and practices. Many religions have their roots in ancient mythologies, with mythological narratives forming the basis of religious cosmologies, creation stories, and sacred traditions. Myths often contain symbolic elements that convey deeper meanings and moral lessons. Religious texts and rituals may incorporate mythological symbolism to convey spiritual truths and teachings. Mythological figures and deities can become central to religious worship and devotion.

Gods and goddesses from mythology may be adopted as central figures in religious pantheons and be worshipped by their followers. Mythological stories often inspire religious rituals, ceremonies, and festivals. These events may commemorate significant mythological events or honour specific deities, blending mythology and religious practices. Mythology often contains moral teachings and lessons that shape cultural values. These values can influence religious beliefs and ethical codes, guiding followers in their moral conduct and decision-making. *World History Encyclopedia* expresses the term 'myths' as "deal with various aspects of the human condition: good and evil, the meaning of suffering" (2018). There are always two opposite sides in a mythological story since conflicts such as good and evil or life and death create clashes. This helps the story to be completed by conveying a message at the end. These teachings lead people to choose one side to practice in their own lives. These beliefs exhibit a profound interplay with religion, demonstrating a close interconnection between the two. Taking into account the prevalent arguments that myths are the origins of religion or that religion is the origins of myth, it can be asserted that humanity has continuously been entwined with both religion and myth since its inception. The common thread connecting these two phenomena is the concept of 'sacred understanding', often viewed as the 'human understanding'. As a result, myths have drawn the attention not only of religious historians but also of researchers in the fields of anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and psychology. Extensive mythological research has given rise to three distinct perspectives regarding the origins of myth and religion: that myth is seen as a distorted form of religious beliefs, that myth and religion share a common source, and that there is no intrinsic connection between myth and religion. The notion that both differences and similarities should be observed is well-founded, as myth and religion are not two outdated phenomena but rather two interconnected concepts that must be examined holistically to comprehend humanity's religious experiences. For the comprehension of religious texts, it is essential to understand their mythological narratives within the context. Likewise, religious texts serve as significant points of reference in grasping mythological narratives. According to Mircea Eliade, myths are perpetually intertwined with rituals and have assumed a role in validating and explaining religious behaviour. In *The Rise of the Modern Mythology*, Feldman & Richardson (2020) discusses some theorists' views on mythology and religion:

John Trenchard, also a deist, spoke to the irrational element in myth, in his *The Natural History of Superstition*, arguing that the myth-making impulse is the same as the religious impulse and that both tend to progress naturally from faith to fervor to fanaticism; only a thoroughly rational religion could avoid the pitfall (4).

This approach to myth briefly summarises the reason why religion and myth have similar characteristics in roots. The term ‘fanaticism’ apprehensively makes the meaning of the terms “myth and religion” clear, as faith, support, and belief are essential for both of them. Moreover, Feldman & Richardson put forward the idea that “myth emphasized the idea that myth came from man’s inner nature” (2000: 4). Considering the fact that religion also comes from the primitive side of man, it is possible to compromise on the basic idea that they both derive from man’s inner, deep down inside. John Toland, another critic, paved the way for perceiving myth and religion as similar by targeting paganism and Christianity at the same time. No matter which mythology and which religion are associated with each other, the ultimate inference is that the terms ‘mythology’ and ‘religion’ have common shares in general.

In his critiques, the religious historian and critic Mircea Eliade has a different perspective on myths. According to him, myths are the essence of religion since they were born out of the first religious experience that humans had. He also claims that early historical and theological manifestations of the human mind can be found in myths. He suggests that the narration of stories and the performance of rituals are the products of man’s creativity in the ancient world. (Allen, 1972: 170-186) In this way, sacred in early philosophy is related to the reality of the world of man. The importance of religion in ancient times can be seen in the fact that the ancient world was made up of many different religious ideas and practices, such as polytheism, monotheism, the worship of nature, and the worship of ancestors. Myth serves as the unifying element of these religious experiences in a variety of ways, such as the nature of the divine, rituals, sacrifices, and afterlife concepts.

Mircea Eliade, a professor at the University of Chicago, a fiction writer, a philosopher, and a historian of religion from Romania, is well known for his substantial contributions to the study of religion, notably in the area of mythology and its significance. He has received both praise and criticism for his method of studying myths and his contributions to the discipline, especially that of mythological critique. The primary objective of mythological criticism is to identify the hidden cultural,

psychological, and symbolic meanings in literature, particularly myths. One of the main concepts in Eliade's work, *The Myth of Eternal: Cosmos and History* (1954), is his approach to myths, which he refers to as "the eternal return". It has received praise and criticism from mythological critics. He argues that traditional societies perceive time as cyclical, with rituals and myths allowing individuals to participate in the eternal return of sacred events. In the myth of the eternal return, individuals in traditional societies believe that they can participate in the sacred events of the past through rituals and reenactments. By doing so, they transcend the limitations of linear time and enter a timeless, mythic realm. Rituals are not mere reenactments; they are seen as avenues through which individuals can access the divine or the sacred moments of creation. Through rituals, individuals align themselves with the sacred origins of their world, reaffirming their connection to the cosmic order. These rituals are often tied to natural cycles, such as agricultural seasons or celestial phenomena. Moreover, certain places and moments are designated as sacred due to their connection to mythical events. Sacred space is often demarcated as distinct from ordinary space, and sacred time is separate from profane time. These designations allow individuals to experience the sacred and transcendence within their daily lives. At this point, Eliade introduces the term "hierophany" referring to the manifestation of the sacred in the world. Myths, rituals, and symbols are considered instances of hierophany, as they provide glimpses of the divine or the transcendent within the ordinary. These moments of revelation give meaning and significance to human existence. Traditional communities maintain stability and continuity thanks to the belief in the eternal return. It provides a means of bridging the gap between the permanent divine reality and the transient nature of human life. Individuals strengthen their cultural identity and connection to the cosmological grounds of their society by taking part in rituals and myths.

Patterns in Comparative Religion is another significant work by Mircea Eliade that contributes to his approach to mythological criticism and the study of religion. (Eliade, 1958) Published in 1958, this book covers various religious phenomena from different cultures. Furthermore, it seeks to identify common patterns and themes that transcend cultural boundaries. First of all, Eliade employs a comparative approach in this book, which involves examining religious practices, myths, symbols, and rituals from diverse cultures around the world. By comparing these elements across different societies and historical periods, he aims to uncover underlying patterns and universal

themes in a religious experience. Eliade's analysis revolves around the distinction between the holy and the irreligious, which he expands on in *The Sacred and the Profane* (1957). He contends that living a religious life entails drawing a line between these two worlds and keeping it there. Sacred time, space, and things are distinguished from the commonplace and given special meaning. Rituals, stories, and symbols that bind people to the sacred world represent this division. Eliade proposes the idea of "hierophany", which describes how the sacred appears in everyday life. He contends that religious rituals and symbols are ways for God to show Himself to people. Through the use of these symbols, people can experience the divine or transcendence in their daily lives by overcoming the distinction between the profane and the sacred. In his book, Eliade identifies recurring themes in cosmogonic myths, namely stories that describe the creation of the world. He asserts that a cosmic tree, a division between heaven and earth, and a sacred centre, or axis mundi, are common themes throughout these mythologies. In his book, Eliade specifies the mythological elements and examines each of them thoroughly. The section that contributes to this study would be the fifth section entitled "The Waters and Water Symbolism". He defines water as the "basis of every cosmic manifestation", and adds:

In cosmogony, in myth, ritual, and iconography, water fills the same function in whatever type of cultural pattern we find it; it precedes all forms and upholds all creation. Water immersion symbolizes a return to the pre-formal, a total regeneration, a new birth, for immersion means a dissolution of forms, a reintegration into the formlessness of pre-existence; and emerging from the water is a repetition of the act of creation in which form was first expressed (Eliade, 1957: 188).

Water has a consistent function in cosmogony, mythology, ritual, and visual depiction across various cultural contexts. It holds a position that precedes all physical forms and upholds all of creation. Being submerged in water represents a return to a time before clearly defined shapes developed a process of total rejuvenation and a new beginning, similar to giving birth. Immersion in water causes established forms to dissolve and ushers us back to the state of existence before forms gain shape. Emerging from water is a metaphor for the first act of creation when the form first begins to take shape. Water typically represents instability or periods of transition. Water bodies like lakes, rivers, and oceans are frequently considered to be boundaries between several worlds or states of existence. A transition from one stage of life to another or from the commonplace to the sacred can be symbolised by crossing a body of water. Eliade

associates the water with Mother Earth as a life-giving concept. Water, a symbol of creation and the home of all seeds, is the ultimate ingredient for magic and medicine, since it is healing and rejuvenating, and ensures endless life. The “living water”, which evolved to be thought of as residing someplace in the sky, is the model for all water.

Living water, the fountains of youth, the Water of Life, and the rest, are all mythological formulas for the same metaphysical and religious reality: life, strength, and eternity are contained in water. This water is not, of course, accessible to everybody in every way. It is guarded by monsters. It is to be found in places that are hard to get to and belong to some sort of demons or divinities (Eliade, 1957: 193).

He also adds that “all water comes to be considered powerful for fertility or healing” (193). To him, the way that societies assign the features to water may change depending on the cultures of those societies apart from “the prophetic quality of water”. Moreover, what remains predominant is the mixed emotional response of both fear and fascination towards water. To him, water possesses a dual quality: it has the power to both destroy and nurture, simultaneously functioning as a force that brings about both death and aids in the process of birth. He also discusses that water exists before all other things and predates all acts of creation. It draws everything back into itself on a cyclical basis so that it might go through processes of dissolution, purification, and rejuvenation. Humanity occasionally experiences catastrophes like deluges or floods, which are frequently explained by ceremonial infractions or “sins”. These occurrences cause people to temporarily vanish, but they do not eliminate them; instead, people reappear in new forms, continuing on their predetermined pathways and waiting for the same catastrophe to happen again so that they will once more be submerged in water. He concludes that the metaphysical and religious potential of water meets in a seamless whole. According to anthropological views, water is linked to the origins of humanity, hence the idea that the cosmos was created from water makes sense. Similar to the idea of continents being flooded or swallowed by water, the “second death” of the soul, baptism, or religious initiation, finds its parallel in the world of humans. On a cosmic or personal level, however, being submerged in water does not indicate final annihilation; rather, it denotes a brief return to an insubstantial state. Depending on whether it is cosmic, biological, or redemptive, this change is followed by a new creation, a new life, or a rebirth.

Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities is another notable work by Mircea Eliade that explores the intersection of ancient mythologies, dreams, and religious experiences with modern religious faiths and psychological interpretations. (Eliade,1960) The book explores how conventional symbols and archetypal themes still have an impact on modern religious ideas and personal spiritual experiences. In this book, Eliade suggests that ancient myths, symbols, and rituals persist in the collective human psyche and continue to influence individuals, even in the context of modern religious practices. He argues that these symbols are timeless and recur in different forms throughout history, reflecting deep-seated psychological and spiritual needs. Moreover, he discusses archetypes and the collective unconscious using the theories of the famous psychologist, Carl Jung. The hero's journey, creation myths, and symbols of death and rebirth are just a few of the archetypal themes and motifs he examines and how they appear in dreams and religious experiences as part of the collective human psyche. He critiques the secularisation of modern society and the resulting loss of sacredness. In addition, he suggests that the rejection of traditional myths and symbols can lead to a spiritual void and a disconnection from the sacred dimension of life. He proposes that modern individuals can reclaim a sense of the sacred by engaging with myths, symbols, and rituals. Besides, he mentions that various springs of water are related to holiness. To him, the cult of water is independent of the particular religions as it is maintained by widespread devotion and has never been stopped by a religious revolution.

In conclusion, Mircea Eliade's analysis of mythology is multifaceted and firmly based on the study of symbols, rites, and the interaction of the sacred and the profane. His ideas on hierophany, eternal return, and the transformational force of myths highlight how important mythology is for introducing people to more profound levels of reality and for offering frameworks for comprehending one's place in it.

In light of Eliade's understanding of mythology and emphasis on water, analysing the concepts of myths, symbols, and rituals will enlighten the main concern of this study, which is to reveal the elements of Celtic mythology through the plays of Synge and Yeats.

3. ANALYSIS OF J. M. SYNGE'S *THE WELL OF THE SAINTS*

John Millington Synge, an Irish playwright, poet, and fiction writer, lived from 1871 to 1909. He was born into a Protestant family in a suburb of Dublin, but he spent much of his life in the west of Ireland, where he found inspiration for his work. He suffered from illnesses throughout his life, thus his schooling was always stopped. After studying at Trinity College, Dublin, Synge moved to Paris, where he lived for several years and became fluent in French. In 1889, he met Yeats in Paris, and Yeats suggested Synge go to the Aran Islands. John Millington Synge visited the Aran Islands to immerse himself in the traditional Gaelic culture and lifestyle of the islanders. He sought inspiration for his writing, escape from urban life, and personal growth by experiencing the remote and unique environment. The isolation of the islands provided him with an opportunity to authentically connect with the community, learn about the Irish language and dialects, and incorporate these experiences into his literary works. His time on the Aran Islands influenced his famous play *The Playboy of the Western World* and greatly impacted his artistic perspective.

He spent his apprenticeship period on those islands and assimilated their language as if it were his own (Çapan, 1966: 4). Yeats also introduced him to Maud Gonne, a famous nationalist. She influenced him to join the Irish League, but resigned just a few months later. He then returned to Ireland and began to explore the rural west of the country, where he became fascinated by the language, customs, and traditions of the people who lived there. He also examined books written about Celtic mythology and the Irish mythological cycle. In 1897, he learned that he had lymphatic sarcoma. He was writing *An Imaginary Portrait* at the same time. In 1903, Synge published his first play, *Riders to the Sea*, which was based on his experiences in the Aran Islands. This was followed by several other plays, including *The Playboy of the Western World*, which caused a scandal when it was first performed in Dublin in 1907. Despite the controversy surrounding his work, Synge continued to write. He also spent time traveling in Europe and North Africa. However, his health was fragile, and he died of cancer at the age of 38. Today, Synge is considered one of the most important writers of the Irish Literary Revival. His work is still performed and studied around the world.

Unlike other playwrights, such as Yeats and O'Casey, Synge avoids conveying his nationalistic ideas or propagandist discourses directly in his plays. Yeats

summarises that his characters are drawn from the ranks of common individuals one might encounter on the streets. A beggar or woman lamenting after her son can take place in his plays (Yeats: 1911: 46). In other words, Yeats supports the idea that “Synge is not created to write for politics; it is contrary to his nature” (Yeats: 1911: 53). Conversely, some critics argue that his plays reflect Synge’s interpretation of nationalism. However, both sides agreed on the fact that his style is unique. It can be posited that his creative output does not arise solely from a nationalistic perspective; rather, he forges a distinctive style of writing that stands apart from prevailing norms (Boyd, 1968: 335).

A comprehensive grasp of his plays necessitates a profound exploration of his personal life. He uses ordinary characters from the streets. His plays are known for their vivid portrayals of rural life in Ireland and their use of the Irish language, which Synge helped to popularise (Benson, 1982: 1-17). Although he was able to produce only six plays in his short lifespan, his type of drama left a mark on Irish Literary Theatre. His keenness for his native language and its use paved the way for the reputation of his drama. After he had abandoned Protestantism, which was a heritage from his Anglican bishop ancestors, he focused on the culture of his nation. In his own words, he writes that “soon after I had relinquished the Kingdom of God I began to take a real interest in the Kingdom of Ireland. My patriotism went around from a vigorous and unreasoning loyalty to a temperate nationalism, and everything Irish became sacred...” (Synge, as cited in Kiberd, 1979: 20). One of his first plays, *The Shadow of the Glen*, which handles daily events, was interpreted by Yeats’ own words in *Synge and the Ireland of His Time*:

A patriotic journalism which had seen in Synge’s capricious imagination the enemy of all it would have young men believe, had for years prepared for this hour, by that which is at once the greatest and most ignoble power of journalism, the art of repeating a name again and again with some ridiculous or evil association. The preparation had begun after the first performance of *The Shadow of the Glen*, Synge’s first play, with an assertion made in ignorance but repeated in dishonesty, that he had taken his fable and his characters, not from his mind nor that profound knowledge of cot and curragh he was admitted to possess, but ‘from a writer of the Roman decadence.’ Some spontaneous dislike had been but natural, for a genius like his can but slowly, amid what it has of harsh and strange, set forth the nobility of its beauty, and the depth of its compassion; but the frenzy that would have silenced his masterwork was, like most violent things artificial, the defense of virtue by those that have but little,

which is the pomp and gallantry of journalism and its right to govern the world (Yeats, 1911: 8).

The passage implies that Yeats maintains unwavering faith in his friend Synge. To facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the distinctiveness inherent in Synge's style, it is essential to take a glance at his other plays. This contextual consideration lays the groundwork for a more insightful analysis of *The Well of the Saints*.

The Tinker's Wedding is a one-act play of 1908. The play tells the story of two tinkers, Michael and Sarah, who fall in love and decide to get married despite the disapproval of their community. The couple encounter many obstacles, including Sarah's father who wants to marry her off to a wealthy farmer, and Michael's former lover who is jealous of their relationship. Eventually, they manage to get married in secret with the help of a priest who sympathises with their plight. The play is a commentary on the social conventions and prejudices of rural Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century, and the struggle of the working class to find happiness and autonomy in a society that values wealth and status above all else.

Riders to the Sea, another well-known play of Synge, is also a one-act play written in 1904. The play tells the story of an Irish family, the Murrays, who live on the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland. The family has been plagued by tragedy, with several of their men lost at sea. The play focuses on the mother, Maurya, and her daughters, Cathleen and Nora, as they await news of their youngest son/brother, Michael, who is also feared to be lost at sea. Throughout the play, the family grapples with the harsh realities of life on the island and the inevitability of death. Synge's use of language and imagery vividly portrays the rugged beauty of the island, the fragility of human life, and the deep emotional bonds that tie the family together. *Riders to the Sea* is considered a masterpiece of modernist drama, and a powerful exploration of the themes of grief, loss, and the cyclical nature of life and death.

Deirdre of the Sorrows is based on an ancient Irish myth. The play tells the story of Deirdre, a young woman of unsurpassed beauty, who is prophesied to bring destruction to the kingdom of Ulster. To avoid this fate, she is raised in isolation by a wise old woman, but ultimately falls in love with Naoise, a handsome warrior. They flee to Scotland, where they live in blissful isolation until they are betrayed and forced to return to Ulster. There, they are pursued by the jealous King Conor, who ultimately

succeeds in killing Naoise and his brothers. Deirdre, unable to bear the grief, takes her own life. Synge's retelling of the myth highlights the tragic nature of human existence, the power of love and beauty, and the destructive force of jealousy and envy. The play's poetic language and vivid imagery convey the haunting beauty of an ancient Irish myth and the enduring relevance of its themes.

Covering mythological elements, *The Well of the Saints* is thoroughly studied in this chapter. First performed in 1905, the play tells the story of Martin and Mary Doul, two blind beggars who live in poverty in Ireland. The play explores the themes of blindness vs. sight, ignorance vs. knowledge, appearance vs. reality, and Christianity vs. Celtic culture (esp. paganism and druidism). Synge's use of language and imagery evokes the savage beauty of the Irish countryside and the harsh realities of life for the poor and marginalised. *The Well of the Saints* is considered one of Synge's most powerful works, a testament to his skill as a playwright and his ability to capture the complexities of the human experience. According to Bourgeois (1913), if independence and originality in writing are put aside, it can be asserted that the theme 'blindness' might have been influenced by a non-Irish writer, namely Maeterlink, in his play *Pelleas and Melisande*. Moreover, Zola's and Husyman's books on Lourdes might have affected him on the idea of a miraculous cure from a well. Bourgeois also puts the idea that *The Well of the Saints* shares many common points with *The Maid of Malines* by Lord Lytton when they are compared (1913: 186). Apart from the intertextuality of the story, mythical elements from the Celts and the use of language and its dialects in counties of Ireland and the description of these lands create the difference. Based on a well, this play covers many direct and indirect themes related to the well.

As it is aforementioned, the first focal point of the play is the theme of blindness. The play tells the story of a blind couple who are also unattractive and miserable beggars. The first act begins with the conversations between these two about how much they have a yearning for sight. Paying attention to misleading expressions about his and his wife's appearance, Martin depicts himself as "the handsome fellow Martin" and his wife as the most beautiful woman in the world. (Synge, 2009: 72)

MARTIN DOUL. I do be thinking in the long nights it'd be a grand thing if we could see ourselves for one hour, or a minute itself, the way we'd know surely

we were the finest man and the finest woman of the seven counties of the east (Synge, 2009: 72).

Individuals within their social circle, including acquaintances such as Timmy, Molly Bryne, and Bride, engage in deception by affirming their attractiveness and handsomeness, despite the clear discrepancy between this affirmation and their actual aged and unappealing appearances. With this distortion of reality, society offers an escape from the harsh truths of existence, into realms of fantasy and mythology, where individuals can detach from reality. Additionally, they assume false identities, gaining a deceptive sense of independence. As Martin deeply internalises this concept, he becomes susceptible to societal manipulation and control. When compared to Martin, Mary is more sensible against these lies. The result of mocking a blind couple triggers them to witness a miracle through the hands of a Saint. In a conversation with Timmy, they are told that a Saint visits their village and offers to cure their blindness with the help of the sacred water. Here Timmy mentions the Saint for the first time to Martin.

TIMMY *impressively*. There's a green ferny well, I'm told, behind that place, and if you put a drop of the water out of it on the eyes of a blind man, you'll make him see as well as any person is walking the world (Synge, 2009: 77).

Based on these claims, for Martin, who has already internalised the myth, there exists no time for reasoning. Nevertheless, this faith in the Saint is called into question in the subsequent sections of the play, depending on the interrelationship between myth and religion. For instance, Mary utters the word "devil" for the Saint after he cures Martin (Synge, 2009: 96). When they would like to run away from the Saint as he could not heal their eyes for the second time, Martin says "Will we be running off, Mary Dou?" (Synge, 2009: 102). Additionally, Mary expresses her regrets at different times, saying, "May the Lord protect us from the Saints of God!" (Synge, 2009: 102). Based on these examples, healing two blind people by a Christian Saint in a pagan ceremony can be interpreted as ironical. As discussed above, this proves Trenchard's ideas on the inseparability of myths from religion, particularly in the play studied, as people have the same urge to create myths and religion (Feldman & Richardson, 2000: 4).

On the other hand, it is also gripping that a Christian Saint uses sacred water from the holy well, borrowing from the famous stories of Celtic mythology. This is also a glimpse into the idea that Celtic culture including myths cannot be separated from religion. Religion, here particularly Christianity, can be acknowledged as a myth.

The relationship between mythology and religion is intertwined. Campbell states that “Mythology may, in a real sense, be defined as other people’s religion. And religion may, in a sense, be understood as a popular misunderstanding of mythology” (2001: 8). Celtic mythology and religion, two intermingled terms, thus appear under a new title. Celtic Christianity stands apart from other forms of Christianity due to its unique infusion with Celtic culture, characterised by a rich tapestry of imagination and the captivating art of Druidic storytelling. This distinctive blend is further enhanced by the scarcity of concrete ancient Celtic and early Celtic Christian historical records that allow for a more fluid and imaginative interpretation of the tradition. American historian Lisa Bitel (2009) analyses the period of Ireland’s Christianisation in three stages. To her, the conversion of Ireland was a gradual process driven by the movements of many individuals across different locations, rather than a single decision by a preacher or king. The first phase involved increased trade between Ireland and Roman society, leading to the introduction of Christian artifacts to the region. In the second phase, evangelists arrived in Ireland and propagated Christian ideas and goods, adapting them to fit within the Irish political, social, and geographical contexts. This was aimed at preparing the ground for a more permanent establishment of Christianity with a Romanised influence. The third and final phase witnessed the construction of churches and monasteries, solidifying the presence of Christianity. Interestingly, Bitel attributes a significant role to Saint Brigid¹ in the establishment of Christianity in Ireland. Brigid’s contributions to building permanent architectural structures and creating a hierarchical Christian infrastructure were pivotal. While other evangelists like Saint Patrick played a role in bringing Christianity to Ireland, Bitel argues that Brigid’s influence was critical, potentially even in shaping the institutional Irish Celtic Church characterised by monasticism. Brigid’s dual identity as both a figure of pagan and Christian significance marks the culmination of Ireland’s conversion to Christianity and the coexistence of these two belief systems (105-110). In brief, after gradually adopting Christianisation, Ireland never attempted to give up the values that formed its culture and synthesised a new myth, Christianity, with Celtic myths. This part of the play, where the Saint uses sacred water as a healer, can be acknowledged as its most obvious example.

¹ This word is adopted as it is written in the source. ‘Brigit’ and ‘Brigid’ are both used in sources.

Within the play, the narrative of a Saint assuming the role of a healer, with people anticipating miraculous eye healing, evokes parallels with the biblical accounts of Jesus and his healing miracles.

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!"

28 When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I can do this?"

"Yes, Lord," they replied.

29 Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you"; 30 and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this."

31 But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region. (Matthew 9 English Standard Version)

Similarly, uttering words in Latin while performing the miracle with sacred water, the Saint in the play directly refers to God and his son Jesus himself.

"Saint: Laus Patri sit et Filio cum Spiritu Paradiso Qui Suae dono gratiae misertus est Hiberniae" (Synge, 2009: 84).

("Praise be to the Father and to the Son with the spirit of paradise who has had mercy on Ireland with the gift of His grace.")

However, there exists a little difference between the actions of Jesus and the Saint. While Jesus is gifted with healing, the Saint needs an instrument to realise the action. At that point, the relationship between Celtic culture and Christianity, namely Celtic Christianity, appears in the play with the symbol of sacred water. Additionally, it is necessary to go over how Spinoza's philosophy inspired Synge's life. (as cited in Neff, 1989: 138-145) Spinoza's metaphysical system is characterised by his view of the universe as a single, infinite, and indivisible substance, which he called 'God' or 'Nature'. He believed that everything that exists is a manifestation of this one substance. This perspective is often referred to as pantheism, as it identifies God with the entirety of the natural world. Hewit (2017) brings forward that Synge established a spiritual foundation for his aesthetic approach, juxtaposing asceticism with pantheism and restraint with Rabelaisian excess. Nonetheless, Bourgeois (1913) argues that the sole impact of Spinoza on Synge's intellectual journey is the refinement of his Latin skills through Spinoza's works. To him, Synge reads "a few pages of Spinoza's *Ethics* every day" to keep up "his knowledge in Latin" (Bourgeois, 1913: 36). Concerning the criticism of Bourgeois, it can be interpreted that the use of Latin

words in the play shows merely his keenness for the Latin language rather than the philosophy of Spinoza.

Furthermore, the dialogue between the Saint and Martin is reminiscent of the Ossianic ballads in which the poems and ballads are centred around the adventures and exploits of Ossian, a mythical figure from Gaelic folklore. The Ossianic ballads are passionately pagan and anticlerical, full of regret for the glories of the past and disdain for the Christian present, and generally begin with a dialogue between Oisín and St. Patrick. The image of St. Patrick as a biased and persistent cleric is common.

SAINT. Let you not be afeard, for there's great pity with the Lord.

MARTIN DOUL. We aren't afeard, holy father.

SAINT. It's many a time those that are cured with the well of the four beauties of God lose their sight when a time is gone, but those I cure a second time go on seeing till the hour of death. (He takes the cover from his can.) I've a few drops only left of the water, but, with the help of God, It'll be enough for the two of you, and let you kneel down now upon the road. Martin Doul wheels round with Mary Doul and tries to get away.

SAINT. You can kneel down here, I'm saying, we'll not trouble this time going to the church.

TIMMY. *turning Martin Doul round, angrily.* — Are you going mad in your head, Martin Doul? It's here you're to kneel. Did you not hear his reverence, and he speaking to you now?

SAINT. Kneel down, I'm saying, the ground's dry at your feet.

MARTIN DOUL. *with distress.* — Let you go on your own way, holy father. We're not calling you at all.

SAINT. I'm not saying a word of penance, or fasting itself, for I'm thinking the Lord has brought you great teaching in the blindness of your eyes; so you've no call now to be fearing me, but let you kneel down till I give you your sight.

MARTIN DOUL. *more troubled.* — We're not asking our sight, holy Father, and let you walk on your own way, and be fasting, or praying, or doing anything that you will, but leave us here in our peace, at the crossing of the roads, for it's best we are this way, and we're not asking to see.

SAINT. *to the People.* — Is his mind gone that he's no wish to be cured this day, or to be living or working, or looking on the wonders of the world?

MARTIN DOUL. It's wonders enough I seen in a short space for the life of one man only.

SAINT. *severely.* — I never heard tell of any person wouldn't have great joy to be looking on the earth, and the image of the Lord thrown upon men.

MARTIN DOUL. *raising his voice.* — Them is great sights, holy father.... What was it I seen when I first opened my eyes but your own bleeding feet, and they

cut with the stones? That was a great sight, maybe, of the image of God.... And what was it I seen my last day but the villainy of hell looking out from the eyes of the girl you're coming to marry — the Lord forgive you — with Timmy the smith. That was a great sight, maybe. And wasn't it great sights I seen on the roads when the north winds would be driving, and the skies would be harsh, till you'd see the horses and the asses, and the dogs itself, maybe, with their heads hanging, and they closing their eyes——.

SAINT. And did you never hear tell of the summer, and the fine spring, and the places where the holy men of Ireland have built up churches to the Lord? No man isn't a madman, I'm thinking, would be talking the like of that, and wishing to be closed up and seeing no sight of the grand glittering seas, and the furze that is opening above, and will soon have the hills shining as if it was fine creels of gold they were, rising to the sky. (Synge, 2009: 104-105)

Through a comparative analysis of the dialogue presented in the play and the Ossianic ballads, it is possible to reveal several common points. St. Patrick is defined in *Celtic Mythology A to Z* (2004) as follows:

One of the three patron saints of Ireland, along with Saint Brigid and Saint Colum Cille. A historical figure from the fifth century, Patrick was an evangelist for the Christian religion, but he also figures in later mythological tales. Irish characters survived for hundreds of years to speak to Patrick and Colum Cille about the “old ways.” These included Oisín and Cailte. Parts of Patrick's life have been mythologized. For example, he is credited with driving the snakes from Ireland, although Roman geographers noted the absence of snakes from the island long before his time (Matson & Roberts, 2004: 94).

As the quote suggests, one of the similarities between Patrick and the Saint in the play can be seen as their possession of enchanted powers. On one hand, Patrick is known for banishing snakes from Ireland, and on the other hand, the Saint attempts to heal the villagers with holy water, both showcasing extraordinary abilities tied to their saintly roles. On the other hand, Ossianic Ballads are defined as follows in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2012). Ossianic ballads refer to a collection of Irish lyric and narrative poems that revolve around the legends of Fionn mac Cumhaill and his warrior band. These poems are named after Oisín (Ossian), the primary bard of the Fenian cycle, and are part of a shared Scots-Irish tradition. While some of these ballads are found in the Scottish Highlands, others originate in Ireland, yet their themes are rooted in Irish folklore. These ballads are extensive, comprising over 80,000 lines, and were composed between the 11th and 18th centuries, although their themes, which include pursuits and rescues, the slaying of monsters, internal conflicts, elopements, and encounters with magical beings, can be traced back to an earlier era, around the 3rd century AD. What sets the Ossianic ballads apart is their distinct tone, which

differs markedly from the earlier Fenian literature. While the earlier literature reflected a mutual respect between pagan and Christian traditions, the Ossianic ballads exhibit a stubbornly pagan and anticlerical attitude. They often lament the glories of the past and express contempt for the Christian present. St. Patrick is frequently depicted as a bigoted cleric. Based on this, given that Saint is in the role of St. Patrick, Saint is depicted as thick and obstinate just like St. Patrick. He insists on healing Martin's eyes disregarding Martin's unwillingness and opposition. The conversation in the play, characterised by a lack of mutual respect and resembling a power struggle, mirrors a complex dynamic. Martin initially agrees to be healed by the magical spell rooted in mythology. However, his refusal to accept further healing when he becomes dissatisfied with the conversation is significant. What Martin rejects is not merely the act of healing but rather the idea of being healed by the hands of a Saint. In this context, the Saint represents an embodiment of Christianity, a religion that maintains connections to mythology, which Martin directly opposes.

Considering Martin as a representative of Ireland, living as a peasant in a remote village, the conflict between him and the Saint can be interpreted as emblematic of a broader struggle. It can symbolise the tension between traditional Irish folklore and the influence of Christianity, a clash that has persisted in Irish history. Martin's refusal to accept healing from the Saint can be seen as a rejection of external religious influences and a reaffirmation of his adherence to the cultural and mythological traditions of his homeland. Furthermore, Ossian is a blind bard yet he is "clearly possessed of 'second sight'" (Larrissy, 2007: 36). It appears that Martin shares certain characteristics with Ossian in the midst of the mutual conflict. However, it is important to note that Martin's perspective of "second sight" differs from Ossian's. Ossian's second sight may possess elements of mystical insight, but the nature and interpretation of their visions or insights could be distinct. While Ossian's second sight is rooted in Celtic mythology, Martin's second sight could be shaped by the people around him. Within this context, considering the parallels between the Saint and Martin in Synge's play *The Well of the Saints* and Ossian and St. Patrick, it would be valid to assert that this particular scene evokes echoes of the Ossianic ballads.

As discussed above, blindness is affiliated with second sight, that is to see what is beyond. In the play, it seems that Martin's second sight is essentially a product of

dreams, manipulations, and conjectures, lacking mystical or mythological aspects. In this context, Martin expresses his understanding of sight that is different from other people's.

MARTIN: ... Ah, it's ourselves had finer sights than the like of them, I'm telling you, when we were sitting a while back hearing the birds and bees humming in every weed of the ditch, or when we'd be smelling the sweet, beautiful smell does be rising in the warm nights, when you do hear the swift flying things racing in the air, till we'd be looking up in our minds into a grand sky, and seeing the lake, and big rivers, and fine hills for taking the plough (Synge, 2009: 106).

However, it is strange that he would say all of this given that when his eyes were initially opened, he was unable to obtain what he desired from the outside world. He is not depicted as a character holding prophecy or second sight in the play. On the contrary, people, including his wife, are aware of his heart, which is all black.

MARY DOUL: "Martin Doull'll get his reward in a short while for the villainy of his heart" (Synge, 2009: 98).

Drawing from Eliade's perspective on the adaptability of mythological symbols in response to changes in society, the dialogue between the Saint and the blind beggars, Martin and Mary, where their eyes are miraculously healed, can be seen as resembling a baptismal ceremony. In this context, water symbolises purification from the sins of the world, akin to the symbolic cleansing associated with baptism in Christian rituals. This reference to Jesus's words in the Bible, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God", underscores the parallel between the play's healing through water and the spiritual cleansing and rebirth emphasised in Christian theology. This connection highlights how mythological symbols can represent similar connotations. Indeed, from the Saint's perspective, it could be interpreted as if Martin and Mary are compelled to undergo purification with water due to their perceived sins. This notion aligns with the idea of baptism as a means of cleansing and spiritual renewal for individuals who seek redemption from their past transgressions. In this context, the Saint's act of healing through water may symbolise an attempt to absolve Martin and Mary of their perceived sins and grant them a chance at spiritual renewal and transformation.

SAINT: It's many a time those that are cured with the well of the four beauties of God lose their sight when a time is gone, but those I cure a second time go on seeing till the hour of death. (*He takes the cover from his can.*) I've a few drops

only left of the water, but, with the help of God, It'll be enough for the two of you, and let you kneel down now upon the road.

SAINT: You can kneel down here. I'm saying, we'll not trouble this time going to the church. (Synge, 2009: 104-105)

The Saint, firmly convinced that sin is the root cause of blindness, extends an invitation to beggars who are regarded as sinners to participate in a ceremony that bears a striking resemblance to a street-side baptism. During this ceremony involving water, the Saint raises doubts about whether a mere few drops of water are sufficient for their redemption, as he assumes they may carry a burden of more sins. It can indeed be argued that water serves as a symbol of redemption in this context. Eliade's views on this support the very idea that water is used to clean. To him, water symbolises both death and rebirth, as contact with it leads to regeneration. This duality is seen in myths of floods, submersions of continents, and baptism on the human level. Immersion in water is not a final extinction but a temporary return to the indistinct, followed by a new creation or life. In religious practices, water is purifying and regenerating, capable of washing away sins and symbolising a return to a state of purity. It precedes creation and eventually reabsorbs it, unable to transcend its own virtual and latent nature. Forms manifest themselves above the waters by detaching from them. He asserts:

In whatever religious complex we find them, the waters invariably retain their function; they disintegrate, abolish forms, "wash away sins"; they are at once purifying and regenerating. Their destiny is to precede the Creation and to reabsorb it, since they are incapable of transcending their own mode of being, incapable, that is, of manifesting themselves in forms. The waters cannot pass beyond the condition of the virtual, of germs and latencies. Everything that is form manifests itself above the waters, by detaching itself from the waters (1957: 131).

In the play, water can be interpreted as a symbol of purification from sins. This concept aligns with the broader symbolism of water in mythology and religion, where water is often associated with cleansing and renewal. The idea that water serves as a means of purification is deeply rooted in nature, as water is the essential life-giving element for all living creatures on Earth. This natural connection between water and sustenance likely contributed to the symbolic association of water with cleansing and spiritual renewal in both mythological and religious traditions. Moreover, the reference to the "four beauties of God" in this context could be interpreted as an allusion to the four main elements that mythologies are often based on, which encompass a cosmogonic narrative. This highlights the interconnectedness of religion

and myth, underscoring how these two realms often overlap and influence one another in cultural and symbolic contexts.

On the other hand, the most prominent figure of the play, namely the representation of the well in *The Well of the Saints*, is associated with a source of healing for blindness. Celtic mythology is replete with mythical tales that explore the dual nature of water from the holy well. It holds the potential of both a powerful healer and a possible danger. It offers wisdom, immortality, and healing, but demands a sacrifice in return. In the play, the term ‘well’ takes on a mythological significance. It once again emerges as a source of miracles, conferring wisdom, healing, or even immortality on those who seek it. MacLeod points out that certain early Irish texts revolve around wells, rivers, and springs, with two well-known stories sharing a common theme. In the first, a woman named Sinann drowns in the River Shannon while pursuing wisdom. Similarly, in the second story, Boand meets a similar fate as she circles the River Boyne three times in her quest for knowledge. It is then believed that she transforms into a divine spirit (MacLeod, 2006: 386). These mythological narratives underscore that a well or river, symbolising knowledge and wisdom, is not merely a source of positive attributes. Rivers and wells, which are thought to hold the key to knowledge-based happiness, can serve as elements in narratives where individuals are put at risk, potentially leading to their downfall, which is linked to a sacrifice. Similar to Sinann’s story, the terms ‘well’ or ‘river’ are expected to bestow the individual with the necessary wisdom to initiate a metaphorical “new life”.

Moreover, the dual nature of water is evident in the promises made by the chief doctor and the chief druid concerning the impending battle against the Formorians, following Lug’s confirmation as a self-sacrificing warrior by King Nuada.

The chief doctor promised that, as the battle raged, he would cure the wounded so quickly that they could return to battle the following day. He also advised the Tuatha De to toss the corpses of their slain warriors into a particular well; his chants would cause the dead to emerge from the well restored to life (Rosenberg, 1994: 262).

Uttered by a doctor, the healing side of the water is attributed to a well with the intention of reviving the soldiers killed on the battlefield. Beyond the healing nature of water, as a holy performance, resurrection appears here. On the other hand, “the chief Druid of the Tuatha de promised to cause three streams of fiery rain to wash the

faces of the Formorians” (Rosenberg, 1994: 262-263). Contrary to the nature of healing and resurrection, rain, as a source of water, is acknowledged as a destructive factor. On the one hand, the imagery of a life-giving well, and on the other, the image of destructive rain, vividly encapsulate the dual nature of water. Similarly, in *The Well of the Saints*, this dual nature of water is observed concurrently. While it offers brightness and sight to a blind couple, it claims a sacrifice of the life they built upon the manipulations and lies. The sacrifice here is to abandon a pleasing life. Both Martin and Mary are dissatisfied with the world that they are confronted with after the healing of their eyes. After having a chance to see Martin for the first time, Mary speaks fair about her feelings and discontent.

“MARY DOUL: I’m thinking it’s a poor thing when the Lord God gives you sight and puts the like of that man in your way” (Synge, 2009: 96).

Her engagement with the actual world commences through self-realisation and progresses with her disillusionment upon encountering Martin, as none of the information she has heard about Martin proves accurate. Martin, much like her, is also discontented with the world he experiences. After facing numerous rejections from Molly, Martin responds to the Saint’s proposition of a second cure with the following words:

MARTIN DOUL: It’s wonders enough I seen in a short space for the life of one man only.... Them is great sights, holy father... What was it I seen when I first opened my eyes but your own bleeding feet, and they cut with the stones? That was a great sight, maybe, of the image of God... And what was it I seen my last day but the villainy of hell looking out from the eyes of the girl you’re coming to marry – the Lord forgive you – with Timmy the smith. That was a great sight, maybe. And wasn’t it great sights I seen on the roads when the north winds would be driving, and the skies would be harsh, till you’d see the horses and the asses, and the dogs itself, maybe with their heads hanging, and they closing their eyes (Synge, 2009: 105).

Martin also depicts the day that they are cured as “dark and gloomy” (Synge, 2009: 92). It is both surprising and comprehensible that they label the day as dark and gloomy rather than joyful and beautiful, given that they feel like strangers in an unfamiliar world. Bourgeois (1913) makes this point:

“Nothing can be more pathetic and also more/ depressing than the two blind people’s disillusionment and the complaint of Martin Doul when reference is made to the “grand day” when he was healed: “Grand day, is it ?...” (192).

While the scene involving the healing process is expected to be the most exhilarating, it paradoxically emerges as the most heartbreaking of all. Bourgeois (1913) employs the term “pathetic” precisely because it evokes comparable emotions within the reader or audience. In fact, while what is defined as pathetic should have been the life that Martin and Mary have lived as blind, they are considered pathetic as they begin to see. It describes the disappointment of the couple who open their eyes to the world with a ceremony that resembles the birth of a baby yet have no idea about the world itself. There is darkness along with happiness; however, happiness vanishes when light comes. In other words, there is a significant discrepancy. Furthermore, the fact that they have been living in a state of joy without acknowledging the actual world and the transition into a contrasting realm can be analysed through the lens of the theme of ignorance versus knowledge. On this, Burke states:

Mary and Martin Doul share an unselfconscious contentment, dwelling in what they alone perceive to be an Arcadian idyll. However, their fall to knowledge of being cured of blindness by the saint reveals their own moral corrosion as well as that of the wider community (Burke, 2009: 41).

Based on this, as their perception of the world undergoes a complete transformation, their comprehension of morality likewise shifts due to anger. They not only see their own ugliness but also the ugliness of the people around them, which they find strange and unacceptable. While the phase of ignorance portrays a world shrouded in darkness yet brimming with bliss, the phase of knowledge includes harsh realities. Before they literally gain sight, they define themselves as “the finest man and the finest woman from the seven counties of the east” (Synge, 2009: 73). However, the enchanting effect of the sacred water fails to bring happiness to their lives. Quite the opposite, it is at this juncture that the true darkness unfolds. Hence, the portrayal of darkness in the play carries an inherent contradiction.

In the play, the theme of blindness is recognised as a form of suffering by the Saint. That he asserts “sin has brought blindness” substantiates the notion that blindness serves as a punitive consequence (Synge, 2009: 83). This utterance by the Saint draws a parallel with Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, thereby invoking reminiscent associations. In the final act of the play, Oedipus blinds himself as a punishment, a stark departure from the preceding narrative, where Teiresias, a blind prophet, faces Oedipus’s unjust censure and disdain. “It has no strength for you because you are blind

in mind and ears as well as in your eyes” (Sophocles, 1959: 429-430). This contrast between Oedipus’s self-inflicted blindness later on and his earlier blaming of Teiresias highlights the theme of blindness in different ways. It shows how physical and metaphorical blindness interact in the story. Teiresias holds the belief that physical blindness can lead to a deeper understanding, particularly linked to prophecy. This perspective is evident in his messages to Oedipus, like when he states, “You are sighted, yet you cannot see the calamity you are in” (Sophocles, 1959: 423). Moreover, he clearly states that “Who only has eyes for gain he is blind in respect of prophecy”. Teiresias’s interpretation of prophecy, where insight is connected to blindness, sharply contrasts with the Saint’s perspective *In the Well of the Saints*. In Synge’s play, the idea of prophecy is synonymous with wisdom. A distinct departure from “Oedipus” emerges in terms of how knowledge is perceived subjectively. Synge portrays knowledge as having a dual nature; sometimes it leads to happiness, while sometimes it may cause the loss of existing contentment. This duality is exemplified in the characters of Mary and Martin, who gain their sight but lose their happiness. Both plays converge in their exploration of the idea that blindness shouldn’t be narrowly understood as punishment. This is evident through the experiences of Oedipus and the blind couple in Synge’s narrative. The duality of knowledge draws a parallel to the previously mentioned dualistic nature of water; it requires sacrifice while it bestows a benefit. Additionally, it would not be wrong to say that this theme of wisdom associated with blindness is also the complete change from their old lives for Martin and Oedipus and their attempt to become another version of themselves in the same life. This literally means rebirth, for it is possible to say that the end of the old ignorant life also means the beginning of a wise life - through blindness as a choice for Martin and as a punishment for Oedipus. On this Eliade explains:

“From one religion to another, from one gnosis or one wisdom to another, the immemorial theme of the second birth is enriched with new values, which sometimes profoundly change the content of the experience” (1957: 201).

As the quotation suggests, rebirth, as a concept, can be interpreted differently based on cultural backgrounds and personal experiences. In some contexts, it represents the new life that a hero leads after attaining awareness and wisdom. This

idea of rebirth is influenced by one's culture and the unique experiences that shape their perspective.

Celtic mythological narratives interweave the motifs of blindness and water, both distinguished by their inherent duality. This thematic interrelation finds expression in the play under consideration, where water functions as a remedial instrument, particularly concerning the issue of blindness. The origins of this water-based remedy often align with wells or rivers, contributing to the thematic depth of the narrative. The first story told about the relationship between blindness and water is Brigid's. She is a woman pressured by her brothers into marriage, and rebels against their demands. She blinds herself by poking out her own eyes, convinced that being blind would make her an unsuitable bride. Struggling with bleeding eyes and no water to wash them, water unexpectedly emerges from the land, healing her eyes. While there are different versions of this story, the recurring theme of water's healing power adds depth to the narrative's themes. Brigid is a prevalent name in Celtic culture, deriving from the appellation of the goddess Brigit, signifying "the exalted one" (Koch, 2006: 287). In *The Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopaedia*, it is also asserted that:

Here, she is identified as the daughter of the Dagda and she had two sisters, also named Brigit, who were respectively the patron of smiths and the patron of healers; from these, according to the text, all goddesses in Ireland (Ériu) are called Brigit.

From this point of view, Brigit is more than a goddess, she is like a persona in mythological stories. Matson and Roberts (2004) confirm this:

Still other gods and goddesses have more than one identity. Brigit, for example, is the goddess of fire, fertility, cattle, crops, healing, and poetry. She also has two sisters who share her name. One of the sisters is a physician. The other is a smith. But these lesser-known Brigit's likely represent just other facets of the dominant Brigit's persona. Taken together, the three women form one incredibly talented goddess. Finally, some deities share similar duties in different locales. For example, Celtic myth has multiple river goddesses and more than one mother goddess (XIII).

Having a multifaceted nature, she also holds the role of a goddess linked to healing, fertility, and motherhood. Moreover, she is the goddess of water, and there are two wells attributed to her. According to Wright (2022), the first one, Brigid's Well in Kildare, is a widely acclaimed location in Ireland. The water of the well was believed to possess curative properties for various ailments and injuries. Presently

attributed to St. Brigid, the well continues to draw visitors seeking blessings from the goddess. This location also houses the Flame of Ireland, a tribute to Brigid. It is important to note that the Christian accounts of St. Brigid often incorporate elements of the earlier Celtic goddess Brigid, resulting in a blending of mythological and Christian narratives. The second one, Brigid's Well in County Clare, is situated within a church and integrated into or beneath a cemetery. This well lies in close proximity to the renowned Cliffs of Moher. At this specific point, there are two important points related to the play, *The Well of the Saints*. Similar to Synge's play, these wells associated with Brigid, who is revered as the deity of healing, also possess properties about healing. In other words, the water from the well is associated with healing as a sacred source. Besides, the fact that it holds the representation of Celtic Christianity as Brigid the goddess and St. Brigid share common features. This verifies the relation between myth and religion as two intermingling terms. Talland Etair is another tale that explores the therapeutic benefits of water. King Aithirne Algesach, noted for being bossy, requests the King of Munster give him one of his eyes while traveling across Ireland. The King of Munster uses a stream to wash his damaged eye because there is no water nearby. It is said that a god grants him two new eyes after three splashes of water. In a different myth, behind a hill protected by Nechtan, it is told that a well is hidden. According to the myth, anyone who glances at the hill would suffer from blindness as a result of having their eyes burned. Nechtan's wife, Boand, challenges him three times, firstly by her tone, then her touch, and finally with her gaze. Suddenly the water emerges from the mountain, causing her to flee quickly. This water then spills downward, forming the River Boyne (Carey, 1983: 214-218). It can be concluded that this story and many of them like this briefly summarize the relationship between water from the holy well and blindness that Celts attribute to the water's sanctity for healing.

Considering the myths related to blindness and water together, it is obvious that punishment is also an intermingling theme. Moreover, Celtic mythology features numerous other renowned wells, each steeped in its own array of stories and legends. The first one is The Well of Segais where "the Irish hero Fionn earned his supernatural wisdom by eating a magic salmon. Salmon that could bestow knowledge also swam in 'Connla's Well', which is "a mystical spring, a source of knowledge and inspiration to anyone who drank its waters" (Matson & Roberts, 2004: 33-100).

4. ANALYSIS OF W. B. YEATS' AT *THE HAWK'S WELL*

“William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) is considered one of the foremost poets and playwrights who added the element of mysticism to modern English literature. He inserts his characters from the Irish legends, myths, and folklore to come up with something unique” (Al-Doori, 2021: 62). One of the founders and leading playwrights of the Abbey Theatre, W. B. Yeats makes an impression on English literature as he emphasises uniqueness. He can be defined as a symbolist writer; thus, he uses symbols in his plays to connote another:

Yeats wrote with passion and eloquence about personal disappointments, Ireland's troubled history, and the modern era's loss of faith in traditional beliefs about art, religion, empire, social class, gender, and sex. His works uniquely reflect the gradual transition from Victorian aestheticism to the modernism of Pound, Eliot, and Joyce (Holdeman, 2006:1).

Yeats bases his plays commonly on mythological stories. In his words, “I have used fragments of ancient mythology common to all lands” (Yeats as cited in Alspach, 1996: 1283). He also declares that he uses mythology both as a main tool and a source for his plays.

I took the story of ‘The Ballad of the Old Fox Hunter’ from ‘Knocknagow,’ and the story of ‘The Ballad of Father Hart’ from a Sligo county history; that of ‘The Ballad of Moll Magee’ from a sermon preached in the chapel at Howth if I remember rightly, that of ‘The Countess Cathleen’ from a story told as Irish by Leo Lespes in ‘Les Matinees de Timothe Trimm,’-there is a Donegal story resembling it in its principal incident in Larmonie's ‘West Irish Folk Tales,’-and the story of the ‘King's Threshold’ from a middle Irish account of the fantastic demands of the poet at the court of King Guaire; but I have revised the moral of this last story to let the poet have the best of it (Alspach, 1996: 1283).

In his own words, each of his plays has at least a mythological symbol. He uses symbols in his plays that represent mythological stories. He is also influenced by his plays. He criticises them at the same time to improve himself even while he is watching them on the stage. One day, while watching one of his plays, namely *The King's Threshold*, he realises that there are three people in front of him: a man, probably a husband, a wife, and a woman friend. The man is bored during the play while the wife is enjoying it. Instead of being angry with them, Yeats tries to empathise with them. He figures out that the man is bored as the music of the play is not satisfying enough; the woman is joyful as she is a reader of Yeats' plays. Along with being sorrowful, he decides to bring people together who care about his poetry to create an atmosphere

where they can perform with all their different emotions. It was a very interesting experience that artists, musicians, and poets who have one common point work together for the play, namely *At the Hawk's Well*. It was first performed in 1966 in a drawing room of Yeats' friend. He honestly declares that he has never experienced such joy from the applauses of poetry lovers (Alspach, 1996: 415-417).

That being the case, *At the Hawk's Well* is based on the stories of Cuchulainn, the mythological hero of an ancient Ulster like four other plays: *On Baile's Strand*, *The Green Helmet*, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, and *The Death of Cuchulain*. It is an experimental play that is based on both the Irish saga and the Japanese 'Noh model'. To make the Yeats' type of writing clear in this play, it is quite crucial to mention the Japanese Noh model. It is quite different from other types of drama, not only by its style but also the costumes used on the stage. "Japanese Noh theatre offers a particularly interesting case study because it is self-evidently 'theatre' in terms of all normal Western definitions – Noh plays being based upon crafted literary scripts and offering the audience stories about distinctive characters" (Wiles & Dymkowski, 2013: Chapter 3). Moreover, Fenellosa and Pound (1959) note that these plays that are based upon the art of allusion have a target audience including nobles who were educated to catch the allusion. In the Noh, there is an art built upon the god dance and some spiritual ghosts with a harmony of dancing, an attention-grabbing posture, and chanting. There is a great mixture of half-sung words and the colours that are in the traditional costumes. Without a doubt, it is difficult to adapt this to the stage (as cited in Jin 1996: 4). "The Noh theatre of Japan became popular at the close of the 14th century, gathering into itself dances performed at Shinto shrines in honor of spirits and gods or by young nobles at the court, and much old lyric poetry, and receiving its philosophy and its final shape perhaps from priests of a contemplative school of Buddhism" (Yeats, 1916, as cited in Fenollosa & Pound, 1959). Under the influence of Noh theatre, Yeats applies many features of Noh into his plays. To him:

All imaginative art keeps at a distance and this distance once chosen must be firmly held against a pushing world. Verse, ritual, music, and dance in association with action require that gesture, costume, facial expression, and stage arrangement help in keeping the door. Our unimaginative arts are content to set a piece of the world as we know it in a place by itself, to put their photographs as it were in a plush or a plain frame, but the arts which interest me, while seeming to separate from the world and us a group of figures, images, symbols, enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto

been too subtle for our habitation. As the deep of the mind can only be approached through what is most human, most delicate, we should distrust bodily distance, mechanism, and loud noise (Yeats, 1916, as cited in Fenollosa & Pound, 1959: par. 5).

Yeats' plays are characterised by their exploration of Irish mythology, folk traditions, and historical themes, combined with innovative dramatic techniques and poetic language. This discussion aims to examine Yeats' plays within an academic framework, highlighting their unique characteristics and their place in the canon of dramatic literature. Yeats's plays, particularly those written during the later stages of his career, are often referred to as 'masks' or 'dramatic poems'. These works represent a departure from conventional dramatic structures, as Yeats sought to create a theatrical experience that was deeply rooted in poetic expression. The fusion of poetry and drama is a defining feature of Yeats' plays, and he skilfully crafted his dialogues to achieve a lyrical and musical quality. One of Yeats' most notable plays is *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), which explores themes of sacrifice, morality, and the conflict between material wealth and spiritual redemption. This play exemplifies Yeats' fascination with Irish mythology, as it draws inspiration from the legend of the Countess of Blessington and the folklore surrounding the Great Famine. Through rich symbolism and vivid imagery, Yeats crafts a poetic narrative that delves into complex ethical dilemmas. Another significant work by Yeats is *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), co-written with Lady Gregory. This play, often considered a cornerstone of the Irish literary renaissance, uses the figure of the character named Cathleen ni Houlihan as a personification of Ireland itself. The play addresses themes of nationalism, sacrifice, and the quest for Irish identity in the face of British colonialism. It employs elements of folklore and mythology to evoke a sense of national pride and collective memory, establishing Yeats' reputation as a champion of Irish cultural revival. Yeats' later plays, collectively known as the *Four Plays for Dancers* (1921-1926), mark a significant shift in his dramatic style. These works integrate dance, music, and symbolic gestures to create a synthesis of multiple art forms. Notable plays from this collection include *At the Hawk's Well* and *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, which draw upon Celtic mythology and explore themes of eternal beauty, love, and the cycles of life and death. In addition to their thematic depth, Yeats' plays also exhibit innovative staging techniques. He embraced the concept of a unified stage design, where the sets, costumes, and lighting work harmoniously to enhance the dramatic impact. This

approach aimed to create a total work of art, in which every element contributes to the overall aesthetic experience. Yeats' commitment to theatrical experimentation and his willingness to challenge traditional dramatic conventions influenced later practitioners of avant-garde and experimental theatre. Accordingly, William Butler Yeats' plays occupy a distinct place in the realm of drama, characterised by their poetic language, exploration of Irish mythology, and innovative theatrical techniques such as inspiration from Noh theatre or use of poetic language that they have already been mentioned. These works reflect Yeats' profound engagement with Irish culture, history, and spirituality, while also pushing the boundaries of traditional dramatic forms. Through his plays, Yeats contributed significantly to the development of modernist theatre and left a lasting legacy in the realm of dramatic literature.

The other play which holds the significance of sacredness of water and the figure of "the well", *At the Hawk's Well*, first performed in 1916, is a one-act play written by William Butler Yeats. The idea that myths could serve as a basis for exploring historical specifics and racial characteristics, all the while offering a way to transcend those categorisations, introduced a significant layer of complexity to the endeavours of Irish writers aiming to rejuvenate Celtic myths for nationalist objectives. This complexity is vividly illustrated in W. B. Yeats' significant essay, *The Celtic Element in Literature* (1902), where he contends that literature, myth, and folklore are distinguished by national or ethnic heritage only conditionally, not inherently. Following this explanation of Yeats', the play is inspired by Irish folklore and tells the story of a mythological figure, Cuchulainn, and his quest to attain eternal youth and power by drinking from a 'well'. The well is guarded by a hawk, and Cuchulainn faces various challenges and adversaries in his pursuit of its waters. It also explores themes such as the quest for immortality, the passage of time, and the conflict between the human desire for power and the limitations of mortality. It also draws on elements of Celtic mythology and legend, emphasising the importance of preserving cultural heritage.

At the outset of Yeats' efforts to differentiate Irish Theatre from English Theatre, several changes are introduced to his own theatrical productions. One of the initial changes is the incorporation of choir and music, often in coordination with dance. This artistic approach drew inspiration from Noh Theatre, a traditional Japanese

form of theatre known for its highly stylised performances, music, and dance. By incorporating these elements into Irish Theatre, Yeats aims to create a distinct and culturally resonant theatrical experience that sets it apart from English Theatre. This play is the best representative of the features discussed since dance and music are in accord. Other characteristics serve the main point of the play such as setting and themes. The time of the play is during the Irish Heroic Age, as written at the very beginning of the play. This play includes contradictory themes such as ignorance vs. knowledge, youth vs. old age, action vs. passivity, and immortality vs. mortality. The most important feature of the play is covering the symbol of water through the representation of a well that is guarded by a half-woman, half-bird creature. In the play, two men are in search of immortality through sacred water from the well. In Irish culture, which is influenced by Celtic myths, magical power, and wisdom mostly overlap with the concept of immortality since life symbolises a gift. The image of water in the play derives its sanctity from ancient Irish beliefs and Celtic mythology, representing not only a source of miracles but also demanding sacrifice and effort in return for its blessings. The play features various mystical figures and characters centred around the symbol of the well, and this dual nature of water is explored in light of Eliade's duality theory of water, similar to the analysis of water in another play. Additionally, rituals are examined within the framework of Eliade's concept of eternal return, as part of his understanding of myth. While the plot of the play may appear relatively simple, the primary focus lies in the symbols employed, and the meanings they evoke. These symbols carry deep cultural and mythological significance, contributing to the rich tapestry of the play's themes and interpretations. The first act begins with a scene in which there are three masked players on stage. They carry a black cloth that has a gold pattern suggesting a hawk. As Yeats puts "they slowly unfold the cloth, singing as they do so" (1916, 1.1-8):

I call to the eye of the mind
A well long choked up and dry
And boughs long stripped by the wind,
And I call to the mind's eye
Pallor of an ivory face,
Its lofty dissolute air,
A man climbing up to a place

The salt sea wind has swept bare. (1.1-8)

The reference in the song to the well as the “eye of the mind,” which serves as the focal point of the play, suggests that the water emerging from this well will be associated with wisdom and insight. The symbolic significance of the well as a source of enlightenment and understanding is reinforced by this lyrical description. Furthermore, the song’s continuation after the presentation of the gold-patterned hawk. The folding of the black cloth adds to the sense of ritual and mysticism within the play. These elements contribute to the overall atmosphere of the performance, enhancing the audience’s engagement with the themes and symbols presented in the play. While they are unfolding the cloth, they sing:

What were his life soon done!
Would he lose by that or win?
A mother that saw her son
Doubled over a speckled shin,
Cross-gained with ninety years,
Would cry, ‘How little worth
Were all my hopes and fears
And the hard pain of his birth!’ (Yeats, 1916, 1.9-16)

From this excerpt, it becomes apparent that the symbol presented at the beginning of the play and the subsequent song is related to a mother who becomes emotional upon seeing her son in his aged form. This emotional connection between a mother and her son will later be embodied by the character of the Hawk-lady in the play. Within this initial scene, laden with foreshadowing, there are two primary details that hold significant relevance to the unfolding narrative. These details likely serve as hints or clues for the audience, inviting them to anticipate and contemplate the deeper layers of the story as it progresses. In this context, the depiction of a half-woman and half-bird creature is the first point to be examined in detail.

Numerous scholars have observed that the literary works of William Butler Yeats are replete with bird symbols. Due to the way Yeats employs symbolism in a cumulative manner, many of these avian representations can be interconnected and organised into coherent groups and patterns. Such an arrangement and examination of these symbols can occasionally offer more than just a deeper comprehension of individual symbols within these patterns; it can also yield unexpected insights into the

essence of Yeats' symbols and his use of symbolism as a literary technique (Allen, 1960: 117). Moreover, the most distinctive feature of the play is that it bears traces of Celt mythology, which is also the source of the symbols. In other words, birds and winged creatures have particular meanings in Celtic mythology.

Winged creatures were frequent symbols in Celtic mythology. In early Celtic times the raven and the wren, especially, were thought to have powers of divination—the ability to foretell the future. The rooster may have been sacred to the Celts. In tales, birds often represent bad luck or foreshadow bloodshed. They also serve as messengers and guises of the gods. For example, the goddesses Badb, Macha (1), and Mórrígan appeared as crows on battlefields, foretelling an especially fierce fight. Many mythological characters took the form of birds—some by choice and others as the result of a curse. Aífe (3) was turned into a crane; when she died, her skin was used to make the crane bag that held magical treasures. Both Angus Óg and Cáer (1) took the form of swans, and the unfortunate children of Lir (2) were turned into swans by their stepmother. Several heroes, including Lleu Llaw Gyffes, Taliesin, and Tuan mac Cairill, took the form of an eagle. Another Irish character, Fintan mac Bóchra, lived for part of her 5,500 years as a hawk and a swan according to legend. As punishment for her infidelity, Blodeuedd the flower bride was turned into an owl (Matson and Roberts, 2004: 10).

According to this quote, it is obvious that Yeats chooses a winged creature as guardian for a well that is created by inspirations from Celtic mythology, through which humans wish for wisdom and immortality. Hawk has a place in mythological stories especially in supernatural transformations. For instance, “the sole Survivor was Fintan mac Bóchra, who lived for 5,500 years disguised as a salmon, an eagle, and a hawk. In these forms, he witnessed the next five invasions” (Matson & Roberts, 2004: 12). The reason why he particularly chose a hawk can be the fact that the hawk may have a long life. Moreover, it also reminds us of the poem named *Hawk of Achill*, printed in Irish in 1907, which presents the colloquy between Fintan and the bird, namely the hawk of Achill. In the poem, Fintan and the Hawk share their life experiences, recounting the adventures and hardships they have faced over their remarkably long lives, each totalling 6515 years. These extensive lifespans have allowed them to endure numerous sorrows and embark on countless adventures. They engage in an extensive conversation that stretches into the late hours of the night, and the following day, they pass away simultaneously (Hull, 1932: 376-409). It can be inferred that although the Hawk-lady in Yeats' play has no words for either the Old Man or Cuchulainn. As Cuchulainn goes after the Hawk-lady and then they disappear, the end of these two stories may resemble each other. Moreover, as it is a mythological

poem, Yeats may have decided to use “The Hawk” for his play under the influence of it. Furthermore, in several mythologies, hawks are seen as messengers or intermediaries between the mortal world and the divine realm. They are believed to carry messages from gods to humans or serve as a bridge between the earthly and spiritual realms. This association highlights their role as a link between different worlds. This Hawk-lady in the play has similarities with the main female figures in Celtic mythology. The Old Man defines her with these words:

“The woman of the Sidhe herself,
The mountain witch, the unappeasable shadow”
She is always flitting upon this mountain-side,
To allure or to destroy. When she has shown
Herself to the fierce women of the hills
Under that shape they offer sacrifice
And arm for battle. There falls a curse
On all who have gazed in her unmoistened eyes. (Yeats, 1917: 1.162-168)

Depending on this quote, it may be asserted that the Hawk-lady is acknowledged as a mythological figure as the Old Man feels certain that she belongs to the otherworld. It is not surprising that there exists an otherworldly woman figure in Celtic mythology. The ‘bean sídhe’ is a figure from Irish folklore known as the fairy woman who predicts the death of a family member. Hearing her mournful wailing is believed to foretell a family member’s demise on that very night. According to tradition, she typically appears in a grey cloak and green dress, and her eyes are red from crying. Irish folklore suggests that capturing a bean sídhe would compel her to reveal the identity of the person destined to die. In its traditional context, the bean sídhe is associated with a specific family or clan. Her mournful singing is meant to guide the soul to the Otherworld. During the era of Druidism, she might have originally been considered a household spirit akin to the Roman lares, which were ancestral protectors of families. Some speculate that the roots of the Tuatha Dé Danann, a mythological Irish race, may be linked to ancestor worship, implying that the bean sídhe could have evolved from this practice, eventually becoming associated with fairies or supernatural beings. Another mythological figure, ‘Badbh’, is known as a war goddess who announces her death by disguising herself as a scalded crow. There is a close connection between the aforementioned type of bird and death itself. It is

believed that Banshee has the ability to take the shape of a young lady shining in a white dress in southeast Ireland. Similarly, in the play, the hawk is in the colour grey: “As I came hither / A great grey hawk swept down out of the sky, / And though I have good hawks, the best in the world” (Yeats, 1916: 27). That being the case, the Hawk-lady may be interpreted as a Banshee with her looks, the sounds she makes with grief, and the things she symbolises such as death or femininity. From this viewpoint, the Hawk-lady in the play can be called a divine figure just like Banshee with all she symbolises: “...when she has shown herself / To the fierce of women of the hills / Under that shape they offer sacrifice an arm for battle” (Yeats, 1916: 28).

References to the concept of a bean sídhe can also be found in some mythological stories like *Oisín in the Land of Youth* and *The Adventures of Connla*. In these tales, a fairy woman, often the daughter of Manannán mac Lír, appears to a hero and lures the hero away across the ocean to the Otherworld. The hero follows her to various otherworldly islands but often does not return. This motif is also seen in the legend of King Arthur, who was taken to Avalon by Morgan le Fay. In these narratives, similar to the common bean sídhe, these fairy women sing to the dying and guide them to the afterlife. Moreover, there is a mythological character, Bee MacBuain, who serves as the guardian of an Irish well and possesses the gift of wisdom. She has three daughters. According to the myth, these daughters encounter three thirsty men. When one of the daughters splashes water onto one of the men, he undergoes a transformative change, instantly becoming a wise leader named Fionn (Matson & Roberts, 2004: 30). This example from Celtic mythology embodies the guardian and the sacredness of water together. In addition, the beliefs of Celts attribute the term ‘sidhe’ to the mountains where fairies are believed to dwell. They are regarded as holy and magical lands in which a gate opens for immortals to be welcomed by the world of mortals. It is also noteworthy to say that, according to the belief, valuable materials such as swords and pieces of jewellery are given as presents to the fairies. Based on the concept of the well, it is evident that the well represents a place that promises immortality and requires an absolute journey to reach it. This parallels the notion of “Tír na nÓg”, which is referred to in Celtic mythology as the “Land of Eternal Youth” or the “Ever Young Land”. It is one of the many other worlds in Celtic mythology. Its most notable feature is that it is a mysterious and magical place where people do not age, and time flows differently from the known world. In one legend, the children of Lir return to

Tír na nÓg after living as swans for 900 years. When baptised by a benevolent hermit, they regain their child form and then dissolve into dust. Their spirits continue to dwell in the Land of Eternal Youth. In the story of Diarmait, the hero travels to the Land Under Wave, where everything is ancient yet perpetually youthful (Matson & Roberts, 2004: 109).

On the other hand, winged creatures are also linked to divinity in Abrahamic religions. As the Hawk-lady has wings and is associated with divinity, it is possible to resemble her to angels. In the Bible, angels are described as follows:

They had a human likeness, but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot. And they sparkled like burnished bronze (Bible, John 3:5).

The reference to attributing meaning to winged beings as a common feature in cosmogonic myths and divine religions is insightful. Indeed, many cultures and religions have traditions involving winged beings, often believed to serve as messengers between the divine and the mortal realms. In various religious traditions, angels are considered messengers between God and humans, and although their gender is often ambiguous, they are frequently depicted as female in artistic representations. There are also beliefs in guardian angels who protect sacred places such as heaven or hell, and some traditions suggest the presence of angels even in graves to accompany the deceased. These beliefs and associations specific to angels find parallels in the character of the Hawk-lady in the play. The Hawk-lady, who guards the sacred well, possesses both non-human and human characteristics, with her wings and her depiction as a woman. In addition to symbolising the sanctity of “the well”, the well itself may be metaphorically linked to the grave of Aoife's son, adding layers of symbolism and meaning to the play's narrative and themes. In addition, considering the Hawk-lady in the play as a guardian of the well, the symbol of immortality, it can be interpreted that she is the keeper of the gate that lets immortals and mortals meet. The bubbles of the well in the play might be seen as cursors of opening the gate: “I have heard water plash; it comes, it comes; / It glitters among the stones and he has heard the plash” (Yeats, 1916: 17). Without doubt, the old and the young man are seeking for it. Moreover, at the very point of giving presents, it is possible to confirm that the Old Man is serving his youth, in other words, his whole life as a gift for fairies with these words:

Old Man. The accursed shadows have deluded me
The stones are dark and yet the well is empty
The water flowed and emptied while I slept,
You have deluded me my whole life through
Accursed dancers, you have stolen my life. (Yeats, 1916, 1.230-235)

The Old Man perceives the dancers as the arbiters of his life, which he had dedicated to the pursuit of immortality. His disappointment stems from his belief that he was misled and enticed. It is crucial to note that seduction is closely linked to dance and dancers in this context. Similarly, when Cuchulainn persists in remaining and issues a challenge, the Hawk-lady's dance commences.

Young Man. Why do you fix those eyes of a hawk upon me?
I am not afraid of you, bird, woman, or witch.
Do what you will, I shall not leave this place
Till I have grown immortal like yourself.

“He has sat down; the Guardian of the Well has begun to dance, moving like a hawk. The Old Man sleeps. The dance goes on for some time” (Yeats, 1916, 1.209-1.212).

One of the most significant features of Yeats' symbolist writing is his great emphasis on dance and music in his plays. In this context, it seems as though the Hawk-lady's dance initiates as a ritual and possesses a magical quality that induces the Old Man into slumber. On this, Mallarmé describes dance as a “rite... the expression of the idea” and “the superlative theatrical form of poetry”. He viewed dance as a sacred ritual. He believes that dance has a dual nature - it serves as both a ritual and a form of writing, a system of theatrical signs (1945, as cited in Shaw, 1988). Based on this view, in this play, which is based on a mythical story, the dance will be interpreted as a ritualistic symbol. This appealing dance, which captivates the Old Man who witnesses it, bears a resemblance to Oscar Wilde's Salome's Revenge dance. It is worth noting that Kuchuk-Hanem's dance also inspired him. She performs her dance flouting a brown shawl adorned with gold details. Similarly, the presence of a bluish veil covering Salome's face during her dance underscores the significance of attire details in these femme fatales' performances (Carter, 2008). In light of these, the incorporation of dance, song, and a costume adorned with gold within the play can be linked to seductiveness. Taking universality into account, it is widely acknowledged

that figures embodying both human and animal traits exist in the mythology of various cultures. In this context, Gündüz (2020) highlights that the character exhibiting a hybrid nature of half-human and half-snake is referred to as Şahmeran in eastern culture, while in western culture, it is known as Melusine. Notably, these two figures exhibit striking similarities. Their animalist half is associated with danger, while their female half is linked to attractiveness. Consequently, it can be argued from an academic perspective that these characters, including the Hawk-lady in the play, align perfectly with the definition of a femme fatale. Even though the Hawk-lady's dance is not extensively described, it is evident that she mimics hawk-like movements with her arms and uses her enchantment to lull the Old Man to sleep. She is portrayed without clothing, and her dual nature as part hawk and part woman, combined with her captivating dance and her ability to induce slumber, categorises her as a femme fatale. Moreover, by incorporating a dance reminiscent of Salome's revenge dance, Yeats seems to imply that Aoife may seek vengeance against Cuchulainn. This inference arises from the fact that the Old Man is entranced by the dance and falls asleep, while Cuchulainn remains awake. Eliade's commentary on dance once again centres around the concept of holiness:

All dances were originally sacred; in other words, they had an extra human model. The model may in some cases have been a totemic or emblematic animal, whose motions were reproduced to conjure up its concrete presence through magic, to increase its numbers, and to obtain incorporation into the animal on the part of man. In other cases, the model may have been revealed by a divinity (for example the pyrrhic, the martial dance created by Athena) or by a hero (cf. Theseus' dance in the Labyrinth). The dance may be executed to acquire food, to honor the dead, or to assure good order in the cosmos. It may take place upon the occasion of initiations, of magico-religious ceremonies, of marriages, and so on (1954: 27).

In addition, Eliade emphasises that dances imitated archetypal gestures or commemorated events from the mythical past. They were a way of actualising and repeating the sacred actions of "those days" in the mythical period. He extends this idea to conflicts and wars. He suggests that many conflicts had a ritual cause and function. They symbolised opposition between clans or represented struggles between divinities. War and duels, in particular, were not explained through rational motives but were seen as imitating archetypal models (1954: 29). In line with the sacred purpose of dance, Eliade links the movements within dance to rituals and ceremonies that hold a sacred significance, and dance is an inhuman model. In this play, the

character who is a hybrid of both human and bird-like qualities appears to engage in a ritual, assuming the roles of both a woman and an animal. It can be argued that the Old Man being directly affected and falling asleep during the dance, as if under a spell, substantiates the notion that this dance indeed constitutes a ritual.

On the other hand, the gold pattern on a black cloth is the second prominent detail. According to the *Oxford Dictionary* (2023), gold is “a yellow precious metal, the chemical element of atomic number 79, used especially in jewellery and decoration and to guarantee the value of currencies.” Gold is often chosen as a gift for a beloved because it symbolises enduring love and affection. Its timeless beauty and rarity make it a precious and cherished token of affection. Whether it is in the form of a delicate gold necklace, a pair of elegant earrings, or a meaningful gold jewellery piece, gifting gold to a darling is a heartfelt gesture that expresses deep love and appreciation. The lustrous metal represents not only the value of the relationship but also the promise of a lasting and golden future together. Here it can be considered as a present to the beloved. The gold detail here is like a foreshadowing and when the other signs are considered together, it can be concluded that the gold detail is a reference to a mythological story in which Cuchulainn gives Aoife a golden present. This play can be directly associated with the story of Aoife and Cuchulainn and can be understood as a new version of their story or as a confrontation. In the play, the name of the young character is Cuchulainn who has a significant place in Celtic mythology as the hero of Ulster. According to the *Celtic Mythology A to Z*, Cuchulainn is defined as “the most celebrated Irish warrior hero in Celtic myth and legend; the son or adopted son of the light god Lugh Lámfhota and the mortal woman Deichtine” (35). Cúchulainn is one of the principal characters of the Ulster Cycle. He plays a crucial role in the epic named *Táin Bó Cúailnge* which means The Cattle Raid of Cooley (Matson & Roberts, 2004: 35). As suggested by its name, although the character in the play is depicted as a young and brave man, the focus of the play is not centered on his bravery actions. In this theory, Brunel (1992) asserts:

In the majority of cases, the entry is based on the name of a character or a mythical hero. This does not imply that a myth always hinges on a single individual. In this respect, the name serves as an indicator, though there is no doubt that much of the focus is on it (XVI).

Based on this, it can be said that Yeats uses a well-known mythical character; who has many stories including wars, clashes, murders, revenge, and love, Cuchulainn, one of the main characters in the play, stands as the central mythological hero featured in the Ulster or Red Branch Cycle, one of the four significant cycles within Celtic mythology. He is often regarded as an embodiment of the god Lugh, a figure in Irish mythology associated with skills, crafts, arts, and oaths. It is also recounted that Cuchulainn had a mortal father named Sualtim, a detail found in the play. Yeats characterises Cuchulainn as a semi-divine legendary figure. In the year 1900, Irish speakers in the western regions of Ireland possessed an extensive vocabulary, estimated to include more than 5,000 words, and some individuals could still recite the saga of Cuchulainn. Consequently, Yeats has a valid basis for creating his adaptation, drawing from his sources, and grounding his poetry and playwriting in Irish folktales.

Besides these, this play has many components such as a half-female and half-animal character, who is a grieving mother, a waiting lover, a guardian of a well (which is a source of immortality and wisdom), holy water, and an old man who needs a miracle from that well. In the play, before Cuchulainn goes after the Hawk-lady, “the musicians cry ‘Aoife!’ ‘Aoife!’” and the Old Man introduces her to Cuchulainn with these words:

Old Man. She has roused up the fierce women of the hills,
Aoife, and all her troop, to take your life,
And never till you are lying on the earth
Can you know rest. (Yeats, 1916, 1.242-245)

Cuchulainn, upon learning that the Hawk-lady is, in fact, Aoife herself, responds to the Old Man “The clash of arms again!” as if he is already aware of the remainder of the narrative (Yeats, 1916, 1.242-245). The identification of the Hawk-lady as Aoife holds significance in this context since Cuchulainn and Aoife, two mythological characters, share a common story in Celtic mythology. Matson & Roberts (2004) introduce Aoife and her relationship with Cuchulainn.

Aífe (1) (Aoife, Eve, Pleasant, Bountiful) A powerful Scottish warrior. Aífe often clashed with her enemy, the Irish warrior from the Land of Shadows, Scáthach. In some texts, the women are sisters. Aífe was defeated in battle by one of Scáthach’s most celebrated students, the Ulster hero Cúchulainn. Despite the conflict between Aífe and Cúchulainn, the two produced a son named Connla (2). Cúchulainn left Aífe before finding out she was pregnant with his child.

Before he departed, Cúchulainn gave Aífe a little golden ring. Aífe raised Connla in secret, training him in the dark arts and in combat. When he was old enough, Aífe sent Connla into the world to seek his destiny. She gave her son the ring that Cúchulainn had given to her and told him never to turn his back on a fight. He followed his mother's advice, although it led to his death at the hands of his own father. Cúchulainn killed Connla in battle, unaware that the boy was his son. He did not recognize the gold ring that Connla wore until it was too late (2).

Grounded on this, the gold detail in the first scene becomes meaningful. In the story that forms the basis for the play, Cuchulainn is the father who kills his son, Connla, without noticing him. This relationship between father and son with a murder brings to mind Oedipus. However, the father is the murderer here. Despite the fact that patricide is familiar in mythological stories, filicide rarely occurs. According to Freud, the paternal function is associated with prohibitions. When the father is metaphorically "killed" by the son, he assumes a symbolic position. Through the relationship between his desires and the paternal function, the child attains this symbolic position. This symbolic function allows the child to discover him/herself. According to Lacan, the concept of the Name of the Father is a metaphorical naming. This naming connects the imaginary, symbolic, and real realms. Passage into the symbolic can only occur by establishing one's position in relation to the father. This position is achieved through identification. (Lacan as cited in Thoma, 2011: 133) Mendel (2000) states that all identification creates a dual unconscious image (imago): the 'good' imago and the 'bad' imago. The superego, or ideal self, is the 'bad' image of the father that comes after the acquisition of identity. The 'good' image of the father, which reclaims and alters the ideal self inherited from the initial narcissism, is referred to as the Ideal Ego (9-10). The rules of the superego, or the ideal self, are determined by the name of the father. This imposition of rules begins with the mother's discourse. The presentation of the Name of the Father as an object of identification is crucial in establishing a healthy paternal function. Otherwise, the absence of the father, along with the void in the mother's discourse, will lead to the development of defences against the authoritarian father, resulting in the fusion of the mother and son. Consequently, the child cannot detach from being a part of the mother's body. According to Freud, overcoming the Oedipus complex, and according to Lacan, transitioning from the imaginary to the symbolic, are essential for the construction of the self. To sum up, the father's position plays a critical role in the establishment of the self. Based on this, in the mythological story, the absence of the father makes the mother, Aoife, and the son,

Connla, inseparable. When the son is killed by the father, it can be set forth that a symbolic position may be assumed. The son, who awaits eternal love from his father, unexpectedly faces death. Thus, the mother, who has been disappointed once by her husband, experiences the same feeling after filicide one more time. This makes them stay together even when death comes. So, Yeats portrays the grieving mother as someone who cannot leave her child and appoints her as a guardian to a sacred well. Symbolically, this well is Aoife's son, Connla himself. This well can even be described as the grave of Connla, who is killed by his father. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that the well in the play is Connla's well in Celtic mythology, which is "a mystical spring, a source of knowledge and inspiration to anyone who drank its waters" (Matson & Roberts, 2004: 34). So, even if they are physically apart, the son and the mother are not separated spiritually. However, this is not compensation for her loss; she keeps grieving, mourning, crying, and screaming. In the play, Cuchulainn describes her cry with these words:

That cry! There is that cry again. That woman made it,

But why does she cry out as the hawk cries. (Yeats, 1916, 1.183-184)

According to the cries the Hawk-lady makes, it is obvious that Hawk-lady feels agony. Depending on the background information including the story of Cuchulainn and Aoife, it would not be wrong to identify why she is crying in agony. It is interpreted that she is guarding the well as it is a symbol of her son. These vocal expressions of sorrow are unsettling to the individual responsible for Aoife's suffering, as evident in the aforementioned sentences. However, she is not the only one who suffers or sacrifices something. The Old Man also gives up his youth on the way to gain wisdom through the well's water. Considering the background of the story, Yeats builds a system in the play that requires both psychological and physical healing and repair. But healing exists only when there is something to sacrifice for it. Last but not least, this healing is expected to happen through the sacred water from the well since water is the source of nature. In this play, what is expected from a dry well can be interpreted as the mercy that humans have been expecting from nature for centuries. This mercy can be interpreted as rain for droughty lands. The expectation of rain for the longing for green in these arid climates is the mercy expected from the energy that varies according to beliefs in nature or God, but essentially remains the same. Moreover, the

act of relinquishing one's possessions in anticipation of receiving a more substantial blessing is a recurrent tenet in various religious traditions. This doctrine, which posits that one must give in order to receive, aligns harmoniously with the notion that the acquisition of wisdom is contingent upon acts of sacrifice. For example, sacrificing a sheep to God for rain in agricultural countries can be interpreted as a sacrifice like in the play; therefore, as it is clear that the reward cannot be without sacrifice, The Old man sacrifices his youth in order to have a few bubbles of water from the holy well which represents wisdom.

Indeed, it is also noteworthy that one of the alternative names mentioned for Aoife is Eve who is widely recognised as the first woman created in Abrahamic religious traditions and is considered the wife of Adam, according to holy books such as Qur'an and the Bible. Additionally, the names 'Pleasant' and 'Bountiful' are descriptive adjectives often associated with the first woman, reflecting her qualities. The perception of the female body as fertile and its connection to agricultural work is a recurring theme in many cultures, as noted by Eliade when he states, "The assimilation of the sexual act to agricultural work is frequent in numerous cultures" (Eliade, 1953: 303). In this regard, the Qur'an also conveys a similar concept: "Your women are your tilth, so come into your tilth how you choose" (Qur'an 2: 223). Religions that view the female body as an integral part of nature often emphasise a woman's significance when she gives birth to a child, exemplified by the biblical passage: "And Adam knew Eve his wife; who conceived and brought forth Cain, saying: I have gotten a man through God" (Genesis 4:1 English Standard Version). In Aoife's story, Aoife's motherhood and her femininity remain unquestioned until her child is killed by his father. The loss of her child not only casts her into the role of a mourning mother but also symbolically portrays her as barren and devoid of the nurturing aspect traditionally associated with femininity. As a result, her womanliness becomes subject to doubt, and this ambiguity is reflected in the play by describing her as "half woman". The other half, characterised by animalistic revenge instincts, underscores her character's complex duality.

Indeed, it can be inferred that the other side of Aoife reflects feelings of anger and a desire for revenge. However, in the play, Yeats does not offer a definitive ending to Cuchulainn's fate; moreover, while he hints at the possibility of a confrontation by

sending Cuchulainn after the Hawk-lady at the play's conclusion, Yeats leaves the audience in suspense, without revealing whether Cuchulainn emerges victorious or suffers defeat. This play can be viewed as a dramatic showdown where Aoife and Cuchulainn are destined to meet again and seek revenge, but there is no concrete evidence of vengeance in the final scenes. Cuchulainn does allude to an impending showdown by stating, "I will face them", (Yeats, 1916, 1.248)but the audience or reader is not privy to the outcome. It is also important to note that there are different versions of Cuchulainn's death in Celtic mythology, adding to the ambiguity surrounding his fate:

After only a short time as a warrior, Cúchulainn had fulfilled two of the three prophecies about him. He was the most glorious warrior ever known in the world, for he had never been defeated. He was also the most famous hero, for his name was always on the lips of kings, warriors, and poets. The third part of the prophecy was that Cúchulainn would die an early death. Many versions exist of stories about the hero's last stand (Matson & Roberts, 2004: 37).

As Matson & Roberts (2004) have also pointed out, there is uncertainty surrounding Cúchulainn's death in Celtic mythology. Similarly, in the play, Yeats appears to embrace this uncertainty and avoids definitively depicting the character's fate. By refraining from giving Cuchulainn a heroic or ignoble death, Yeats leaves room for interpretation and allows the audience to ponder and decide upon the character's ultimate destiny. This approach invites the audience to engage with the narrative and contemplate the potential outcomes, adding depth and complexity to the play's themes and characters. The enigmatic departure of Cuchulain might draw parallels with the sudden disappearance of Jesus as described in the Holy Bible. Although it is widely known that Jesus was crucified, the uncertainty surrounding his absence from the tomb after his crucifixion has sparked debates about whether he truly died. This event is mentioned in the Bible as follows:

28:1 : Now late on the Sabbath, when the dawn of the first day of the week was near, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the place where his body was.

- 28:2 : And there was a great earth-shock; for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, rolling back the stone, took his seat on it.
- 28:3 : His form was shining like the light, and his clothing was white as snow:
- 28:4 : And for fear of him the watchmen were shaking, and became as dead men.
- 28:5 : And the angel said to the women, Have no fear: for I see that you are searching for Jesus, who was put to death on the cross.
- 28:6 : He is not here, for he has come to life again, even as he said. Come, see the Lord's resting-place. (Bible, Mathew)

Like the Bible, In the Quran, specifically in the chapters of Ali Imran and Nisa, it is stated that Jesus did not experience death but ascended to the heavens. The ambiguity surrounding Jesus' demise can be likened to Yeats' omission of a conclusive ending in the story of Cuchulain.

As thoroughly discussed, Yeats' play is indeed replete with rich mythological elements. The central figures of the Ulster hero, Cuchulainn, and the half-woman, half-animal entity symbolising Aoife stand out as prominent examples of these mythological elements. The pivotal element around which all these mythological characters converge is the meeting point that unites the mortal and the immortal, embodied by the figure of a well from which miraculous outcomes are anticipated. This well serves as a focal point in the narrative, bringing together various themes and characters, and representing a potent symbol of transformation and sacredness. The well holds symbolic and archetypal significance associated with water, abundance, and divine bestowal. In both mythology and religion, water is commonly described as life-giving. "God also said: let the waters bring forth the creeping creature having life, and the fowl that may fly over the earth under the firmament of heaven" (Genesis 1:20 English Standard Version). Water, as the vital common element that sustains all forms of life, consistently appears with these essential attributes. It is accurate to assert that water serves as the primary source for depictions of immortality, life-giving, and healing in mythology.

When considering Eliade's duality of the water theory, while water is considered a life-giving element, and the presence of water in the context of a well is often associated with the vibrant hues of green that symbolise nature and vitality, it has another destructive side. It vivifies but it can claim a life at the same time. Celtic mythology often portrays this duality together, drinking water from a well as granting not only physical life but also bestowing magical powers upon the drinker. On the other hand, as it needs to sacrifice water, it kills or takes something valuable. For instance,

Bóand drowned when she tried to drink from the Well of Segais to gain its supernatural wisdom. The sacred well was surrounded by hazel trees and filled with salmon. Its waters were a source of supernatural wisdom, but drinking from it was forbidden. When Bóand tried to drink from the well, its waters rose up and pursued her. Bóand ran toward the sea, but the water overcame her, leaving the goddess dead in its wake. The waters formed a river leading from the well to the sea, which was named the Boyne, in honor of Bóand (Matson & Roberts, 2004: 32).

In Celtic mythology, there are rivers and wells whose water is acknowledged as magical and sacred. The first one, Connla's Well, is mentioned above. The 'Well of Segais', is another prominent well renowned for its association with bestowing supernatural wisdom upon those who drink from its waters (Matson & Roberts, 2004: 32). "Connla's Well is similar to another mythical spring, the Well of Segais. It, too, was a source of supernatural wisdom, surrounded by hazel trees and inhabited by salmon" (34). Consequently, it can be inferred that the term 'well' carries a connotative meaning of wisdom. This connotation extends to various powers, such as a potential for eternal life or attainment of a prominent public status. MacLeod (2006) explains:

A number of early Irish texts make reference to rivers and wells held in great esteem and were associated with sacred or poetic wisdom and inspiration. Two of the most well-known the references are the Dindshenchas accounts of Boand (the Ri Boyne) and Sinann (the River Shannon). In the several versions of the story of Sinann, a woman of the Tuatha Dé Dannan approaches a particular well. In her pursuit of knowledge, she follows a stream that issues from the well and is drowned, becoming the eponymous spirit of the river. A somewhat similar story is told of the woman Boand who approaches a well and unadvisedly walks around it three times. When the water rises up she is disfigured, drowned, and similarly transformed into the spirit of the river (337).

Based on the quotation, in the play that takes Celtic mythology as a reference to the theory of Eliade, the duality of water appears here. The negativities that occur to those who seek healing, wisdom, and immortality from water match the destructive

side of water, and the reference to wisdom and immortality matches the life-giving part of nature itself. In this play, the wisdom that Cuchulainn and the Old Man follow is what Eliade defines as the eternal return. Participating in the sacred events of the past is possible in this play with the sanctity of water and the ritual of drinking this holy water from the holy well. In the play, the water is associated with the source of immortality. It is understood first by the words of young man Cuchulainn:

Young Man. ... You can, it may be,
Lead me to what I seek, a well wherein
Three hazels drop their nuts and withered leaves,
And where a solitary girl keeps watch
Among grey boulders. He who drinks, they say,
Of that miraculous water lives forever. (Yeats, 1916, 1. 97-102)

Water from the sacred well, with its dual nature of being life-giving yet demanding sacrifices in mythological stories, is depicted here as a miraculous source that not only sustains life but also bestows the possibility of eternal life. On this, Eliade remarks that the “symbol of creation, harbour of all seeds, water becomes the supreme magic and medicinal substance; it heals, it restores youth, it ensures eternal life” (Eliade, 1958: 193). To the extent that the Young Man undertook a journey across the seas in pursuit of this miracle, and the Old Man spent his life in pursuit of this. Coming from different backgrounds, both the Old Man and the Young Man need the miracle of the water. The shared fear of death and the collective hope for healing or immortality through water unite these characters, whether they are young or old and whether death is imminent or distant in terms of age. This convergence of their beliefs and desires leads them to a place where the sacred is anticipated to manifest, serving a common purpose. It is evident, given the dual nature of water, that obtaining access to this sacred entity will entail a cost for them, whether they are aware of it or not. Cuchulainn is a newcomer to this sacred place, while the Old Man has already paid the price for his presence. While there may not be a direct and immediate price paid, such as drowning in water as seen in some mythological tales, it can be argued that the Old Man has made a gradual sacrifice over time. In the play, the reference to the sacredness of water and the things that the old man has sacrificed are given together in the following lines:

Old Man. The well was dry, I sat upon its edge,

I waited for the miraculous flood, I waited
While the years passed and withered me away.
I have snared the birds for food and eaten grass
And drunk the rain, and neither in dark nor shine
Wandered too far away from a sudden sleep. (Yeats, 1916, 1.131-136)

These lines suggest a life of hardship and survival, with the Old Man resorting to hunting and foraging for sustenance. It highlights the struggle for survival in the absence of the life-giving properties of water. He states that he lives in hard conditions while there exists nothing to eat or drink. The dry well can be seen as a representation of the absence of life-giving water. In this context, the well, typically a source of water, is devoid of its life-giving properties. This absence of water could symbolise a lack of vitality or spiritual fulfilment. Simultaneously, the adversities faced by the Old Man as he endured considerable hardships in exchange for a few drops of water are symbols of his sacrifices. Furthermore, the water that proved fatal for Boand, in the mythical context, serves as a metaphorical representation of the Old Man's relinquishment of his entire life within the framework of the play. The sacrifice of Cuchulainn is different from the Old Man's. Its story dates back to ancient times. The act of Cuchulainn offering a sacrifice to obtain water from the holy well may be seen as his return to the conflict where he had previously tragically killed his own son. Cuchulainn, hailing from antiquity, emerges displaying valour and bravery. Yeats, in his effort to offer a unique viewpoint through the selection of Cuchulainn, a figure from mythology, incorporates situations within the play that diminish Cuchulainn's bravery. Yeats, who expresses "his desire to use mythology to shape a new culture hero for the Irish" creates an unfavourable hero in the play (Allen, 1960: 119). When he introduces himself to the Old Man uttering, "I am named Cuchulainn, I am Sualtim's son", the Old Man does not recognise him and says, "I have never heard that name". Moreover, he says, "I have an ancient house beyond the sea" (Yeats, 1916, 1.84-86). The word 'ancient' might be seen as a clue that he is the hero of Ulster. Given the oral tradition through which mythological narratives are transmitted, it is comprehensible that an individual who has lived in isolation for his/her entire life might not have encountered this name previously. However, it is paradoxical that a person who devoted half a century in pursuit of the mythological miracle of water remains unfamiliar with this mythological character. Considering Eliade's definition

of myth, when a myth does not focus on the creation of the universe, it follows a similar pattern on a smaller scale, explaining the origins of various elements like islands, specific plants, human behaviours, or social institutions, it is possible to claim that the Old Man instinctively attempts to make sense of a well that is a part of the universe, and the water coming out of that well explains the situation. It could be asserted that his ascription of sacredness to water, irrespective of any accumulated belief system, stems from water's life-sustaining properties. It is evident that an individual who has relied on rainwater for survival would unquestionably regard clean water as something sacred. This clearly demonstrates that myths inherently represent an effort to comprehend the universe. It might explain why the Old Man does not recognise Cuchulainn. Another plausible interpretation is that Yeats aims to provide an alternative perspective on Cuchulainn and his overly glorified image within the context of nationalism. In this context, The Old Man characterises Cuchulainn based on his appearance with the following words:

What mischief brings you hither? - you are
Like those
Who are crazy for the shedding of men's blood,
And for the love of women. (Yeats, 1916, 1.87-89)

Based on this, it appears that Yeats, through the character of the Old Man, has taken it upon himself to alter the conventional notion of heroism associated with Cuchulainn, which encompasses deeds that could be construed as acts of banditry. Through the portrayal of Cuchulainn, who embodies Eliade's concept of the "eternal return", in a role that subjects him to ridicule and disdain rather than adoration, Yeats diminishes his wild, audacious, and valiant attributes. In this manner, he illustrates that the mindset he envisions for returning to the essence is not aligned with a disposition favouring war or brutality. In this case, it could even be inferred that he makes no sacrifices since he does not relinquish heroism and defiance. It is explicitly mentioned in the subsequent lines of the play that he has retained his fearless and confrontational demeanour from the mythological narratives.

Musicians. Come to me human faces

Familiar memories;

I have found hateful eyes

Among the desolate places

Unfaltering, unmoistened eyes. (Yeats, 1916, 1.250-254)

While it might be anticipated that what he ought to relinquish as a warrior is his role as a challenger, he exhibits no hesitation in pursuing the Hawk-lady, as expressed in the third person singular, referring to himself. Since he does not make sacrifices, he cannot attain the wisdom for which he has travelled across seas. On the other hand, the Old Man's wisdom appears while begging Cuchulainn not to go, even though he cannot drink a sip of water from the sacred well:

Old man. O, do not go! The mountain is accursed,

Stay with me, I have nothing more to lose,

I do not deceive you. (Yeats, 1916, 1.246-248)

The wisdom depicted here revolves around the concept of connecting with another individual and discovering commonalities after years of living in isolation. In this sense, it can be asserted that Yeats conveys his ideas of identity and nationalism through the notion of society, as what holds significance for him is the act of collective action. He once said the following to confirm this:

I understand my own race and in all my work, lyric or dramatic, I have thought of it . . . I shall write for my own people, whether in love or hate of them matters little, probably I shall not know which it is (Howarth, 1959: 11).

With this quote as a basis, it is unsurprising to discern traces of nationalism in every piece of Yeats' work, including this play. A shared belief in Celtic mythology, namely, the conviction that water bestows immortality or wisdom, serves as the common ground that unites the Old Man and Cuchulainn. Their shared objective transforms them into a small community of two. What binds nations together typically encompasses shared beliefs, a common culture, a shared history, and a common language. Viewing life from a similar perspective gives a nation its uniqueness and sets it apart from others. In this context, the Old Man's plea to Cuchulainn not to depart, along with his assertion that he has nothing left to lose, conveys the idea that unity as a nation is paramount for Ireland. Simultaneously, advising a mythological character not to depart implies that holding onto their cultural origins is the most

beneficial path for the Irish people. Indeed, Eliade's concept of the 'eternal return' becomes relevant once again. What Yeats is striving to convey in this context is the idea of illuminating the future by drawing upon the sacred events and beliefs of the past. In this play, Yeats underscores the link between individuals and the cosmic order by using the symbol of the well, which holds mythological significance, and he reflects his contemporary era through the lens of sacred ancestral origins. Thus, it would not be inaccurate to assert that Yeats, a playwright from Ireland, a traditional society, believed that stability and continuity could be maintained through faith in the concept of eternal return. This notion of eternal return can only be attained by ascribing an extraordinary or, in other words, supernatural quality to an otherwise ordinary phenomenon. Celtic mythology, being a cosmic mythology, plays a significant role in bestowing these meanings. Hence, these mere drops of water emerging from the well hold great value. In other words, the anticipation of water emerging from the well, even if it were to be just a few drops, holds such profound value that the two main characters in the play, who pin their hopes on it, opt to share it.

Old Man. Only a little cupful will bubble up.

Young Man. I'll take it in my hands. We shall both drink,

And even if there are but a few drops,

Share them.

Old Man. But swear that I may drink the first. (Yeats, 1916, 1.200-204)

Here, the willingness of both the Old Man and the Young Man to share the water, even if it is just a few drops, highlights the significance of water as a precious and vital resource. This act of sharing can be seen as a gesture of unity and a recognition of the life-giving properties of water. In addition, this act of sharing can be interpreted in the context of the concept of Eliade's eternal return, the understanding that humans can transcend mundane time through the use of rituals, and establish connections with the eternal by taking action and participating in events in sacred time. The shared belief in the ancient idea that holy water will emerge from a dry well holds significant importance for both individuals. Even though he shows maturity by offering to share the drops of water, "Yeats critiqued Irish audiences and the anticolonial movement through his culture hero in *At the Hawk's Well* by depicting

Cuchulainn as foolish, ignorant, and immature” (McCracken, 2018:13). The theme of immortality subjects both to oldness and youth and meets them at a point in the play. “Cuchulainn is of the heroic type common to Yeats’ plays drawn with particular clarity. He is young, proud, regal, courageous, generous, impulsive, impatient, and self-confident. He reaches out for life, venturing all for it. The Old Man in the play provides a distinct contrast. he is passive, fearful, grasping, and retentive” (Schmitt, 1979: 503). The play draws a contradiction between old and new, dry and wet, life and death. It is accurate to suggest that the themes of contrast, upon which the play is built, are introduced in the song of the second musician during the first scene of the play. This song provides initial information to the audience that the play will be centred around contrasting concepts and ideas. These themes of contrast are likely to play a central role in the development of the narrative and the exploration of its deeper meanings:

Second musician [singing]

The heart would be always awake,

The heart would turn to its rest (Yeats, 1916, 1.19-20).

From this point of view, there exists another dichotomy covering ignorance and knowledge. In this context, the two characters of the play represent this dichotomy. While the Old Man is associated with wisdom, and Cuchulainn, the Young Man can be acknowledged with ignorance. As mentioned before, the Old Man has a chance to complete the journey from ignorance to knowledge when he begs Cuchulainn not to go, who does not want Cuchulainn to stay at first by saying, “But find your sail again and leave the well to me” (Yeats, 1916, 1.144-145). On the contrary, choosing to challenge and fight at any time makes Cuchulainn ignorant as he only believes in his physical power. Similarly, while waiting for a few drops of water from a dry well for years might be associated with the patience and inaction of the Old Man at the same time, Cuchulainn can be defined as impatient and impetuous in order to get what he wants. It is plausible to argue that Yeats, by bringing together two contrasting characters with a shared objective, effectively illustrates his own interpretation of nationalism in this context. A nation comprised of individuals who share the same values, whether they are young or old, such as Ireland, should ideally have a common objective. In a note appended to *Early Poems and Stories* (1925), regarding *The*

Wanderings of Oisín, written in 1889, Yeats proudly declared, “From the moment I began *The Wanderings of Oisín*... my subject matter became Irish”. It would be accurate to say that while crafting the play, *At the Hawk’s Well*, Yeats brought forth mythological elements, with a clear focus on Ireland. As Bradley (2011) articulates on this matter, “Yeats also saw in Irish myth and legend the hidden and primitive religious energies that could be assimilated to Irish nationalism” (18). In writing for his nation with the legends and myths of it, he can be seen as expressing his allegiance to his nation.





5. CONCLUSION

The results of the present study indicate that two plays of the Abbey's playwrights, W.B. Yeats and J.M. Synge, namely *The Well of the Saints* and *At the Hawk's Well*, use mythological characters, symbols, and tales of Celtic mythology in light of Irish nationalism. Considering its history of experiencing many invasions, Ireland is a country that has a unique culture and belief system depending on various rituals and symbols. While these invasions brought diversity to Irish culture, the ongoing challenge has been to establish and safeguard its unique identity. The repercussions of this struggle are not only evident in historical accounts but have also resonated through the medium of theatre, which has served as a platform for conveying messages over the centuries. Nineteenth-century Irish theatre, fortunately, has playwrights who cared about Irish theatre and needed to differentiate it from British theatre. These playwrights were able to depict this struggle in their plays by imbuing their intentions with a nationalist importance. Nonetheless, the struggle they willingly embrace significantly diverges from the violent turmoil they observe in the external environment. Within the context of their plays, these two playwrights explore the concept of nationalism from differing angles but abstain from overtly propagating nationalist ideologies. In the plays that are the focal point of this study, by incorporating elements such as stories, symbols, and characters from Celtic mythology into their plays, Yeats and Synge aim to convey the idea that their concept of nationalism revolves around a return to Ireland's cultural essence. They assert that the strength Ireland requires can be found in the richness of its unique cultural heritage. In an encounter in Paris, Yeats encourages Synge to journey to the Aran Islands with the intention of getting to know the local people intimately and immersing himself in their language. Yeats firmly believes that true proximity to the populace can only be achieved by living among them and gaining profound insights into their experiences and beliefs. He himself pays great attention to such diversities and actively incorporates them into his plays. The shared element in these two plays, which prominently draw from this multifaceted diversity, is the thematic representation of "the well". This recurring symbol, featured prominently in both plays, substantiates that for Yeats and Synge the aspiration to return to the core of their beliefs and rekindle the Irish spirit is conveyed through the incorporation of mythological elements. Since Ireland is naturally suitable for being the centre of supernatural stories, the tales and

sacred symbols that the Celts, who previously ruled Ireland and surrounding lands, developed to describe and give meaning to the universe and nature are inevitably directed towards nature itself. Both plays, *The Well of the Saints* and *At the Hawk's Well*, include the common concept that “the well” that appears and the holy water that spills from this ‘well’ brings immortality, wisdom, and healing to the people who are seeking it. The argument has been made that the terms ‘religion’ and ‘mythology’ have identical points based on the attempt to describe the universe and give it meaning. Eliade (1960) argues in that many features between religion and mythology that help understand the universe and humans exist in both mythology and religion; that is, they both have common features. Additionally, he contends that both religion and mythology incorporate symbols, narratives, and rituals and that the sacred elements and sanctification are at the heart of both. Based on this idea, it has been concluded that many of the elements that Synge and Yeats employed in their plays with the instinct of nationalism have common features, characters, and symbols with the Abrahamic religions, especially with Christianity, which Ireland later adopted, and occasionally with Islam, through the examples and references given from both the Bible and the Qur’an.

In these two significant Irish plays, the well and its sacred water are explored through Eliade’s theory of the dual nature of water, in which he attributes water as both life-giving and destructive. Similarly, in these plays, water appears with this dual aspect: as characters anticipate the water to grant them immortality, healing, and/or wisdom, it often ends up taking something from those people in return. This sacrifice does not typically result in death as in the examples in Celtic mythology, instead, it manifests itself in a different way as is illustrated in *The Well of the Saints* with the characters of Martin and Mary, both of whom willingly give up seeing and prefer blindness after being thrown into a life they are not familiar with. Correspondingly, the Old Man in *At the Hawk's Well* wastes his life in vain by waiting for days and nights with the hope of water emerging from a dry well. However, wasting a life does not occur as physical suffocation, as seen in examples from Celtic mythology, but rather it becomes the representation of spiritual wear and tear. The fact that a Christian priest mediates a supernatural belief with mythological origin in the play *The Well of the Saints* again demonstrates the parallels between religion and mythology. In the play, blindness is considered by Saint as a result of sinfulness, and he tries to cure it

with holy water, which coincides with the belief in baptism in Christianity. In this manner, the term 'rebirth' has come to the forefront. By giving examples from Oedipus, one of the most important mythological stories in which blindness is seen as a punishment and similar stories of Jesus about blindness and healing, it has been proven that the roots of blindness as atonement are not only in mythology but also in Christianity. Furthermore, the dialogues between Saint and Martin have been likened to the squabbles between Patrick and Oisín, both of whom are considered religious figures representing the oppressive regime of religion, in the Osianic ballads dealing with the legends. Along with this allusion, it has been suggested that Martin, seen as a representative of Ireland, opposes this regime out of a concern for preserving the true essence of Ireland. Thus, the term Celtic Christianity, which emerged as a synthesis of both, has been clarified with Lisa Bitel's explanations (2009: 105-110). After Bitel's statements, which described conversion to Christianity in three stages, it is concluded that Celtic identity never disappeared but evolved. In addition, the concepts of blindness and second sight are associated in the play, and despite the common belief that blindness brings wisdom and second sight, Martin's wisdom and second sight are evaluated from a different perspective as blindness is his own deliberate choice.

In another representation of the well, the play *At the Hawks Well* also revolves around the sacredness of water from the sacred well as the main motif. However, unlike in *The Well of the Saints*, here the sacredness of water does not manifest itself through a ritual or any other means. The belief that water will bring immortality dominates the play, but Yeats does not create a scene where water performs a miracle and grants immortality or wisdom. On the contrary, in this thesis, where wisdom is associated with a nationalist perspective, the fact that the Old Man does not want Cuchulainn to leave is interpreted as a gift of wisdom for the Old Man. The dual nature of water is revealed here as it accepts the Old Man's life as a sacrifice and, in return, gives wisdom to him. Moreover, mythological symbols in the play, such as the gold detail, the Hawk-lady, and being assigned of the Hawk-lady to protect the well are associated with the relationship between the hero of Ulster, the famous Cuchulainn, who has a significant role in Celtic mythology, and Aoife. This play is described as the re-confrontation of Aoife and Cuchulainn. This appears as an exact example of Eliade's concept of eternal return. The death of Aoife's child in the mythological story, caused by her father Cuchulainn, is again associated with the story of Oedipus, and

similar and different aspects are identified. The Hawk-lady, who symbolises a grieving mother, and the well, which symbolises the grave of her son, and the fact that the Hawk-lady does not leave the well, are explained by Freud's interpretation of the bond between mother and son. In addition, by giving examples from world mythologies based on these half-human, half-animal figures, it has been determined that the Hawk-lady is both mortal and immortal and takes part in the play as a divine figure. Her feminine side and dance figure are associated with seduction, and her similarity with Salome, femme fatale, is compared through both revenge and a dance figure. In addition, it has been revealed through the analysis of the play that this winged creature is associated with the 'sidhe' in Celtic mythology, and the similarities between religion and mythology are once again underlined by emphasising its similarities with the concept of the angel in the Bible and the Qur'an, which is similar to this winged creature. In addition, Yeats' depiction of the other mythological figure in his play, Cuchulainn, as an ignorant and windy challenger who is entirely different from Celtic mythological tales, has been interpreted as a reaction to the dark and violent side of nationalism. Yeats' understanding of having returned to the essence is understood by only taking what would be useful for his own time from this essence. This highlights again Yeats' sense of nationalism in this specific play. Additionally, the fact that he does not foresee any ending for Cuchulainn is likened to God who does not give a definitive ending for Jesus, explained with examples from the Qur'an and the Bible. Once more, it is found that there are overlaps between the ideas of mythology and religion. As a result, Eliade's concept of eternal return, indeed, the theory that people can be returned to that time in myths, is carried out through the understanding of nationalism in the plays of Yeats and Synge. These two significant playwrights jointly realise this eternal return using the metaphor of a well, or holy water, or what Eliade refers to as 'hierophany'. This hierophany, namely holy water, is illustrated based on Eliade's theory of the duality of water. In a nutshell, Synge and Yeats attempted to give Ireland a distinctive identity through theatre, a medium that has long been used to express political, religious, and emotional convictions. To conclude, Eliade's understanding of both religion and mythology is used to explain the similarities in the essence of the beliefs while creating this originality. It is concluded that religious and mythological symbols in these plays are similar to one another since their primary purpose is to express meaning to the universe.

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ÖZGEÇMİŞ

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Yabancı Dil

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