Introduction

This thesis focuses on the plays of W.B. Yeats (addressed in the title of thesis and hereafter as Yeats) by applying the Post-colonial theory. The thesis studies the plays of Yeats as an intrinsic part of decolonization process, and hence it posits the view that Yeats’s plays have played an important role in the construction of an Independent Ireland by subverting the British form of drama and substituted it by creating a drama that was essentially Irish in form as well as content.

Yeats (1865-1939) endeavoured to gain Independence for Ireland through the creation of national literature. He produced his plays at a time when the question about a viable Irish Identity was gaining impetus. As an Irish by nationality Yeats was well aware of the scenario of biasness and oppression of the nation and the natives under the British Imperialism and the oppressive policies therewith. His plays are strong statements of resistance and an appeal for the establishment of national literature.

Up to the time Yeats produced his drama, the Irish and English stages had exhibited the Irish people as drunken buffoons— the mere comic relief within the serious drama depicting the lives of the legitimate English people. The Irish character was sotted, weak, and corrupt, but was also often feminized— depicted as fragile and in need of the masculine protection of the English government. This feminization of Ireland was used by English propagandists to marginalize the Irish people, marking them as docile and controllable. Even most of the Irish playwrights like Oliver Goldsmith(1728-1774), Issac Bickerstaff(1735-1812), James Knowels Sheridan(1784-1862), Oscar Wilde(1854-1900), and Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) made no contribution in this direction. In the drama as in most else, Ireland had been colonized by England since Plantagenet times. Through most of this long history, Dublin at least, and frequently provincial towns as well, had theaters; but the plays and the
players were almost always English in origin or influence. The many Irish-born or Irish-raised playwrights of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—Congreve, Farquhar, Steele, Goldsmith, Sheridan, etc.—were mainly London men who wrote of London subjects, though their plays had a certain satiric edge to them characteristic of outsiders who saw things more objectively than the natives. In the nineteenth century Boucicault wrote plays on Irish subjects, but their mainstay was a lovable, patriotic “stage Irishman” whose charming but sentimental buffoonery rather compromised the ambitions of the nationalistic Irish to free them of such stereotyping. Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw then let the world know how fertile a country Ireland was for growing dramatic genius, but they were forced by the lack of a native theater to emigrate to London in order to bloom. Shaw wrote a few plays based on Irish matters, with John Bull’s *Other Island* brilliantly satirizing English misconceptions about Ireland, but these plays were sidelights to his main effort, and Wilde wrote nothing specifically Irish at all. And so a truly indigenous drama in Ireland awaited its moment of birth at the opening of the 1890s. If we take Yeats as a representative of the founder’s principles, we assume that he sought drama to be Irish.

The drama that Yeats produced embodied a discourse about the silent strategies of suppression adopted by the colonial English to marginalize the natives of Ireland. The chapters of the thesis will scrutinize the ways in which this discourse has been used by Yeats. How does he address racial and cultural differences? How do the plays bring out the dialectics of Irish nationalism? The thesis through its chapters will further elaborate argument in this respect.

At this point it is imperative to bring in the concept of ‘constructing the nation’ and ‘decolonization’ as used in the thesis. The term, “constructing the nation”, has been used in the thesis in relation to ‘Irish cultural nationalism’. The beginning of Irish Nationalism can be traced back to the history of Ireland and its culture. ‘Cultural nationalism’ in the broader
sense may be seen as a perspective term. John Hutchinson describes nation in his book, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*, as a creative force, an organic being (Hutchinson 13) and the movement of cultural nationalism as seeking to “re-unite the different aspects of the nation – traditional and modern, agriculture and industry, science and religion – by returning to the creative life-principle of the nation.” (14) With this definition Hutchinson agrees that the main goal for cultural nationalists is to provide a strong basis for solidarity that can incorporate and consolidate the different aspects of the nation. He also stresses the significance of creativity – and therefore its main actors, the artists – in the originating and developing process of the new state.

Hutchinson's main contribution, however, is that he does not merely support the above mentioned view on the purpose of cultural nationalism, but that he suggests a methodology to examine its principles and means. Inspiration for the cultural movement had to come from a time when individual aspirations were still subordinate to a greater good and from a time that could be embraced by everyone as their own history. For this, Hutchinson goes as far back as to the origin of the nation's existence, a time characterized by a so-called “creative life-principle” (14). The term “life-principle” can have two different meanings here; the first explanation refers to the nation's original life, namely its earliest ancestors. This means that everyone shares a common ancestry that is generally regarded – in an allegorical sense parallel to that of the Bible – as pure, unspoilt and incorruptible by earthly powers. This bond through blood provides sufficient legitimacy to answer the nationalist call for unity. The second explanation interprets the term according to the principles of the nation's life. Rather than focusing on characters from the past, uniformity is reached here by selecting those characteristics – such as bravery, strength, and honour – needed to ensure the nation's glorious future. Everyone belonging to the nation should then strive to possess and ideally share these same characteristics in an attempt to strengthen homogeneity. Both possibilities
support Hutchinson's theory that cultural nationalism aims at a certain connection of the people through a shared culture and heritage.

Ireland has existed in oral tradition and literary forms before the advent of the English. Before the coming of the Christianity in the fourth/fifth century of the Christian era, Ireland, as David Ross says was an “overwhelming pagan Country. The religious beliefs of the people were focused on nature, the seasons and specific places” (Ross 77). Yeats had much to take from the pagan Ireland that he weaves to a great extent to meet his necessity for cultural nationalism and for that he visited the heroes and legends of the Irish past story cycles. About the Heroes of the Irish story cycles Ross writes:

Emain Macha was the centre-point of another great collection of legends, the Ulster cycle. Its king then was Conchubar mac Nesa, … . The great hero of the Cycle is Cuchulainn, the supreme warrior of ancient Ireland, who figures in many stories and whose character, deeds and life story have a wide range of sources …(74) . The magic world of Cuchulain and Fionn had many elements that continue in the historical period. Champions fighting on behalf of their tribes; a warrior caste whose task was to attend on the king and fight for him;…(76)

The presence of the English in real sense was felt in the 12th century A.D. as G. M. Trevelyan in History of England says, “The English conquest of Ireland began during the twelfth century in the reign of Henry II”(202). Goldwin Smith in A History of England mentions that, “The English rule in Ireland reached its peak in the reign of King Edward I, because this powerful king paid attention to affairs which enabled Ireland to flourish for a period of time especially in the such regions in which the English influence was strong as Leinster and Meath” (63). Post this there remained many highs and lows of the imperial
regime in Ireland but the Imperialism continued till the 20th century until after a struggle for centuries and immediate revolutions in the nation and literature, Ireland gained independence. As per Ross, “It was in Ireland that England’s most successful and long lasting form of imperialism showed its strength: the adaptability and flexibility of its language to embrace the mind-set of a different people and become its vehicle for self expression”(Ross 166). As the purpose and argument of the thesis does not have much to do with detailed history of Ireland and Irish culture and literature hence the attempt has been made in the aforesaid to have an overall idea of continued imperialism for centuries and the effect it had on the life of people vis-à-vis culture and literature of Ireland.

The other aspect ‘Decolonization’ is the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms. This includes dismantling the hidden aspects of those institutional and a cultural force that had maintained the colonialist power and that remains even after political independence is achieved. Initially in many places in the colonized world the process of resistance was conducted in terms of institutions appropriated from the colonizing culture itself. This happened since early nationalists had been educated to perceive themselves as potential heirs to European political system and models of culture. This occurred not only in settler colonies where the White colonial elite was a direct product of the system but even in colonies of occupation. Although the Irish were white and European, at least geographically, yet the colonial outlook regarded them as inferior to the superiority of the English. Ania Loomba in her book Colonialism/Post-Colonialism recounts the observations of Charles Kingsley returning from his first trip to Ireland: ‘I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. … But to see white chimpanzee is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours’( Ania Loomba 109). An instance of that can also be seen in Macaulay’s infamous “1835 Minute on Indian Education”, which had
proposed the deliberate creation in India of just such a class of ‘brown white men’ (Macaulay, 1835), educated to value European culture above their own. This hegemonic process of control is just one example of the colonial strategies to maintain power. The aspect of decolonization can be best understood from Frantz Fanon’s famous work, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Although the book itself tells the story of the Algerian struggle against its colonizer France, there are some interesting points which can be remarked about decolonization in general and that can be later applied to Ireland and Yeats in particular. Fanon describes very clearly how difficult it is for a colonized nation to impose its own culture and language against the oppressing political, military, and cultural force.

A single preordained theoretical model has not been used in this study as the issues involved require the use of Marxist Criticism as well as the postcolonial literary theories. The thesis applies key concepts of colonial discourses such as the hegemonic control, race /ethnicity, essentialism etc.

In the analysis of Yeats’s plays the issues related to race and ethnicity are drawn from Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* and *The Black Skin White Masks* (1967). Fanon in these works argue that colonialism annihilates the native and makes him something less than a human. This is achieved by the emphasis on the psychic difference where the native psyche is repeatedly represented as savage and ‘treated’ as inferior. These concepts together have been used to analyze Yeats’s play from a postcolonial angle.

‘Race’ is a dominant variable that calls attention. It is particularly pertinent in the rise of colonialism because the division of human society is inextricable from the need of the colonialist powers to establish dominance over subject people and hence justifies the imperial enterprise.

By translating the fact of colonial oppression into a justifying theory, however, spurious, European race thinking initiated a hierarchy of human variation that has been difficult to
dislodge. Race though not an invention of imperialism quickly became one of its most exhaustive tools. Though the physical difference in the colour of the skin does not count for intellectual caliber, yet with the rise of the European Imperialism; such a distinction between superior and inferior finds its most ‘scientific’ confirmation in the most dubious analysis and taxonomy of racial characteristics. Imperialism to gain ground propagated the concept of racial improvement through the feigned civilization mission. The colonial powers took up the ‘white man’s burden’ to improve the condition of the inferior races who were represented as childlike, malleable and incapable of self improvement. The empire did this through the mode of liberal humanism which coupled with the ‘civilizing mission’ became a mask for the naked exploitation by the colonizer.

The empire propagated the concept of ‘race’ in such a manner that it became anything and everything as per its requisite. If the difference in the colour was not sufficient for the empire to proclaim itself, its other connotation appeared. Race became culture and also gender. ‘Race’ with all its connotation is a social construct and literature is a reflection of society, it is in the literature that the social constructions are put to test. By testing the value of the social constructs in literature hopes, fears are betrayed. Narratives are both the substance of culture and the place where the borders of culture can be drawn. In Yeats’s plays the concept of race is used to represent the cultural contradictions between the Irish-whites(Celts) and the English Whites.

The case of natives of Ireland is still not different from that of other colonies. The Irish were white and European, at least geographically, yet the colonial outlook regarded them as inferior to the superiority of the English. Ania Loomba in her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* recounts the observations of Charles Kingsley returning from his first trip to Ireland: “I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. … But to see white chimpanzee is dreadful; if they were black, one
would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours”(109).

The concept ‘Postcolonial’ will not be applied in the narrow meaning of the term which designates it as ‘post-independence’ period, which is irrelevant to the Irish situation as Ireland is a nation of ‘Gaelic or celtic’ as well as early settlers. The term is being used to signify the political, linguistic, and cultural experience of the Irish people. Stephen Slemon assumes that ‘the anti colonialists’ resistance writing may termed reactionary documents as they spring from the suffering of the oppressed(Slemon 9). Whether Yeats’s resistance is reactionary is debatable, will be evaluated in the chapters.

Yeats’s programme of decolonizing drama was very obvious in the invocation of the writing of the American Renaissance as models for his own plays. His notions of nationalist literature were derived from Walt Whitman that the man or woman of genius moulded the nation rather than being made upon its mould. Yeats’s commitment was to create an indigenous theatre and bring upon the stage deeper thoughts and emotions to evoke passion in the people. He in this sense was the first author from a colonized nation who consistently appealed through his art to dispel the shadow of cultural dependency by the light of his imagination. He left in his wake the mirage of a unity between a culture and its people that started in late 19th century and continued to shimmer even at present time.

To Yeats the term national literature would encapsulate Irish folk culture and mythology. He hoped to make his poetry and drama a medium to foster nationalism and construct a nationalist ideology. He worked profusely for Irish cultural and literary renaissance. Being born in Dublin towards the end of the nineteenth century, Yeats could not escape from the influence of the Irish literary revival in the 1890's. Lured by the ideas of national pride and the rescuing of their tradition as a nation, he saw in Celtic mythology and Irish themes a rich source for his poems and plays.
The attitudes of the early nationalists were imbied with the cultural and social values they had been taught to regard as those of a modern civilized state, consequently political independence did not necessarily mean a wholesale freeing of the colonized from colonialist values for these along with political, economical, and cultural models persisted in many cases after Independence. Ireland is also such a colony where this indirect control on cultural models became apparent in continuing the Eurocentric practices which privileged the imported over the indigenous, colonial languages over local languages, writing over orality and linguistic culture over inscriptive cultures of other kinds (dance, graphic arts, which had often been designated as ‘folk-culture’).

Over all these occlusions and over-writings of pre-colonial cultural practices, a number of programmes of decolonization have been attempted. Notable among these have been those that seek to revive and revalue local languages. The decolonizer resists and overthrows the colonial hegemonic practices by returning back to indigenous languages and cultures. However the decolonization process does not end here. It involves not only a programme of cultural recuperation but also re-valuation. W.B. Yeats’s drama is also an example of this programme of recuperation and revaluation of Irish folk literature and culture as well as language. The thesis demonstrates that Yeats's desire to bring forth the ritualistic origins of the drama is intimately connected with his aim to make the audience participate in the re-actualization of exemplary actions in the past heroism so as to encourage them to assume a heroic posture and to shake them out of their gravity in an attempt to restore their sense of national identity. Yeats strongly reacts against the commercial drama and theatre vis-à-vis the abusive materialism of his age. He goes back to Celtic roots and uses folklore and mythology to proceed the national rejuvenation in the Irish people and the nation on the whole.
His friendship with Douglas Hyde, Stephen Gwyn, John O’Leary, Michael Davitt, Maud Gonne and other important leaders brought him close to many nationalist movements and associations like Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) which spearheaded the issue of Independence of Ireland. In 1980 Michael Davitt and Charles Stewart Parnell founded ‘Ireland Land League’ to evacuate English landlords. Yeats’s family had returned from London to Ireland by this time (as his family used to shift between Sligo, Dublin and London). This was an eventful time of the beginning of the end of the British Empire, the fall of feudalism in Ireland, the renewed struggle for mastery in Europe, the widespread collapse of cultural optimism, and the difficult birth of modernity. John O’Leary (1830 - 1907) is probably the most important person Yeats meets in his life due to the contacts he makes through him and the profound influence O’Leary has on both his personal and professional life. Under the influence of O’Leary Yeats joined IRB in 1887, which boosted his spirit as it regarded literature essential to nationalism. They shared poetry, views on Ireland – political and other – and its future, and exchanged thoughts on how to build a nation where everyone felt at home. O’Leary supportive Yeats’ creativity as well, finding a market for his literature and giving him a chance to meet with his public in order to understand it better. But in the end it was his passion and conviction that appealed to Yeats the most and that continued to inspire him. A large part of this fascination for O’Leary came from the timing when the two men met. This was the time when Yeats abandoned art as profession in favour of literature. In the same year the Home Rule Bill was also defeated in the parliament that aroused the nation towards violence, riots and killings.

Yeats' encounter with Maud Gonne was the beginning of a lifelong devotion that lead him to write his most intimate and affectionate poetry and impressive drama. He wrote The Countess Cathleen and Cathleen ni Houlihan – in which she played the leading role and thus Yeats paid, the greatest respect by identifying her with the legendary queens and heroines of
Celtic Ireland. She was also his Diana, Deirdre, and Helen of Troy, but to no avail, Yeats' feelings for her were not reciprocated and time after time she refused his proposals until in 1903 she married the nationalist John MacBride. Despite her refusal to be together, she remained an important source of inspiration and her passion has undoubtedly incited Yeats' own creed. Yeats was shocked and devastated, but even after this she continued to be his Muse.

Over the years Yeats developed very honest patriotic convictions. His activities against the British actions made him an open protestor and he became an active member of IRB from 1896-1900. As a nationalist with a vision to revive the nation he helped to found ‘Irish Literary Society’ in London in 1891 and in Dublin in 1892. One way of working for the unity and nationalism was to resurrect the ancient Irish language and publish translations of its myths, legends and folklore. Douglas Hyde (the first president of independent Ireland) founded the ‘Gaelic League’ for this purpose in 1893 that also brought Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory, J.M. Synge, and Edward Martyn as the votaries of ‘Irish National Theatre’. As the founder of ‘Irish Dramatic Movement’ Yeats had the idea that the cultural unity of his nation was especially to be created by dramatizing Irish myths and legends and by their performance awakening heroic passion dormant in the racial memory. This becomes more evident from the book of David Ross: Ireland: History of Nation, where he says:

An Irish past of kings and heroes was useful in the political dimensions, for those of Patriot convictions. Here was evidence of Irish greatness at a time when England and English language did not even exist. The rediscovery of the intelligentsia of Western Europe, of Irish people’s ancient culture meant little for the majority of Gaelophone population, however Irish was still very much on the retreat (182).
Yeats however did not abandon the use of English language rather by the use of Irish rhythm and style, he developed a drama which may be termed as transcultural. The patent contradiction was of an ‘Irish National Theatre’ staging plays in English. How could a literary movement be in any sense national when the interest of the whole nation lay in extirpating the condition which produced it? He deflected the challenge which it posed to the creative writing. In 1892 he solved the problems by insisting that a national tradition can be built by using English, “… can we not have a national literature which shall be nonetheless Irish in spirit and English in language?” It could be done “by translating and retelling in English which shall have an indefinable Irish quality of rhythm and style, all that is best in ancient literature”.

Yeats being a writer of the conscience toiled hard to carve a niche of Irishness in his Drama. In 1923 when he was awarded the Nobel prize for literature, his entire speech was focused on Ireland and Irish Drama, titled “The Irish Dramatic Movement” in the very beginning of which he asserts:

I have chosen as my theme the Irish Dramatic Movement because when I remember the great honour that you have conferred upon me, I cannot forget many known and unknown persons. Perhaps the English committees would never have sent you my name if I had written no plays, no dramatic criticism, if my lyric poetry had not a quality of speech practised upon the stage, perhaps even - though this could be no portion of their deliberate thought - if it were not in some degree the symbol of a movement. (William Butler Yeats - Nobel Lecture: The Irish Dramatic Movement)

All throughout his career and much more after his death Yeats’s literary achievement and his turbulent life have been the focus of interest and criticism. There is no shortage of literary
criticism and evaluations on different aspects of his life and works; on the contrary there is a
great deal of critical material on Yeats. One remarkable point about Yeats is the breadth and
variety of his interests and works: magic, occult, theosophy, politic, culture, Irish nationalism,
theatre management, philosophy, public speech, lyrical poetry, essay-writing, drama, short
stories. Another is the persistent development and improvement of his works.

Yeats is undoubtedly among a few writers who created excellent and memorable work
which maintains their highest level of achievement throughout his long career, even up to the
last years of his life. Yeats’s Irish Nationalism is an umbrella topic which encompasses the
dramatist’s interaction with Irish tradition, including Irish folklore, legends, and mythology.
His relationship and contribution to that tradition, and its effects on his thought and writing
has been one of the most important subjects that Yeats’s criticism has dealt with since the
outset. So has been the issue of Yeats’s Irish lineage, his literary background, and his uneasy
connections with both the Protestant Anglo-Irish and the Catholic Irish. Coming from the
mixed background of an Anglo-Irish family, which in the eyes of the native Catholics were
associated with the English colonizers, Yeats was always anxious to prove his status as an
Irish poet and dramatist, and apart from an early brief period, he tried hard to concentrate on
an Irish subject-matter in his writings. In his youth one of his recurrent mottos was that
Ireland is the true subject for the Irish. His interest in the Irish peasants and their lives; his
untiring work on collecting Irish folklore and mythology, and his contribution to the Irish
literary revival, were all means towards realizing that motto. However, in his middle and later
period, and following his disappointment with and estrangement from mainstream Irish
nationalism and the emerging Catholic Free State, he turned towards a different version of
Ireland, an eighteenth-century Protestant-ruled Ireland with an Anglo-Irish tradition.
In 1899, along with Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn, and George Moore, he established the Irish Literary Theatre to promote Celtic and Irish plays. His own plays range from the dream-laden *The Land of Heart’s Desire*, the controversial *The Countess Cathleen* and the explicitly nationalist *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* to the more artistic and experimental plays of his middle and late periods such as *The Player Queen*, *Fighting the Waves*, and *Purgatory*. Above all he was interested in employing music and poetical speech in his own plays and endeavoured to create a kind of poetic drama in which speech had a prominent part over action and scenery. Yeats was introduced through Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenellosa to Japanese Noh drama, which inspired some of his plays such as *At the Hawk’s Well* and *The Death of Cuchulain*. Yeats’s borrowings from Noh tradition has been an important subject discussed by some critics. Moreover his involvement in the Abbey theatre both as a playwright and as a practical theatre manager has been the focus of a considerable number of critical studies.

In 1899 Yeats asked Maud Gonne to marry him, but she declined. Four years later she married Major John MacBride, an Irish soldier who shared her feeling for Ireland and her hatred of English oppression: he was one of the rebels later executed by the British government for their part in the Easter Rising of 1916. Meanwhile, Yeats devoted himself to literature and drama, believing that poems and plays would engender a national unity capable of transfiguring the Irish nation. He (along with Lady Gregory and others) was one of the originators of the Irish Literary Theatre, which gave its first performance in Dublin in 1899 with Yeats’s play *The Countess Cathleen*. To the end of his life Yeats remained a director of this theatre, which became the Abbey Theatre in 1904. In the crucial period from 1899 to 1907, he managed the theatre’s affairs, encouraged its playwrights (notably John Millington Synge), and contributed many of his own plays. It is no longer strange for us to consider Ireland a source of great literary talent; the superabundance of Irish literature in this century
has found an admiring audience in every part of the world. The incredible success of such luminaries as Joyce, Beckett, O'Casey, and Yeats tends to obscure the fact that until the turn of this century Ireland had nothing resembling a literary tradition. It did, however, possess a remarkable heritage-the Celtic myths.

To a great extent, we can attribute the emergence of Ireland as a literary power to the revival of interest in these myths brought about by William Butler Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory, AE, and a somewhat reluctant John Millington Synge. In particular, it was the dynamic relationship between Synge and Yeats - the two most prominent writers of the early Irish Renaissance-which provoked an ongoing exploration of what it means to be an Irish writer; we find in the works and beliefs of these two men the ideas which would give form to a national literature. As Philip L. Marcus has brought to our notice in his book, *Yeats and the Beginning of the Irish Renaissance*, Yeats's goals in this venture of forming national literature find their most efficient and eloquent expression in his proposal for the founding of an Irish National Theatre:

We propose to have performed in Dublin in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will insure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in the theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an
ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us (278).

Yeats’s proposition is no mere a call for the production of new works; new works in themselves are not enough. Yeats is beckoning for a new species of literature and a new audience to receive that literature; his hope is to dispel any aura of inferiority in the Irish mind.

To understand specifically what Yeats is demanding we need only to consider a few of his central propositions. Immediately we take notice of his insistence that plays be "Celtic and Irish ... [and] written with a high ambition." At first one might suppose Yeats means only a revival of the old Irish myths for stage presentation; this response is at once both correct and short-sighted. Indeed, Yeats did aspire to revive an interest in the Celtic myths, but mere retelling would result in creative stagnation and repetition. What Yeats wants, what he means by "high ambition," is a dramatic literature which at once turns towards the past for inspiration ("ancient idealism") and displays innovation by endowing those stories with relevance to modern concerns.

Such high aspirations are necessarily difficult to realize, and Yeats wisely notes that success depends as much on the audience as it does on the works being produced. Yeats's rhetoric seeks an "uncorrupted," "imaginative," and "tolerant" audience because without these characteristics, the plays would certainly fail. "The freedom to experiment" is absolutely necessary for the difficult task of creating a body of uniquely Irish literature, not only because Ireland had "no viable dramatic tradition" but most importantly because these experimental plays were to be unlike anything found in English theatres (Marcus 278). For their tolerance,
audiences would be rewarded with the representation of "an ancient idealism"; no longer would they have to writhe in their seats at portrayals of buffoonish and sentimental Irishmen.

We finally see Yeats's proposal as a means of uniting a politically and religiously divided Ireland. The success of the theatre project depends on a cooperative effort between artists and audiences. Yeats is attempting to unite Ireland under the one thing all of its people share-the Celtic inheritance, the "ancient idealism" of what was once one of the most powerful and influential cultures in the western world. Now we can understand Yeats's concluding remark; a national literature need not be a nationalistic literature. Although many of the plays would address political and religious themes, their true aim would be to educate the Irish people about themselves and their glorious past.

Yeats's manifesto is not only confident and ambitious, but also highly idealistic. Such proposals are bound to attract criticism, but what is fascinating about the Celtic Revival is that much of the opposition to Yeats's ideas stemmed from groups (even other playwrights) who were sympathetic to Yeats's cause. The Gaelic League, for example, agreed that the Celtic myths were excellent sources for new literature, but they also wanted to revive the dying Irish language as the only acceptable tongue for Irish writers. Yeats, who did not have understanding of Irish language, argued that Irish themes expressed in an Irish dialect of English would distinguish these new works from everything else written in English; more importantly, English is a world language. Plays, poems, and novels written in Irish would have a very limited audience; those same works written in English would spread Ireland's greatness across the globe. John Millington Synge, a fellow playwright, had similar ambitions for Irish literature and was a close companion of Yeats. It is all the more ironic, however, that Synge, whose skill at capturing the Irish dialect in written English is perhaps unequalled, did not adhere to Yeats's other ideals. Among the latter that became part of the Abbey Theatre’s
repertoire are *The Land of Heart’s Desire* (1894), *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), *The Hour Glass* (1903), *The King’s Threshold* (1904), *On Baile’s Strand* (1905), and *Deirdre* (1907). As the founder of ‘Irish Dramatic Movement’ Yeats had the idea that the cultural unity of his nation was especially to be created by dramatizing Irish myths and legends and by their performance awakening heroic passion dormant in the racial memory. His Drama mostly seems to be a dialogue between the self and state, individual and authority.

After three years of employing English players in performing the plays of the Irish Literary Theatre, the two brothers, Frank J. Fay and William G. Fay, who were amateur Irish producers, formed a company of amateur Irish actors because they felt that the Irish dramas should be acted by Irish actors instead of the English performers, who misused the Irish accent by making it a medium for amusing the English audience.

This company, called the Irish National Dramatic Company, incorporated with the Irish Literary Theatre, and this led to the establishment of the Irish National Theatre Society whose presidency was given to William Butler Yeats. This society got the patronage of an Englishwoman, called Miss A. E. F. Horniman, who rented the old theatre of the Mechanics’ Institute in Abbey Street renovating it at her own expense and presenting it freely to this society with a small annual subsidy.

After its restoration, the old theatre of the Mechanics’ Institute in Abbey Street was renamed the Abbey Theatre and opened at the end of December 1904 with Yeats’s play, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. This theatre confronted, at the beginning of its foundation, difficulties because of the sparseness of its audiences, the inexperience of its players, the dissensions among its members, and the discontinuity of the annual subsidy presented to it by Miss Horniman in 1909.
But, in spite of these difficulties, the Abbey Theatre was the centre of the Irish
dramatic movement, which aimed at presenting Irish plays performed by Irish actors and
written by such Irish dramatists as William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory, John Millington
Synge, George William Russell, Edward Martyn, and Sean O’Casey. This theatre was also a
reaction against the complication of the dramatic production, which was current in the time of
its foundation; therefore, simplicity and bareness characterized the plays which it produced.

Yeats however did not abandon the use of English language rather by the use of Irish
rhythm and style; he developed a drama which may be termed as transcultural. The patent
contradiction was of an ‘Irish National Theatre’ staging plays in English. How could a
literary movement be in any sense national when the interest of the whole nation lay in
extirpating the condition which produced it?

His greatest concern was to celebrate Irish peasantry that he took to be cardinal model
of Irish cultural nationalism. Yeats, Lady Gregory, Hyde and other authors rely heavily on
the inexhaustible source of folklore because they were conscious that old stories transmitted
from generation to generation by the culturally and politically oppressed peasantry constitutes
an essential element of the Irish identity. The Irish literary theatre is largely responsible for
this vision of rural Ireland and for the ascendance of the peasant as a figure of quintessential
Irishness. The peasant rose to prominence in part because writers like Lady Gregory hoped to
revise Victorian depictions of Ireland and its blarney-speaking and whiskey–swilling. Yeats
and Hyde established a new theory of the peasant which distanced peasant narrators from
their stereotypical ignorance in an attempt to secure literary, as well as aristocratic origins for
their folktales. Yeats became an expert on Irish folktales; steeped in the Irish past, he was not
much concerned with modern-day life. But, as he worked to establish an Irish theater and
became more involved in politics, his subjects and style changed to accommodate the practical realities of contemporary society.

Yeats was the prime founder of the Irish Dramatic Movement. He contributed to a great extent to set up the national theatre and giving a different identity to Irish Drama. He has been analyzed variously as occultist, fascist, modernist, romanticist and post-colonialist. Yeats’s life and work are open to many analyses and interpretations. T.S.Eliot, Richard Ellman, R.F Foster, A. Norman Jeffares, Seamus Deane, David Pierce, Marjorie Howes and F.A.C Wilson, Mary Trotter etc. have been the influential critics to value Yeats’s works.

Edward Engelberg in *The Nature of Yeats's Symbolism* (1918) acknowledges Yeats’s symbolism routed in magic.

Francisco Javier Torres Ribelles in his article, “Predetermination and Nihilism in W. B. Yeats's Theatre” proclaims that Yeats's theatre is affected by a determinist component that governs it. This dependence is held to be the natural consequence of his desire to create a universal art, a wish that confines the writer to a limited number of themes, death and old age being the most important. In the paper Francisco Javier also argues that the determinism is positive in the early stage but that it clearly evolves towards a negative kind. In spite of the playwright's acknowledged interest in doctrines related to the occult, the necessity of a more critical analysis is also put forward. The article of Francisco goes on to suggest that underlying the negative determinism of Yeats's late period there is a nihilistic view of life, of life after death and even of the work of art. He concludes by arguing that the Yeats may have exaggerated his pose as a response to his admitted inability to change the modern world and as a means of overcoming his sense of impending annihilation.

Roland Schuhard in the Essay, “Yeats in the Extremis” is of the view that Yeats had a death vision. After serious premonitions occurred during the autumn of 1937, he actively
began to stage the approaching personal drama in his poetry and plays, summoning his chosen death-companions—the mythological Cuchulain and his band of fierce horsemen, the heroic Pearse and his Cuchulain cult of 1916—and creating out of dreams and ghostly shades a phantasmagoria through which he could dramatize his death-vision, one worthy of a poet’s life, worthy of being received into an ancestral night by his oath-bound companions.

Louis Macniece in the *New Republic* (1940) regards that Yeats had two great passions- Ireland and Art. Peter Ure in *Yeats The Playwright* (1963) focuses on the philosophical mythology and dramatic experimentation of Yeats. W.A. Armstrong in the introduction of *Classical Irish Drama* (1964) says that the cultural unity of his nation was especially to be created by dramatizing Irish myths and legends and by their performance awakening heroic passions dormant in the racial memory. John Rees Moore in *Masks of Love and Death: Yeats as Dramatist* (1971) brings into context the interpretive reading of his plays vis-à-vis his literary patriotism and his poetic ideals and how they are put in the plays.

Phillip L. Marcus in the article, “Artificers of the Great Moment: An Essay on Yeats and National Literature” Talks to great extent about the literary development of Yeats and the challenges he had to face throughout his life and career. To him the young Yeats was a nationalist in politics, but virtually none of his early writing had any obvious and direct political import. It was later on that Yeats gained tempo for nationalism and creation of Irish national literature. As per Marcus, Yeats wanted a literature that would be national but high in literary quality, not mere propaganda but nevertheless a force in shaping the lives of the many as well as the few. Yeats would have to base much of his own hope to shape Irish life, and imaged also a mode of influence that went deeper, was more basic, more organic than oratory, journalism, and propaganda.

Seamus Deane in *Celtic Revivals* (1985) debates over the position of Yeats as a Postcolonial writer by calling him a strong cultural nationalist and more profoundly political
dramatist than O’Casey. James Mcfarlane in *A Commentary on the Plays of W.B.Yeats* (1991) describes Yeats as part of the neo-modernist Movement in the twentieth century European drama. He extends his views on Yeats development and contribution as a dramatist and is of the view that Yeats toiled hard for having excellence in the field of drama.

Norman Jeffares in the Introduction of the book, *W.B.Yeats:Selected Poetry* that Yeats’s aims were to write for an Irish audience and about Ireland—to recreate a specially Irish literature. At first he drew upon the fairy and folk tales.


Sunil Kumar Sarker in the book *W.B. Yeats: Poetry and Plays* (1997) feels that like in poetry, Yeats played a major role in the plays also. He brought the verse drama from the limbo and added myth and mask to it with extreme courage and skill. Sarker feels that Yeats, as T.S. Eliot did later on, deliberately introduced myths in his plays. He also accentuates that the dramatic skill in Yeats was not a serendipity, but was acquired by him through hard labour and wide experience. That’s why he feels that it was Yeats who, along with Lady Gregory, founded the great Abbey Theatre; and moreover, for a considerable time he was the director of the same. He admits that Yeats was sincerely interested in drama and theatre. He also believes that Yeats’s plays are not realistic, but ritualistic and symbolical. Yeats made a dichotomy between the natural and the transcendental, and only the latter was his concern.
Sarker is of the view that Yeats wanted to move his audience not in their conscious level of mind, but in the unconscious level of it and that it was for this reason that Yeats resorted to myths, symbols, mimes, and masks. With these paraphernalia, he wished to liberate his audience from the trammels of the conscious mind.

Edward Larrissy in the book *W.B. Yeats* (1998) is of the view that it is meaningful to think of Irish writing as the product of a colonial and post-colonial society. In this case he thinks of Yeats’s interest on the occult, and the Masonic connections of the Order of the Golden Dawn, in the light of the Yeats’s Anglo-Irish background. He acknowledges in the book that where others might have been satisfied to read about magic, Yeats joined an order of magicians. Where others might have been satisfied to try and give Ireland a dramatic literature by writing plays, Yeats had to help found a new national theatre and then help to run it. And where as others sympathesized with the cause of Irish national liberation Yeats joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Larissy studies Yeats by a Marxain cultural criticism vis-à-vis deconstruction. Larissy believes that Yeats had the belief that any developing culture will pick up the threads of all the Irish traditions, and make some imperfect attempt at unity.

Jahan Ramazani in “Is Yeats a Post Colonial Poet?” (1998) brings out an idea that with influences on writers as diverse as Derek Walcott and Lorna Goodison, Raja Rao and A.K. Ramanujan, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka etc. puts him in the post-colonial tradition of hybridization and concludes that as a nation-maker and a writer of hybridization Yeats should be considered an anti-colonial writer. Ramazani also puts that championing a new Irish Literature in English, Yeats sparred with the proponents of Gaelic in terms that anticipate the postcolonial debate over language. When Douglas Hide, like the Gikuyu writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o, argued in 1892 that decolonization of the mind required a return to the native language, Yeats responded that by writing a new literature in English and translating old Irish
stories they would do more to de-Anglicize Ireland than by longing to recall the Gaelic tongue.

Yeats is regarded as a dramatist with a purpose by Christopher Murray in his essay “Yeats’s Theatre of the Heart” published in David Pierce’s *W.B.Yeats: Critical Assessments* (Vol.IV, 2000), showing that as a playwright Yeats wanted to enter the imagination of the people, having installed there images and codes of self-understanding for the expansion of consciousness. He thinks that Yeats’s enterprise may be seen as fundamentally political. For all his dislike of Ibsen’s prose plays Yeats saw himself as replicating in Dublin Ibsen’s valiant attempt to found a Norwegian National theatre in Bergen. Murray do opines that Yeats’s reading of Shakespeare led him to translate or transform Shakespeare’s success with the history plays into a model for the creation of modern national consciousness. He asserts that Yeats may be called a seminal figure in the growth of modern Irish drama, not just because he had the energy, skill, and authority to establish and maintain the Abbey Theatre but because it was he who first formulated the role of the Irish dramatist as a shaman, as the outsider/insider with the power to bring wholeness and self-knowledge to a community. He made serious theatre possible in Ireland. Murray goes up to the extent of saying that in addition to the historical achievement in creating a national theatre for Ireland Yeats left a double legacy. He has influenced the development of modern Irish drama by providing a powerful alternative to realism and secondly truth in art and that insistence on verisimilitude has remained a permanent feature of the Irish drama. Ramazani also finds out that Yeats characterizes Spenser as not only a worse person because a colonial administrator, enthralled with efficient brutality on behalf of his beloved imperial state, but also a worse writer, poet, blind to the Irish landscape he lived in and deaf to the great indigenous poets and writers around him. He views well that like other postcolonial writers whose nations have been threatened with erasure, Yeats affirmed his indigenous identity.
About the individuality and occult theatre Marjorie Howes in the essay “From Where the Mob Becomes a People”, published in David Pierce’s *W.B.Yeats: Critical Assessments* (Vol. IV, 2000), says that this individuality was compatible with Yeats’s wish to occupy the state of the leader or magician who transforms the masses. She does feel that Yeats studies has been to treat occult as either a symptom or a cause of what is less than desirable about Yeats’s politics. She is of the view that many of the things Yeats understood by the term ‘magic’ formed an explicit and important part of his practical, material political thinking about the problems he associated with mass politics. She agrees that Yeats’s nationalism of theatre do not need unmasking, they are explicit and insistent. In the essay it is also felt that the major aspect of Yeats’s theory of the theatre- ritual, symbol, pattern, rhythm-were all important elements of occult theory and practice. And these patterns were designed to foster national unity by accessing the unconscious and emotions of the audience through a process like hypnotism and transporting them to an alternative psychic realm.

Barbra Ann Sues in *Progress and Identity in the Plays of W.B.Yeats, 1892-1907 (Ireland)* (2000) says when read in a cultural context, Yeats’s plays become dramatization of a crisis of social as well as individual identity. A. Norman Jeffares in *W.B.Yeats: A New Biography* (2001) says that Yeats in his discussion of how social politics might affect Ireland, he felt that he could affect Ireland’s future-nature.

David Pierce in his article, “Cultural Nationalism and the Irish revival”(2002) takes into analysis the historical development of the Irish literature and goes on probing into the role of Yeats and other writers vis-a-vis their contribution as well as their growth at Irish literary platform. He dwells on the questions of Yeats interests in the native language as well as making English a language other than that of the English. Pierce throws light on the establishment of the Abbey Theatre when he tells that on their estates in the west of Ireland, Lady Gregory and Edward Martin planned with Yeats and Moore the establishment of what
would become a national theatre. And every folktale collected by Yeats and Gregory would become ammunition in the struggle for a separate identity.

Yeats’s distinguished scholars Mary FitzGerald and Richard J. Finneran in the introduction of their edited volume of The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats Volume VIII: The Irish Dramatic Movement (2003) gathers together— for the first time— all of the poet’s time-honoured essays on the drama and the groundbreaking movement that led to the enduring Irish theater of today.

Brendan McNamee in his views in the article "Whatthen?": Poststructuralism, Authorial Intention and W.B. Yeats (2005) shows how Yeats himself embodies and mirrors the conflict of textual criticism in his work, both textually and thematically, and how the most important aspect of this conflict, for Yeats and for literature in general, is that it remains unresolved. Contrasting the ideas of E.D. Hirsch with those of Jerome McGann on the textual side and with those of Stanley Pish on the theoretical side, Mcnamee seeks to highlight some limitations of the poststructuralist position, and also to show how these two apparently disparate schools of thought, traditionalist and poststructuralist, can occasionally exhibit some surprising affinities.

He thinks of Yeats as a particularly apt lens through which to view these conflicting theories, both textual and literary. On the one hand, his work exhibits a yearning for unchanging permanence, and a belief in "monuments of unageing intellect" while on the other, there is a pulling towards a joyous acceptance of everything that impermanent, ever changing life has to offer.

Rob Doggett in his book, The Deep Rooted Things: Empire and Nation in the Poetry and Drama of William Butler Yeats (2006) examines Yeats’s shifting relationship with the discourses of British cultural imperialism and Irish nationalism during Ireland’s transition from colony to (partially) independent nation in order to provide new, historically grounded
readings of his poetry and drama. It demonstrates how Yeats’s writings represent a thoroughgoing and often conflicted response to the multiple and competing formulations of identity, nationhood, and history central to these discourses and to the broader pressures, ambiguities, and paradoxes of (post)-coloniality. Focused on the key historical events that he witnessed and on the nationalist movements that he both embraced and resisted, Doggett reads the core features of Yeats’s aesthetic program, his tendency to reinvent himself as an artist and to privilege contradiction over resolution, as repeated attempts to provide in art a foundation for national unity throughout this period of transition or national crisis. He attends to those ambivalent moments in Yeats’s verse and drama that, because they exceed ready-made political labels, prompt us to reexamine and to reformulate our understanding of the complex and pervasive relationships among literature, colonialism, and nationalism. The chapters introduce, combine, and reconfigure elements from more broad-based discussions of Postcoloniality. As per him ‘For Yeats, who associates Western modernity not only with the apotheosis of British imperial culture, industrial capitalism, and bourgeois society but also with the emergence of empirical, rational, scientific, and utilitarian modes of thought, the West is less a geographic space and more a form of consciousness’.

Matt Hoyt in the article, “From Rebel to Revolutionary: The Evolution of the Irish Outlaw and the Reluctant Irish Revival Author”(2011) is of the view that for revival authors like W.B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory, their understanding of the Irish outlaw stemmed from their occupation with West Ireland. The poorly-educated Irish peasantry who occupied these depopulated lands symbolized the limits of English influence and the purity of Irish heritage. As Yeats and Lady Gregory broke away from garrison ways of exploring Irish culture, they physically immersed themselves in this pure landscape. In West Ireland, Yeats and Gregory experienced Irish folklore, myth, and legend firsthand. Hoyt says that popular conceptions of Conchubar and Fergus, recorded by Yeats and Gregory, represent the Celtic
heritage of outlaw-lore. At the same time, however, Yeats and Gregory also recognized the presence of a modern outlaw. Both Yeats and Gregory composed accounts of the “Cathleen ni Houlihan” myth and, likewise, Lady Gregory’s “The Rising of the Moon” conceived the outlaw’s ideal function in Ireland. At other instance Hoyt posits the view that While Yeats and Gregory offered the initial vision of the free Irish ideal, J.M. Synge followed suit with his dramatic theater. As a historical figure, Synge resisted his evangelical family. His occupation with the imaginative reality of Ireland, coupled with an ongoing theme of rebelliousness, naturally led him to the Irish outlaw.

Hana F. Khasawneh in the article; “An Aestheticizing of Irish Peasantry” (2012) acknowledges that that the vitality of peasant culture with its vivid, even violent antagonism toward modernity is a rich source of inspiration to W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, Douglas Hyde and many other revivalist authors. The Irish peasantry and their folk tales are significant means of establishing a legitimate Irish voice. Yeats’s constant references to countrymen and country women gesture toward rural Irish people and forge a linguistic link between rural identity and national identity: an assertion of essential Irishness that surely did not escape Yeats and many other Irish writers. The Gaelic attitude to Irishness is equated very much with the peasantry. The peasant stands as a national archetype and thus Ireland becomes purely a peasant nation. Yeats presents a distinctive culture of folktales, dances, sports, costumes, all seamlessly bound by the Irish language. Khasawneh shows that Yeats urged Synge to stop trying to be a French symbolist writer and to return to Ireland to study peasant life and search Irish roots for subject, theme and language. Synge did to the glory of the Irish oppressed peasants. Khawsaneh has a strong belief that the Irish peasantry that is transmitted in dramas, poems and stories leads to the birth of Ireland free from the British authority. Thus, the stories of Yeats plays were not being the fantasies of a picturesque peasantry but rather a reflection of the essence of a group that began to rise culturally and politically after
centuries of colonization. The peasant stands not only for Ireland’s victimization, ignorance, vulgarity and poverty but also for nobility and solemnity. No dramatization or portrayal of the Irish peasant by Yeats was free of the shadow and the presence of the English colonizer. There is a close link between Irish peasantry and nationalism.

Yeats has been recognized to be the cardinal man of letters for the Irish Drama. By delving into the Irish world and native culture he subverts the accepted picture of Ireland as a colony of England. It is due to his anti establishment stance that he has been called as the “Artificer of the Great Movement”(Marcus) of the modern Irish drama as well as a nationalist dramatist. But the interpretations have not developed into a strong sustained argument that bring out the relationship of the form and content of the plays as an integral part of Yeats’s Ideology of resistance in the form of decolonization.

Critics have barely discussed and attributed some of the plays of Yeats in the light of his Irish nationalism and mostly have concentrated on his background and his sympathy towards the Irish people or his philosophic concerns on the modern life vis-à-vis his vision. But the thesis posits the view that Yeats’s concern was not superficial and surpasses his biographical origins. He had a true empathy and diehard love for Ireland, its people and its past. His position because of his parentage was also of a colonizer, an outsider. He was an Anglo-Irish, whose parents though English had settled in Ireland. His sense of resistance and zeal for Irish Independence, his sympathy for the natives and love for the Irish myths as brought into his drama raise some questions and conditions to be understood to the core as the vehicle for decolonization and establishment of Irish Nationalism. This thesis in this regard studies Yeats’s The Land of Heart’s Desire, Countess Cathleen, Cathleen ni Houlihan, The King’s Threshold, The Green Helmet, On Baile’s Strand, The Dreaming of the Bones,
The Purgatory, and The Death of Cuchulain in the light of the argument summed up in the preceding paragraphs.

The plays of Yeats dramatize a dialectic character of a colony. All throughout the plays there is an interlocuting idea of colonizer and the colony. Yeats’s plays are here forth interpreted as projections of the ethos and emotion of the natives, a reaction of the culture, of the native heroic passion as that of an outlaw against the colonial presence and dominance which continues to impose the colonial perspective. Through his plays Yeats takes up the measures to assert the superiority of the native identity against the superficial colonial identity imposed on them by their colonial past.

Yeats for this purpose chooses the language of the colonizer to represent the natives thus iconoclasting a notion that representing an indigenous culture with the language of the empire serves as another form of colonization. Resistance theory in the Post-Colonial literature refutes the notion that idea of representation also connotes further subjugation and suppliance. The Literature of resistance uses the language of empire to rebut and spring against its dominant ideologies. In other sense it is the Calibanistic tendency of refuting back or writing back: speaking either of the discriminatory oppression and dualism of the colonizer or the inherent native cultural richness of the indigenous people or some time contrasting both the cultural stereotypes.

The views of Yeats are endorsed in his plays where from one could make out the necessity for resistance and decolonization. They are a part and parcel of the political and intellectual programme to raise the native ethos and transform the consciousness of the oppressed native/ colonized, fill it with passion, more or the less hypnotize the senses and make them understand the oppression at an unconscious level that later draws a passion for native identity and nationalism in them. Yeats’s plays seek to reinstate the marginalized in
the face of the dominant, thus inverting the socio-cultural, politico-literary structures of domination. His plays delve into the pre-colonial as well as the present Irish identity and explore the desperate situation of the not realized but inferiorised identity by the assumed dominant colonial structure. To which Yeats finds an answer by reverting the native back to the celebrated Irish culture and Gaelic identity. It is the mean through which a native identity can be reinforced and decolonization can be achieved.

The thesis does take into context the way in which the drama of Yeats characterizes the Post-Colonial decolonization as an agent for the laying of the counter discourse to the once dominant imperial discourse, writing against the dominant Anglo-centric system of understanding and writing about Ireland as a local construct with native Identity breaking the imperial stereotypes and asserting the local construct with fully connectable meaning and value.

The thesis, besides the Introduction and the Conclusion has four chapters. The first chapter titled Social Realism and Escapism: *The Land of Heart’s Desire* makes an in-depth study of Yeats’s play *The Land of Heart’s Desire*. The form of the play of Yeats suggests a tension between realism and escapism. This tension becomes highly pronounced in the play. Yeats’s desire for the revival of Irish folklore and Nationalism is depicted through the protagonist of the play Mary Bruin, who chooses to escape from the social reality of the Christian-world to the mystic fairy-world. The escape of the protagonist here therefore becomes a highly sophisticated political tool of cultural assertion. The form of the play has not been interpreted so far in terms of how it encompasses the socio-political scenario of Ireland. The chapter argues that the writer’s technique of merging the opposite modes, the realistic and escapist reflect the dialectical interaction of the colonizer and the colonized in Ireland.
The main assumption in the chapter is that literature is a social product arising like every other cultural artifact out of the dialectical interaction between a historical consciousness and social reality. In interpreting the play the views of Raymond Williams as well as of Lukacs’s concept of social realism has been applied. The theme of the play revolves around the main protagonist Mary Bruin who along with a fairy child escapes into the world of Irish mysticism. The Land of Heart’s Desire is based on the theme of Irish cultural realization leaving the own dominant culture and religion aside. The play has an allegorical significance to achieve a ‘Utopia’ as desired by heart. The ‘Land’ for Yeats was never a place but site for struggle. The play is important, being in the tradition of folklore. In the play a contradiction in between Christian consciousness and pagan ambitions is brought out. The play revives the pre-Christian or pre-colonial Irish peasant folklore. The whole play is ground of confrontation between the native Irish consciousness and the dominant imperial Christian consciousness. Yeats in the play achieves to defeat the Christian consciousness by making it helpless in the hands of the native consciousness of the occult world of fairies. The imperial consciousness is finally totally dominated and superseded by native, and once the native consciousness dominates no power remains in the hands of the colonial. The native power overcomes the imperial morally and culturally. The critics have interpreted the play in simplistic terms of a revolt on the part of Mary Bruin against the family life and the materialistic values of the society. The Chapter contradicts such simplistic interpretation and develops the argument in a cultural cum political context of the strife between the colonized and the colonizer.

The second chapter titled National Awakening Through Martyrdom: Countess Cathleen and Cathleen ni Houlihan analyzes and makes an in-depth study of Yeats’s major Plays The Countess Cathleen and Cathleen ni Houlihan. The two plays have been widely criticized as a bleak documentation of the lives of the natives. The plays of Yeats give a
scathing criticism of the English society for marginalizing and discriminating against the Irish. It is due to this anti-establishment stance that Yeats’s plays depict his strong sense of Irish nationalism and resistance against the English colonizer. But the interpretations have not developed into sustained arguments that bring out the relationship of the form of the plays as integral to Yeats’s ideology of resistance. The main assumption in the chapter is that literature is a social product arising like every cultural artifact out of the dialectical interaction between a particular historical consciousnesses and social reality. It contains in it the gaps and silences signifying the writer’s understanding of the class position. The mystic and ritualistic modes of his dramatic representation have been used as effective tools of the representation and assertion of the native culture over that of the imperial British, of the colonized over the colonizers. An attempt has been made in the chapter to show that it was the production of these two plays that resulted into the historical revolution called ‘Easter Rising’. This argument has been further developed in the plays. The play *The Countess Cathleen* is based on the theme of suffering of the downtrodden. The whole play is seen as a confrontation between the opposite of colonial materialism and native sacrifice. The chapter uses Frantz Fanon’s concept of ‘Race’ as used in his *The Wretched of the Earth*. The chapter explains through this play how colonization annihilates the native and makes him something less than a human. It shows how by emphasizing on psychic differences, the native psyche is repeatedly represented, savaged and treated as inferior.

The theme of the plays in the chapter is inter-related as both the plays are for national awakening though the story line differs. The play *The Countess Cathleen* is a curtain raiser for national awakening with the theme of self-sacrifice vested with collective consciousness and revival of the Irish folklore. This was a play with assertions and contradictions of Christian piety and pagan blasphemy, and non-Christian or pre-Christian Ireland. Through repeated references to the classical mythology of the Celtic peoples and Cathleen’s obsessive
Christianity, we begin to see that the basic conflict of drama includes the opposition of two historical ages. The character of Countess to some extent was inspired from Maud Gonne who was an ardent Irish revolutionary. There is notable empathetic zeal of sacrifice for the people of the land; for the Countess Cathleen sacrifices her soul for the sake of feeding her people in the time of famine in the country. The other play which has been a complete genre of Irish nationalism in itself: *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* brings us much nearer to the Irish reality and nationalistic movement. The drama is conceived in terms of conflict between an ideal cause (national liberation) and private or personal good (marriage and material ease). The play was considered the most direct appeal Yeats ever made to militant patriotic emotion. At any rate the effect of the play was so great that the authorities evicted the company from the little hall on Clarendon Street after a week. The play served as a call for Irishmen to help the metaphorical Mother Ireland evict “the strangers”, from her house---strangers who have taken her four green fields (Ulster, Munster, Leinster, and Connacht). She acknowledges her call as demanding “hard service”, but claims that those who take up her cause will be remembered forever.

The third chapter titled Re-living the Heroic Age: *The King’s Threshold*, *The Green Helmet*, and *On Baile’s Strand* analyses the Cuchulain Plays of Yeats. The Chapter focuses on the issue of celebration of native heroism, power, possession and conflict as also death and destruction coming as the Issues of cultural nationalism. The plays under focus are *The King’s Threshold*, *the Green Helmet*, and *On Baile’s Strand*. The chapter is a mirror to the heroic age of the Irish past and brings forth the desire of Yeats to instill the ideal of heroic passion into the people of Ireland. There are varied issues in the plays as in *The King’s Threshold* Yeats delves deeper down into the myths and legends of Ireland. This play has the theme of revolt against authority. Yeats wrote in a note to the play, “It was written when our society was beginning its fight for the recognition of pure art in a community of which one
half is buried in the practical affairs of life and the other half in politics and a propagandist patriotism”. Although Yeats was referring to the period of 1903 the condition he speaks of did not essentially change for many years to come. Yeats was a tireless fighter for the central position of art and the artist in any society that pretended to be a great civilization.

The Green Helmet is a deep plunge into the Celtic Cuchulain cycle of folklore for construction of an Independent Irish identity. It offers a picture of magnanimity, joy, and spontaneity of a truly Irish heroic personality derived from actual Irish myths. This play restores the essential nobility, harmony and honour to Irish culture. It is in the manner of Frantz Fanon’s assertion in *The Wretched of the Earth* as a decolonizer’s ‘decision’ “to go back further and delve deeper” into the native culture and myths. It is worth mentioning that Yeats’s preoccupation with reviving Irish folklore also allows him to access the new constructions of Irish nationality. The open-handed heroism of Cuchulain in *The Green Helmet* is exactly the ideal conduct of Yeats’s wish to restore heroism to modern Ireland.

*The Baile’s Strand* (1904) is about the continuation of the Celtic mythical model in which the hero is degraded when exposed to courtly manners and acceptance of authority. The tragedy is the taming of the hero whose wild anarchy is subdued and power subverted. The result of such subversion is annihilation. The play presents the annihilation of the hero in the state of dispossession and powerlessness, where anyone can reduce him to dust or nothingness.

The chapter takes into account Hutchinson’s concept of Cultural Nationalism where the above mentioned plays become the models of Cultural nationalism that relate the position of the imperial culture and discourse. Simultaneously Fanon’s concept of Decolonization does find the space in the theme of the plays.

The fourth chapter Titled Consummation: *Dreaming of the Bones, Purgatory, and The Death of Cuchulain*, analyzes Yeats’s Plays namely *Dreaming of the Bones, Purgatory, and The*
Death of Cuchulain. The chapter discusses the end of Yeats’s Nationalistic Vision and the ordeal of gaining nationalist momentum from the death which arouses the passion of belongingness to the nation as an Individual identity. The chapter discusses the fact that the work of art has much to relate to a nation than mere history and myth which is its realization of the present realities and also that death and destruction is ultimately imminent to the weak and powerless.

The Thesis ends with the Conclusion that Yeats has successfully constructed the Nation in the form of Irish Cultural Nationalism through the means of ‘decolonization’. Yeats is able to give voice to the voiceless and the oppressed and brings vibrance into the nation and its people. He is successful in bringing the lost identity back through decolonizing the imperial stereotypes and asserting the native and indigenous. Yeats’s plays depict concerns and relationships that epitomize change, progress and self identification as also the flaws, the repercussions. The form, style and structure of his plays have a variety but fits well into the content and mode of representation.