Cathleen ni Houlihan: A Dual Perspective of Disability Studies and Postcolonial Studies

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Abstract—Disability studies generally registers disability as a social and political phenomenon; as against one of personal affliction, and it aids us in understanding the power and oppression in diverse contexts, whereas postcolonial studies allows for a wider-ranging investigation into power relations as to how they occurred. Recent studies have found, in terms of empowerment and inferiority, there is a notable convergence between disability studies and postcolonial studies. The image of crippled Ireland has been formed in the lengthy history of colonization through the practice of othering, and this image of disempowerment has already been extensively represented in the annals of Irish and British literature. The play Cathleen ni Houlihan, by William Butler Yeats, conveys a national call to promote national identity. The story-line of the play is very dramatic and emotional by the famous transformation of Cathleen, from a feeble old woman to a vibrant young girl, which symbolically manifests a re-establishment of not only Ireland’s youthful vigor, but also its native powers of creativity and capability, as an independent nation state. As the play contains numerous representations of physical and mental disability, an interpretation of the dual perspective of disability studies and postcolonial studies provides a new understanding of how literary works present complex and intricate insights into the politics of disability and provide multifaceted illustrations of the disabled images.

Index Terms—disability studies, postcolonial studies, Cathleen ni Houlihan, othering, physical disability, mental disability

I. INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the mid-1990s, disability studies has become increasingly dynamic in American and European critical discourses. In the past three decades, disability studies have registered disability primarily as a social and political phenomenon, instead of simply personal misfortune. So from this perspective, disability studies encourages us to understand more accurately past acts where power and oppression have been administered in a variety of contexts. It interacts energetically with other research fields, like queer studies, gender and performance studies, race studies, and postcolonial studies, etc. From such a stream of historical literature, many of those relating to postcolonial countries are occupied describing crippling events such as war, civil unrest, and lasting poverty; and generally lead to the occurrence of disabling events. Postcolonial criticism can thus be defined as the “analysis of cultural forms which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relations of domination and subordination—economic, cultural and political—between (and often within) nations, races or cultures” (Moore-Gilbert, 1997, p. 12). Representations as to disability in postcolonial literature do help to improve, substantiate, and serve as critiques of the relations as to how empowerment and subordination can shift over time. A fresh understanding of how literary works can provide complicated and nuanced insights into the politics of disability, and multiple illustrations generated through disabled imagery is gained by an interpretation of the dual perspective of disability studies and postcolonial studies. These are the very issues which draw attention to the subtleties of social, cultural and political persuasion. Consequently, updated readings of literary narratives assist in accounting for the multiple viewpoints of the diverse cultural contexts, which may beset a nation state, as to a sense of disability, and now much highlighted, in postcolonial writing.

Cathleen Ni Houlihan (hereinafter Cathleen), a one-act play by the famous Irish poet and dramatist William Butler Yeats; in collaboration with Lady Gregory, an Irish dramatist and theater manager, first appeared on the play list produced by the Abbey Theatre in 1902. Written and produced for convinced and patriotic Irish nationalist audiences, Cathleen serves as a beacon, a milestone in the Irish literature revival, which is closely allied with a strong political Irish nationalism emerging at that time, and fosters an energetic revival of interest in Ireland’s Gaelic literary heritage. No other work by Yeats more clearly expresses the Irish people’s cry to terminate its subjugation to British rule than this play. Needless to say, the play engages directly with Yeats’s primary concern—the exploration of postcolonial national identities and politics, and its clear message certainly has a major propagandizing effect upon its already loyal audience.

As a nationalistic drama, Yeats in this pivotal play sets up a background of the 1798 armed uprising in Ireland. It commences on the eve of the 1798 rebellion, in a cottage in the West of Ireland. The Gillane family is discussing the imminent marriage of their eldest son, Michael, when suddenly their discussion is interrupted by the arrival of a stranger, a mysterious Old Woman. At first, Michael is distrustful and remains close to the door, far away from the
wandering beggar, while his parents welcome the feeble stranger with open arms. The Old Woman speaks in an elevated and poetic way, recounting a tale of being ejected from her home, and how far she has traveled, complaining of “too many strangers” (Russell, 1966, p.222) in her house, and that they have usurped her land, taking her “four beautiful green fields” (p. 223) away. Cautiousness about the Old Woman’s real identity then emerges among the Gillane family. The Old Woman continues to enlist the help of “friends”, who might chase the strangers out. After she provides a verbal list to Michael, a list of heroes, who have “died for the love of [her]” (p.224), Michael, under the enchantment of the Old Woman, forgets his betrothal, and follows her out of the cottage, and fights for the cause of Irish independence and nationalism. His family then is in confusion, and the younger brother, Patrick, who has passed the Old Woman on her way from the cottage, denies having seen an old woman, but utters the famous conclusive line: “I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen” (p.231).

Yeats concludes Cathleen with a transformation of the Old Woman into a young girl with “the walk of a queen”, as if in a fairy tale! This transformation is undeniably symbolic, representing Michael’s devotion to the Irish cause; that it has revitalized Cathleen and turned her into a young beauty. Not only does this symbolic change signal a return to youth, but it also portrays power and capacity to fight back against oppression. Cathleen’s transformation is caused by Michael’s readiness to risk injury or death in the impending war, one which is doomed to be a failure; even though the foundation of a fit and healthy country is invariably at the expense of the health, even the loss of a fit and able younger generation. Thus it can be seen that a disability studies interpretation of Cathleen can help to focus on the portrayals of physical and mental disability cropping up in Ireland’s long-established history of colonization under British rule, and the stereotypes of disability suffered by the Irish, in failing to cast off the yoke of the British Empire. Furthermore, for the purposes of this article, a postcolonial reading might serve as a crucial point of departure for the analysis of disability representations showing power and empowering to a certain group.

II. ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN DISABILITY STUDIES AND POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

The significance of postcolonial studies, has been fairly recent, and came to prominence in the 1970s; with Edward Said’s Orientalism, which was published in 1978, being regarded the start of this field of academic inquiry. Clearly postcolonial critique provides the platform for a broad examination of power relations in a variety of colonial contexts. Postcolonial studies, as an umbrella term, is spawned from the roots of literary criticisms, and is originally applied from the more conventional mode of literature studies. The focus of postcolonial studies covers the global impact of primarily European-based colonialist take-overs of distant lands, where its researchers investigates the complexities of: colonial, neocolonial, and postcolonial identity issues, and related same to a sense of national belonging; and more recently globalization. It commences with the historical, socio-economic, and cultural legacies of European colonialism in previously colonized nations and cultures; as well as more recently the impact of global capitalist concentration; and the nascent inequalities of power thus arising.

Disability studies is a new dynamic inter-disciplinary field founded on the principle that the disability is not an individual affliction, but rather a social category made meaningful by the “cultural ideals of normalcy, productivity and reproductivity, and progress” (Quirici, 2015, p. 74). With the book Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body (Davis, 1995), Lennard J. Davis pioneers the field of disability studies in both criticism and theory, showing how the main determinant is a social construction; rather than a universal constant. Davis commences the book with a critique of “normalcy,” which functions to stigmatize those with different or limited abilities in determining what is normal and what is abnormal. As a result of such ground-breaking work, disability studies is now acceptably related to literary studies, for it is dynamical in a wide array of contemporary theoretical sources; which include: psychoanalysis; cultural studies; feminism; and especially body studies. Critics of literary disability studies investigate disabled characters in canonical works by mostly non-disabled authors. In addition, more recent scholars have drawn attention to the frequent metaphorical use of the notion of disability, which adds to the meanings of disability in texts (Krentz, 2018). Under the dynamics now currently arising, scholars working in this field have called attention to how disability works in literature, by means of complicating texts; expanding their relevance; and changing the way we understand various kinds of narratives. More recently, scholars seem especially interested in how gender, sexuality, race, and class overlap; as well as how social construction and chosen identities intersect. Furthermore, charges have been laid that disability studies has focused mainly on narrative fiction and autobiographies, whereas scholars in this field have also addressed other media such as film, drama, and poetry. Additionally, since disability studies is closely associated with identity studies, it also focuses on the way that identity relates to the body, and on the social constructions of marginality and normality.

So now, considering the extensive nature of disability as a trope—as to its lack of critical interaction within postcolonial studies, the notion of the interplay of disability theory within postcolonial literary work, is just now in its infancy. Many scholars, however, are beginning to contribute tremendously to this field by seeking clarifications, so that the relationship between disabled and postcolonial subjectivity is now being articulated more explicitly; for an example view Sherry (2007); who states that “the rhetorical connections that are commonly made between elements of postcolonial ism (exile, diaspora, slavery, etc.); and experiences of disability (deafness, psychiatric illness, blindness, etc.)” (Sherry, 2007, p. 10).

1 All subsequent quotations from Yeats’s plays will be taken from this book and will be cited parenthetically.
In one of the most persistent postcolonial narrative tropes that have been employed by creative writers and critics alike, disability becomes an embodied marker of the “damage” experienced by postcolonial nations and communities. Further connections can also be easily made between the supposed physical and emotional dependency of people, with that of disabilities, and the economic or political “dependency” on the international support of emerging postcolonial nations (McRuer, 2007). In addition, the term “narrative prosthesis”, proposed by Mitchell and Snyder (2000), shows convincingly that disability crops up frequently within creative writing, as it did with Yates in 1902, as a most powerful storytelling tool, in representing other conditions of disempowerment and lack of deviance. It is in this sense that disability is a trope for social ills, and people with disabilities who live on the margins of social power and cultural value, do continue to suffer from inner othering.

After an in-depth review of the studies concerning *Catheleen*, the author hereby notices that, few researchers refer to the play from the double perspective of disability studies on the one hand and postcolonial studies on the other. The author tends to demonstrate this point with reference to *Catheleen*, a play often read as an example of postcolonial national allegory, and whose protagonist, Catheleen, could be characterized as the personification of “Ireland the mother” calling for the fight of a young man for the Irish to break off the overlordship of the British Government. Hence this article focuses on representations of disability in *Catheleen*, through disabled characters, both physically and mentally, in order to emphasize the need to read disabled characters in terms of environment, culture and politics rather than exclusively as aesthetic devices. The dual lenses of postcolonial and disability theory help, therefore, to draw attention to the cultural, and political history of Ireland and England and their impact on the representation of disability. Through the analysis of the play’s postcolonial politics and disability representations, the author shows how literary narratives can present complex and sophisticated insights into the aesthetics and politics of disability.

### III. Disabled Ireland: Process of Othering

Edward Said, argues in *Orientalism* (Said, 1978), the first milestone book in the field of postcolonial studies, that that the colonizers see themselves at the center of the world, while the colonized are regarded to be on the margins of civilization. Such kinds of images are constructed by Western (or Occidental) artists, writers, and colonial administrators, which is in reality a distorted mindset image possessed by the conquerors (regardless of whether their original homelands are in the East or the West: not on observable facts but on preconceived notions about a fundamentally exotic and alien “Other”). This practice of judging all who are different, as less than the strengths of their own culture is called “othering”, and it divides the world between “us” (the “civilized”) and “them” (the “others” or “savages”) (Tyson, 2006, p.437). Unfortunately, the so called “savage” is usually considered evil, as well as inferior (the demonic other) for the purpose of demonizing the colonized culture. So from the perspective of disability studies, these colonized identities are described in different ways, in terms of physical degeneracy, psychological dysfunction, behavioral disorder and/or a supposed or limited intellectual capacity.

What many people do not appreciate is that in fact until the close of the last Ice Age, Ireland and Britain were part of the same land mass and of the same Eurasian species, which in part contributes to England’s unnoticed colonization of Ireland, and therefore in reality, there is a great pity is that Irish culture has long been marginalized under British hegemony. Declan Kiberd suggests that “the English helped to invent Ireland” (Kiberd, 1995, p.1) for the purpose of colonization and Ireland is always viewed as “a flawed version of England, but not in itself” (Kiberd, 1995, p.14). In this process of othering, numerous cultural and literary images lead to the representations of a disabled Ireland. In literary works from the nineteenth century onwards, the Irish culture has been without foundation by some ultimately represented as a negatively disabled one. The savage and merciless campaigns over centuries like Vikings invading Britain from the eighth to tenth century AD beset Ireland correspondingly with British colonists taking over prime arable land for their own purposes and at times causing great famine amongst the Irish inhabitants. So, *for Irish writers and both Irish and English audiences in this period, stereotypes of physical difference and the corresponding negative social constructions of weirdness, feebleness, reliance, interdependence, paresis blindness, and excessive imagination all seek to negatively define what Ireland is and how Ireland functions*. As the century progressed and as Ireland continued to evolve hanging onto its own home-grown cultures; as did those of Scotland in the preservation of their Gaelic Language, unfairly the Irish nation as a whole became in many eyes “disabled” cultural space in its everyday functions and meanings.

Because English families as colonists initially with their granted land-holding rights—often through force of arms—crossed to Ireland, and there began to exist as a functioning binary of Englishness and Irishness. The Englishness of an individual, with higher education and privileges, became the norm of social success, while the native Irishness and its cultural conditions were considered sub-normal and irrational, which to great part was highly emotive because they had no power over their own land with much of their menfolk devoid of education doomed to farm laborers beholden to English landlords, who had been granted their native lands and heritage; and were doomed to be rated as social failures being denied secondary and tertiary education of any substance. Hence the Irish over time were defined by and were considered rooted within the notion of disability, and stereotypes of aggressive barbarity and dependent femininity dominate representations of the Irish, both invoking unfitness. Female personifications of the land and sovereignty occur throughout the Irish literary tradition, from the earliest examples in allegorical sovereignty texts of the early medieval period to the use of the sovereignty goddess motif as a standardized trope in classical praise poetry. *Caitlin Ni*
Uallachain (1845) does not appear as a political symbol in the nineteenth century nationalist ballad tradition in the English language. Ireland-as-a-woman was depicted as a feeble, unstable, and dependent person; while the barbaric and simian Fenian was an atavistic criminal whose degeneracy signified evolution gone wrong. Additionally, the modern empire’s “semi-colonial” Ireland was depicted to be Britannia’s mal-functioning or sick sister. For example, the cartoons in Curtis’s Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature (1971) portray Hibernia, as an intensely feminine symbol of Ireland, leaning on Britannia, rather than standing or walking independently—a fragile damsel in distress, relying on her stronger sister for protection and support. Postcolonial feminism holds the view that females in colonized land undergo dual oppression of not only colonial power, but also the hegemonic power established by indigenous men, after the colonialism phase is over. It is, therefore, suggested that Ireland as a dependent female by nature, is unfit for freedom and therefore indispensably reliant on the British Government for their ultimate succor.

While tracing from the seventeenth century, drama in Ireland clearly suffered from its colonization by England, as well as its people. There were even no genuine Irish theaters and dramas prior to the Irish literary revival at the turn of the twentieth century. After seeing the arts and the humanities as crucial areas through which Irish identity and ultimately independence can be gained, there did then emerge a literary revival out of the ashes of Parnell’s Scandal², which was at hand in the 1890’s. It evolved around, a calling for Irish artists to seek out Ireland’s folk traditions and folk memories as well as political themes. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the nascent literary revival strived to rejuvenate Irish literary and cultural traditions; even though they had been progressively demolished over hundreds of years due to British colonization. It belatedly served as a new means of expressing their sovereignty and a commitment to a renewal of Ireland’s national identity. Yeats led the enterprise, which through great endeavor and pride achieved nothing less than “a renovation of Irish consciousness and a new re-vitalized commitment and understanding of local politics, economics, philosophy, sport, language and culture in its widest possible sense” (Kiberd, 1995, p.3). No other work by Yeats in his presentation of Cathleen could more clearly express the cry to arouse nationalistic feelings, and to revive a glorious past and memories of previous heroic days, and to mount more concerted protest against the atrocities inflicted on Irishmen by the British in their various subjugation campaigns.

Thus most evidently, Yeats’s play entitled Cathleen serves to be of profound significance in terms of Irish nationalism, at that critical time, when it was put on in 1902; for it acts as the trigger of a national Irish rejuvenation. Yeats, in collaboration with Gregory, through the representation of the disability of the Irish, physically and mentally, evokes the emotion of typical young people in Ireland to devote themselves to the cause of national revival, even though, for the part of audience, they know the results of the 1798 rising, and therefore, Michael’s engagement in the battle does put him at serious risk of severe wounding or even death. The famous transformation at the end of the play, incredible and instantaneous as it is, brought about by the willingness of the young man to lay down his life, is infinitely desirable for a nationalist community since quite clearly it restores to that country from an oppressed state of colonization to a new renewed sovereignty.

IV. REPRESENTATIONS OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL DISABILITY IN CATHLEEN

Cathleen was the most mobilizing of revivalist work in the context of colonial portraits and political representations of Ireland as a disabled and incapable kingdom. The plot is simple but effective, and it is about an old woman, a supernatural mother-figure, who lures the young Michael to dedicate himself to the enterprise of the Irish revival. It is a political rather than a strictly sexual devotion in the context of Ireland’s attempt to awaken from the nightmare of his history, since the Old Woman proclaims blood-sacrifice as the only means to redeem the nation, and in return she promises (to Michael) that “They shall be speaking forever. The people shall hear them forever” (p. 231).

There are numerous examples within the play which articulate diverse forms of disability—both physical and mental. The first scene of the play shows the audience a room within a house and a family in the room, which is a token of normality, of ordinary, familiar life; while into the room enters a stranger, whose status may be questionable: does she belong to the same “real” world as the ordinary figures within the house, or to some other world? The stranger, “The Poor Old Woman”, who symbolizes colonized and impoverished Ireland, actually seeks independence from the British Government. As a stranger, she has come to the countryside of the cottage in the west of Ireland, to enlist the help of the Irish in retrieving her four stolen fields. She persuades Michael to abandon his home and join her cause. His sacrifice, along with the sacrifices of others, transforms her old age into youth, and then she steps from the Gillane’ door a young queen. The appearance of the stranger may have conceivably disruption of normality. Private hopes and dreams, represented by Bridget and Delia, the parents, stand for the normalcy of common life, but the appearance of Cathleen disrupts this normalcy. The conflict Yeats identifies between the “cause of Ireland” and the “private hopes and dreams” of its citizens is an enormously important aspect reflecting the clash between normalcy and abnormalcy.

For most people, Cathleen is a drama of transformation at different levels: a young man being transformed into a soldier who devotes himself to the revolutionary cause, and an Old Woman, who symbolizes Ireland, into a young girl. During the process of these conversions, Yeats, consciously or unconsciously, depicts the Old Woman with disability at different levels. The Old Woman, although not described explicitly as sick or disabled, experiences weariness and pain

² In 1890, Charles Stewart Parnell, head of the Irish Nationalist party, was being cited as co-respondent in divorce proceedings between Captain and Mrs O’Shea.
from the sustained toil of wandering the roads (Quirici, 2015, p. 81). She describes the negative effects of her exile on her body, as well as her spirit: “Sometimes my feet are tired…they think old age has come on me and that all the stir has gone out of me” (p.222). Despite the passion in her heart, people regard her body as debilitated. In the play’s conclusion, after Michael pledges to fight, Patrick reveals that the woman has transformed into “a young girl” who has “the walk of a queen” (p.231). Three things however about Cathleen have changed: her age, her mobility, and her apparent social class. Old age and tired feet hinder her no longer. She who has appeared as a beggar, is revealed as a queen, with her sovereignty signified not by dress or appearance, but by her walk (Quirici, 2015, p. 81).

The symbols of disability are prevalent throughout the play, but what is under the surface? Beyond doubt, if Cathleen is an allegory of the Irish body politic, the Old Woman is crippled by colonialism; rather than inherently unfit for freedom. Her fatigue is the result of dispossession and exile; as she wanders the roads, because strangers have dispossessed her. Thus, Cathleen’s debility is framed as a function of exile. The play’s conclusion registers her rehabilitation through a phrase—the walk of a queen—that equates capability with social rank and political sovereignty. In this reading, Cathleen’s status as debilitated or capable is indispensable to social and political perceptions of power. It should be noticed that unlike other literary works related to a female leading role, the word “beautiful” does not appear in the text at any point in its composition; young Cathleen’s ability was always more important than her appearance. This emphasis on youth and mobility, rather than on beauty, offers a means of linking Cathleen to discourses and reflections of Ireland as “crippled” by colonialism. As already highlighted in literary works, disability imagery, has long been a potent signifier of Ireland’s political disempowerment and colonial subjugation. The Old Woman’s debility is generally interpreted as tragic and disempowering, for prejudice against the disabled body confers privilege, by comparison, on the non-disabled body. Thus representing an autonomous nation as healthy and robust is clearly signified of Cathleen as the “young girl” with “the walk of a queen”; therefore, such a visage provides a direct illustration as to the value of independence.

However, there is another aspect of mental disability in the play, and the possibility of mental disorder in both the Old Woman and Michael introduces a tragic element to the play. Namely, Bridget and Peter manifest their mistrust of the Old Woman by doubting her sanity. In the play, Cathleen shamelessly talks about the numerous young men who have fallen in love with her. The people in the cottage are thereby stunned. Most women will not show off how many lovers they have had; much less what a terrible outcome the love affairs have been for the men involved. Who could have ever loved her? And why? It seems that what all she needs is their help; because she is a sufferer; someone has taken her lands; and thereby she requires a defender. The mental disability is described by Yeats using traditional folk expressions that invoke both illness and the supernatural variously as “from the North,” (p.224) “astray,” (p.222, 224) and “the touch.” (p.229). The folk expressions used by Bridget and Peter, imply that the Old Woman is for them a supernatural figure since Irish folk culture is associated with many of supernatural figures which relate to illness. When Bridget asks, “Is she right, do you think? Or is she a woman from the North?” (p.225). With the suggestion that the Old Woman may be “from the North” (p.224), Bridget voices her fear and her hostility to the Old Woman. Apparently, if the Old Woman is the one “from the North” (p.224) with a hand in the supernatural, her influence on Michael must be unnatural, and for Bridget, unwanted. In her formulation, the Old Woman is either “right” or “from the North”. Mindful of these idioms, using the word “astray” to describe the Old Woman’s exiled state, invokes a twofold meaning. She is “astray” in wandering the country, but Peter also implies that her mind, not just her feet, roams: “Her trouble has put her wits astray” (p.224). The play’s suggestion of mental disorder, whether supernatural or medical, intensifies the tragic power of the play.

Similarly, being a young man planning to be married the day after he meets Cathleen, Michael is contaminated with this kind of madness. His life is full of promise; he is engaged to a pretty girl with a dowry of one hundred pounds. In such a context, Michael’s hasty decision to join the fight, manly and brave though it may be, implies disability of another sort: the “touch” of madness. It is unbelievable for normal people to imagine that an old woman, who presents herself as mentally “astray” enters a household and works her magic (whether supernatural or simply the power of persuasion) on the young man of the house, and then expecting the young man to begin to behave rashly. Bridget says that Michael “has the look of a man that has got the touch” (p.229), and Peter, who urged to tell Michael not to go, responds, “It’s no use. He doesn’t hear a word we’re saying” (p.230). All these indicate not only bewitchment, but also contagion. Whether the Old Woman is a fairy “from the North” or mentally “astray,” the consequence for Michael is the same: he is tragically persuaded to leave his family, and to fight for Ireland. He thus joins the French forces against the British and risks his life, just for potentially eternal fame, but the audiences know the outcome of the 1798 rising and they know that Michael does not march to victory. Hence, in another way by means of illustration, Michael’s rejection of domestic life means his abandonment of normalcy, and the potential manifestation of mental disorder. As a representation of the Irish mother, Cathleen calls for and arouses a nationalist madness that corrupts otherwise sensible young men, and it is not victory but the will to fight that cures the disabilities of the Irish. It’s hard to distinguish which disability—mental or physical—is more sobering: The Old Woman’s physical feebleness or the madness impelling Michael to engage in battle at the risk of disability or death. Representations of physical ability and mental disability in the play, render a reading, indicating the tragedy of Michael’s imminent disability or death in the battle, the price frequently-paid in the rejuvenation of a colonized land.
V. CONCLUSION

Disability is not only an individual obsession, but a social problem that affects almost every aspect of the society; and it is assumed that to associate a given population with disability is to justify that group’s disempowerment because most cultures nowadays around the world still often equate disability with being broken or unqualified. This process is comparable to othering, to describe how colonized people are marginalized and stereotyped as to be inferior, feeble and disabled. As the pioneer of the Irish literary revival, Yeats, in Cathleen, articulates his enthusiasm for nationalism and national identity and yearning to break free from the colonization of England. Cathleen is mostly remembered for its personification of Ireland, and the famous transformation of Cathleen from the Old Woman to the young girl. Representations of disability are clearly evidenced in the play in terms of: an exhausted Cathleen or unhealthy Ireland; the madness of the Old Woman and Michael. People in colonized land need to bear the expense of the health or even the life of the younger generation, in order to transform their colonized identities described diversely in terms of physical degeneracy, and psychological dysfunction in the process of othering. A reading of Cathleen from the perspective of disability studies helps to demonstrate that the dramatic power of this particular play emerges from its successful interpretation of disability; since Cathleen’s transformation from a disabled and feeble old woman, to a healthy young queen is achieved, through Michael’s willingness to face disablement, even death, in the impending war, which is doomed to fail. The interpretation of the dual perspective of disability studies and postcolonial studies provides a new understanding of how literary works present complex and intricate insights into the politics of disability and provide multifaceted illustrations of disabled images.

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