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Revivalist: Medical Herbs and Rejuvenation in the Works of Lady Augusta Gregory

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Abstract. When Lady Augusta Gregory (1852-1932) effected her famous mid-life self-reinvention from Anglo-Irish landlady to revivalist dramatist, healing women from her locality provided significant guides and models for her new life and work. This article will discuss what Gregory learned from the lore of a local healer, the shadowy Bridget Ruane (who died c.1899). It will analyse how Gregory worked Ruane's folk medical knowledge into her prose writings and plays, including *The Pot of Broth* (1904). In restoring the name of this non-elite woman from the west of Ireland, this article suggests the benefits of casting the net more widely for names to stand alongside Gregory's as creators of Revival-era culture.

Key Words. Revival, Lady Gregory, traditional medicine, herbs, healing, Bridget Ruane, *The Pot of Broth*

Resumen. Cuando Lady Augusta Gregory (1852-1932) efectuó su famosa auto-reinvención de casera anglo-irlandesa de mediana edad a dramaturga revivalista, las mujeres sanadoras de su localidad le proporcionaron guías y modelos significativos para su nueva vida y obra. Este artículo discutirá lo que Gregory aprendió de la tradición de una sanadora local, la oscura Bridget Ruane (que murió c.1899). Analizará cómo Gregory incorporó el conocimiento médico popular de Ruane a sus escritos en prosa y obras de teatro, incluida *The Pot of Broth* (1904). Al restaurar el nombre de esta mujer que no pertenecía a la élite del oeste de Irlanda, este artículo sugiere los beneficios de lanzar una red más amplia para que haya nombres se ubiquen junto al de Gregory como creadores de la cultura de la era del Renacimiento.

Palabras clave. Renacimiento, Lady Gregory, medicina tradicional, hierbas, sanación, Bridget Ruane; *The Pot of Broth*

In the decade that followed the death of her husband, Sir William Gregory, in 1892, Augusta Gregory reinvented herself. In her act of self-redefinition, she selected new role models and guises for her life. With her collaborator W. B. Yeats she dramatized a spiritual self-portrait in

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the form of Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the eponymous heroine of their most famous play, who walks away from the action, young again, at its close. This process of rejuvenation and self-reinvention is something that is familiar to readers of Yeats, who theorised that the poet is "reborn as an idea, something intended, complete" in "A General Introduction for my Work", and who famously stated that "[*i*]t *is myself that I remake*" in an untitled poem (1961a: 509, 1957e: 778). The supernatural protagonist of this single-act play features a version of the *cailleach* (the Gaelic word for a hag but also a sovereignty goddess associated with the territory of Ireland). According to the folklore and ethnology scholar Gearóid Ó Crualaoich, this figure is connected to that of the *bean feasa* or wise woman (2017: 29).[1] However, Gregory's healing women were not just of the unearthly variety. The wise women that fascinated her were from her locality: one was the folk healer Biddy Early (of Feakle, Co. Clare), another was Bridget Ruane (of Gort, Co. Galway).[2] When Gregory reinvented herself, the model of healing woman was one on which she drew.

Healing and History

The focus on healing and renewal in the literary career that began around her fortieth year had roots in her previous life. Gregory, in a letter she wrote to the anti-imperialist poet Wilfrid Scawen Blunt in March 1885, hinted that she had medicinal duties in her district. In her autobiography, *Seventy Years* (written between the years 1914 to 1923, and possibly later, but published in 1974),[3] she reproduces a letter in which this is apparent:

> We arrived here [i.e. Coole] two days ago, the weather is cold and even the horse-chestnut trees hardly give promise of a leaf (just three weeks behind Paris) and I was so tired by travelling and unpacking that I have not yet recovered my energy, but half dormant take up my old occupations and buy flannel and make cough cures for old women. But little Robert is bright enough for two and as happy as the day is long … (Gregory 1976c: 209; original ellipsis)

Over three years later, on August 29, 1888, Gregory wrote another letter to Blunt from Coole Park. In a similar style, this letter expanded upon her altruistic practices and, for all its wryness, ended on a positive note: "The poor people come to the door daily, believing that I can cure them of all diseases, including poverty, and I mix their cough-cures and buy their flannel and dye it with madder in an iron pot, and altogether I am at present one of the happy people without a history" (Gregory 1976c: 232). This image of the benign occupant of a Big House dispensing medicine to the occupants of surrounding cottages, which appears in her letters of 1885 and 1888, is in some ways paradigmatic of colonialism. Gregory's claim to be "without a history" as she does this is an interesting one, though, as it is similar to the axiom –"Happy the people whose annals are blank in history books!"– which the Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle attributes to French philosopher Montesquieu.[4] This "history" whose existence is antithetical

[1] The *cailleach* was also "the *bean ghlúine* (midwife)" and "the *bean chaointe* (keening-woman)" (Ó Crualaoich 2017: 29).
[2] See my article: Walker-Dunseith, Holly May (2022). "The healer in the tower: Biddy Early and discourses of healing in the work of W. B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory." *Irish Studies Review* 30 (3) (July 12): 340-356. https://doi.org/10.1080/09670882.2022.2095962.
[3] See the bibliographer and editor Colin Smythe's chronology of dates, written in the foreword to *Seventy Years*, which indicate the timings for when Gregory wrote her autobiography (1976c: v).
[4] Translator Marian Schwartz and editor Gary Saul Morson published an edition of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* in 2014, which includes a footnote that explains the origins of this proverb (2014: 743).

to happiness is worth dwelling on. Perhaps for Gregory, as for Stephen Dedalus, history was a nightmare from which she was trying to awake.

The fraught colonial and religious history of Gregory and Coole Park are ingredients that contribute to her past. Gregory was a Persse by birth; the descendent of a seventeenth-century Protestant preacher. This ancestor of hers, Reverend Robert Persse, "arrived [in Ireland] from England, probably before 1602" (Kearney 2016: 2). His grandson, Reverend Dudley Persse thrived amid the religious vicissitudes of his time and "held five profitable church appointments and received large land grants from Charles II and James II" (Kohfeldt 1985: 9). He built the family seat of Roxborough and so, notes Gregory's biographer Mary Lou Kohfeldt, "[t]he family fortune was thus founded on royal favor and tithes of Catholic tenants to a church they abhorred" (1985: 9). The family tradition of Protestant evangelism was passed down, and Gregory's sisters and mother may have proselytised in the Famine, an activity which involved going from house-to-house and trying to convert people from Catholicism to Protestantism. She married Sir William Henry Gregory in 1880, who was the Governor of Ceylon for the East India Company. This English company, incorporated by royal charter on December 31, 1600, was "formed for the exploitation of trade with East and Southeast Asia and India" ("East India Company"; *Encyclopedia Britannica* 2022). Gregory's grandfather-in-law, Robert Gregory, was an East India Company director. He purchased Coole Park from the Martyns, a wealthy family that owned much land in the area, in 1768, using lucre from his work in India. This money also funded the construction of the house there in approximately 1770, which was therefore built on the foundations of colonialism. This was the same year as the Bengal Famine of 1770. Economist Cormac Ó Gráda identifies this "poorly documented famine" as one of the "colonial famines" that was "the product of the East India Company's rapacity" (2010: 36). Coole House, often referred to as the Big House, was an edifice built on the profits of exploitation. Given the anti-colonial bent of Scawen Blunt's ideas, perhaps, for Gregory, to be "without a history" would have been happiness indeed.

Being "without a history" enables one to begin again, and this was what, from 1892, Gregory was in the process of doing. This year inaugurated a decade of transformation, most immediately prompted by the death of her husband on 6 March. A trip to Inisheer not long after his death provided a glimpse of the kind of new life that Gregory envisaged for herself. Gregory claimed that she "was quite happy" when she took shelter in a cottage in October 1893, on one of the Aran Islands that lie at the mouth of Galway Bay, where the residents spoke Gaelic and ate potatoes as their staple diet (Kohfeldt 1985: 94). This cottage was the binary opposite to Coole Park and, for Gregory, this change of location both reflected and nurtured a gradual change of mind. She perused Irish narratives and folk stories, sparked a friendship with Yeats in August 1896 and, on her return, went from door-to-door collecting folklore at Coole Park. Yeats, Edward Martyn, and Gregory discussed plans for a "Celtic Theatre" in late June 1897. In summer 1897, a progressive plan was born to establish the Irish Literary Theatre in Dublin, which would open its doors on December 27, 1902, and from which would grow the Abbey Theatre in 1904. Her self-reinvention as a mediator, populariser and contributor to the indigenous culture of Ireland was nearing its completion at New Year in 1898 when, in a letter to Blunt, Gregory confirmed, "My own life is happy now, and I *almost* say to the passing moment stay" (Kohfeldt 1985: 122).

Long before Yeats became her neighbour in 1917, when he purchased Thoor Ballylee after negotiating its purchase throughout 1916, he exhibited medical complaints that rendered him dependent on Gregory's care. In a letter to Yeats, perhaps written in 1901, Gregory gives her patient some medical advice for his rheumatism: "How bad of you to get ill just when I am not there to look after you! Do take care of yourself now, and feed yourself properly – and with any threatening of rheumatism you should look to your underwear" (cited in Tóibín 2003: 83-84). Prior to 1850, doctors recommended that underclothing should be made of flannel (Nunn

1984: 138). Maire Horgan, a collector for *The Schools' Manuscript Collection* (*NFCS*) in County Kilkenny, recorded that "[p]eople who suffered from rheumatic pains, often wore a red flannel undershirt, because red flannel is supposed to hold a cure for rheumatism" ("Local Cures" c.1937-1939: 512).[5] In Irish folklore, red flannel holds an inherent cure that works when the patient wears it beside their skin; no other colour would suffice. Folklore collector Helen Cooney, who lives in County Westmeath, writes: "[i]nside garments made of red flannel were worn as a remedy for rheumatism" ("Local Cures" c.1937-1939: 111).[6] The medical doctor Patrick Logan explains that the red flannel was also applied to whooping cough and sprains because "red is the colour used to expel demons" (1972: 44, 124). Maureen Hurley, a collector in County Westmeath, attests to its "curative properties" and advises that "[p]eople who have a tendency to rheumatics should thatch their bodies with red flannel" ("Cures" 1938-1939: 406).[7] This traditional Irish belief would explain the madder dye that Gregory writes about using on flannel. Gregory mirrors Yeats, and vice versa, as friends with similar medical interests that reflect the healing properties of the locality. Gregory perhaps reminding Yeats to wear flannel underclothing that has been dyed with red madder is a command that aims to restore both Yeats and the old folk medical practices of Ireland that she was continually learning about from the people around her.

Gregory's family played a role in proselytism as they had a controversial history of trying to convert people to Protestantism during the Famine. George Moore, an Irish novelist who was not always the most reliable of witnesses, accused her of being "an ardent soul gatherer in the days gone by" who then "abandoned missionary work when she married" (cited in Tóibín 2003: 13). However, Gregory strongly denied her own participation in this conversion practice as she claims that "I myself, the youngest, shrank from any effort to shake or change the faith of others" (cited in Tóibín 2003: 14). Gregory "looked now for poetry and romance" from "stone-breakers and potato-diggers and paupers in the workhouse and beggars at my own door" (cited in Tóibín 2003: 36). Rather than attempting to convert peoples' religion, Gregory turned to restoring respect for the peasantry and Irish folklore. If Gregory did participate in the Persse family practice of going from house-to-house during the smaller periods of hunger in the subsequent years after the Great Famine (1845-1852), with the ulterior motive of trying to convert people to Protestantism, then she later left it in the past and changed her reason for travelling from door-to-door. Her folklore-collecting practice healed the previous associations attached to her neighbourhood rounds. She desired to excise the associations of her Anglo-Irish colonial class. Rather than dispense Protestantism she would gather to herself; she would collect. She wished to be converted.

Bridget Ruane

Bridget Ruane was a healer, local to Gregory, who claimed that her knowledge was inherited from her brother. In "Herb-Healing", an inventory of cures that Gregory learnt from Ruane herself, Gregory describes her as "a respectable-looking old woman, dressed in the red petticoat and blue cloak of the country-people" (1903a: 111). Although her birth date seems to be unknown, Gregory attests that "she died last winter" in her chapter "Herb-Healing", which she wrote in 1900 and then published in *Poets and Dreamers* in 1903 (1903a: 120). Ruane was therefore likely to have died in winter 1899, not long after she wrote a letter to Gregory on September 28, 1899 about "one of the Fathers, a Saint" in London who could "tell me his remedies" (1903a: 111). This letter, written at the very end of Ruane's life, would be reborn as the frontispiece for Gregory's chapter that listed this healer's cures and therefore kept her

[5] I am grateful to the *National Folklore Collection* for their kind permission to reproduce this quotation.
[6] I am grateful to the *National Folklore Collection* for their kind permission to reproduce this quotation.
[7] I am grateful to the *National Folklore Collection* for their kind permission to reproduce this quotation.

memory alive. Ruane mentions in the letter that a patient was sent "back to Gort, here to me" (1903a: 111), a location in walking distance from Coole Park, which suggests that this is where she lived and mixed remedies and dispensed cures to people who came to her for help. Ruane was an accessible muse that gave Gregory the tools to craft a new language and reshape herself as an inheritor and communicator of herbal knowledge.

Gregory's chapter about this healer appears to be the most substantial source of information on Ruane in existence. In the second series of *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (1920), Gregory alludes to this earlier section: "*I have told in 'Poets and Dreamers' of old Bridget Ruane who came and gave me my first knowledge of the healing power of certain plants, some it seemed having a natural and some a mysterious power*" (1920d: 3). Although Ruane is not mentioned in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (2023) and is less famous than another local healing woman Biddy Early of Feakle in Co. Clare, she was something of a local legend amongst the people in counties Clare and Galway, and the surrounding areas.[8] Before Gregory committed her memory to the printed page, Ruane lived on through word of mouth and the oral Irish tradition. In "Mickey Filler and the Tansey Wreath", a narrative about Ruane's grandson that was published in a collection of folk tales titled *Ghosts in Irish Houses* (1947), the writer James Reynolds confirms that "[i]n all the countryside, even into the counties of Cork, Tipperary, and Kerry, the name of Bridget Ruane was a household word" and that "[t]he miracles of healing performed by Bridget were well known by all the poor and hapless" (1947: 41). Reynolds reveals that "[t]he children roundabout did not call Mickey's grandmother by her right name; they called her Biddy Early" (1947: 41). This was echoed many years before in 1900 in *Poets and Dreamers*, where Gregory records a conversation with "[a] neighbour whom I asked about Bridget Ruane and her brother", who revealed that "[s]ome people call her 'Biddy Early' (after a famous witch-doctor)" (1903a: 114). Ruane's service to Gregory was to teach her traditional medicine; Gregory preserved her medical memory in written format, without which, Ruane would most likely be lost in the shadow of Early.

Gregory's "Herb-Healing", the chapter that belongs to the collection of folklore essays and translations named *Poets and Dreamers*, is at once guided by Ruane's words. The chapter opens with a letter from Ruane, addressed to the "Honourable Lady Gregory", and dated on September 28, 1899:

> I, Bridget Ruane, wish to inform you that there is in the Oratory in London one of the Fathers, a Saint. I do not know his name; but there was a young woman of the name of Meara; she got two falls and could get no cure. She went to London and found this holy man; and he sent her back to Gort, here to me, and I cured her. If your honourable Ladyship could make him out, it would be a wonderful thing, and a great happiness to many a weary heart, and the great God would have it in store for you and your son. May you enjoy many happy days together is the prayer of your humble servant, [Bridget Ruane]. (Gregory 1903a: 111)

When Gregory "went down to see the writer" in person, Ruane again asked Gregory the same question and explains that she cannot perform all cures but claims the ability to resurrect people from death using the *slanlus* herb:

> Now if you could find out the name of that Saint through the press, he'd tell me his remedies; and between us, all the world would be cured. For I can't do all cures, though there are a great many I can do. I cured Michael Miscail when the doctor couldn't do it, and a woman in Gort that was paralyzed, and her two sons that were

[8] Although Bridget Ruane's name was well known in the west of Ireland, there are a severe dearth of accounts about her, and she remains a highly under-researched member of Irish society.

> stretched. For I can bring back the dead with some of the herbs our Lord was brought back with, the *Garalus* and the *Slanlus*. But there are some things I can't do. I can't help anyone that has got a stroke from the Queen or the Fool of the Forth. (Gregory 1903a: 111-12)

Yeats glosses the mysterious final phrase in his essay "The Queen and the Fool", in which he states that he has "heard one Hearne, a witch-doctor, who is on the border of Clare and Galway, say that […] 'every household' of Faery" has one of each of these classes of fairy, and that these entities have unusual power (2005c: 75). It is unknown as to whether Gregory followed up on this request, but it is certain that Ruane's herbal knowledge was a source of intrigue for her. In fact, Gregory remarks that "I asked her to teach me some of her fragments of Druids' wisdom, the healing power of herbs" (1903a: 112). At the dawn of the twentieth century, Gregory was trying to recover a pre-Christian past. This meant that Ruane "came another day, and brought some herbs, and sorted them out on a table" and told Gregory about each one (1903a: 112). Gregory became a student and apprentice when Ruane taught her about the medical properties of herbs and passed down her knowledge. Ruane's story began with the fairy-tale-like origin of her family's special knowledge:

> It was my brother got the knowledge of cures from a book that was thrown down before him on the road. What language was it written in? What language would it be but Irish? May be it was God gave it to him, and may be it was the *other people*. He was a fine strong man; and he weighed fifteen stone; and he went to England, and there he cured all the world, so that the doctors had no way of living. So one time he got in a ship to go to America; and the doctors had bad men engaged to shipwreck him out of the ship; he wasn't drowned, but he was broken to pieces on the rocks, and the book was lost along with him. (1903a: 112)

Gregory notes Ruane's claims that her brother "taught me a good deal out of" this book, and that "[s]o I know all herbs, and I do a good many cures; and I have brought a good many children home to the world, and never lost one, or one of the women that bore them" (1903a: 112). In a list format, Gregory wrote down every cure and definition that Ruane had discussed, thus creating a chapter of medical lexicon. Many of the herbs that Gregory mentions in her plays come from the short chapter, "Herb-Healing", which is dated as 1900. Her chapter becomes a first hand-crafted dictionary for her symbolic vernacular, which would be used to doctor her own plays as well as collaborations. At the same time as she was learning of herbs from Ruane, these healing plants sprouted in her literary work.

Healing Herbs in *The Pot of Broth*

Gregory's knowledge that she learnt from Ruane's herbal expertise is traceable in *The Pot of Broth*. This Yeats-Gregory collaborative play, centred around one pot that holds broth, explores poverty, parsimoniousness, and credulity. A tramp arrives at John and Sibby Coneely's cottage in search of food and tells them that a magical stone is a renewable food source that can make "a good drop of broth or a bit of stirabout, or a drop of poteen itself" (1966d: 244-45). He thus tricks the couple into providing him with food. The pivotal moment in the play's action happens when the tramp lists three herbs that could be added into the pot with the stone. The audience will have seen the tramp ask for the *slanlus*, *fearavan*, and *athair-talav*. They would have even witnessed his provision of specific details about how to gather the first two herbs that he requested from the couple and then watched him choose vegetables instead. This scene demonstrates Gregory's knowledge of traditional medicine, which flavoured the joint-authored

play and provided Yeats with knowledge that was unique to his collaborator. Addressing the miserly Sibby, a resident of the cottage, the tramp raises the issue of herbs: "You wouldn't have a bit of Slanlus in the house, ma'am, that was cut with a black-handled knife?" (1966d: 243). In "Herb-Healing", Gregory similarly capitalises "*Slanlus*", groups it as one of "the best of the herbs", and writes Ruane's definition in a seemingly word-for-word fashion: "Here are the *Slanlus* (plantain) and the *Garblus* (dandelion); and these would cure the wide world; and it was these brought our Lord from the Cross […] His Mother and Mary and Joseph gathered these herbs and cured His wounds" (1903a: 114). *Slanlus* is therefore associated with revival and resurrection, a crucial theme for both her and Yeats.

The artist-healer is a figure that recurs in Gregory's works, as the scholar James Pethica has observed. In his introduction to *Collaborative One-Act Plays, 1901-1903: Cathleen ni Houlihan, The Pot of Broth, The Country of the Young, Heads or Harps: Manuscript Materials* (2006), a collection of manuscripts that tracks the changes in the collaborative plays, Pethica argues that

> [a] core vision of the artist as a healer who comes to repair the social economy or to inspire others, but who then typically withdraws unobtrusively, would underpin her principal work as a dramatist, and also inform her optimistic core conception of the theater movement as a venue in which artists such as Yeats, herself, and others might model beneficial social and political change for Ireland. (2006b: lvi)

Pethica mentions three plays in which Gregory casts a healer as the protagonist (2006b: lvi): the poet Raftery in *The Marriage* (1903a [1902]); the ragged man in *The Rising of the Moon* (1993b [1903]); and Jesus Christ, who is the Divine Physician and the Greatest Healer, in *The Travelling Man* (1993b [1905]). In the Yeats-Gregory collaborative play *The Pot of Broth*, however, the protagonist tramp is presented as far from a healer figure although he pretends to have a substantial knowledge of herbal medicine. Pethica notices that, "[a]s in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, Lady Gregory's influence on *The Pot of Broth* registers in the distinctive 'Kiltartan' speech [local Gort dialect] the characters use, in the use of folklore materials drawn from her gatherings, and also in narrative structure" and he writes in the footnotes that "[t]he Tramp's allusions to the beneficial properties of herbs [...] closely parallel material in Lady Gregory's essay 'Herb-Healing', originally published in *The Westminster Budget* in 1900, and reprinted in her 1903 volume *Poets and Dreamers*" (2006b: xlvi).

From the earliest available draft of the play, printed in Pethica's *Collaborative One-Act Plays* (2006b: xlv), it is evident that Gregory had always intended to treat the herbs in the play with seriousness and respect even though she and Yeats employed them in comedy. In an interview with the Druid Theatre director Garry Hynes,[9] Anna Pilz states that Gregory "has always been seen as filling in at the Abbey, providing comedy to offset the more verse-heavy work by especially Yeats" and "Gregory herself, in a lecture called 'On Making a Play', was saying and I quote: 'the circumstances of our theatre have forced me to write comedy; the strain of the attention necessary for listening to verse requires a relaxing afterwards'" (2021: 00:37:58-00:38:27; my transcription). In other words, Yeats was viewed as the serious artist, and so Gregory puts herself in second place as a comedy writer. By the time she came to co-write *The Pot of Broth*, she had already written a sincere and earnest work of herbalism that was embedded in *Poets and Dreamers* in 1903 and she was yet to expand her findings in the second series of *Visions and Beliefs* in 1920. It is the same material in *The Pot of Broth* as in

[9] Hynes, Garry. "In Conversation with Garry Hynes." Interview by Anna Pilz. *Irish Women's Writing (1880-1920) Network: Collaborations and Networks Symposium*, 3 Sept. 2021, https://irishwomenswritingnetwork.com/collaborations-and-networks-symposium/. Interview.

her herbalist collections but, in the collaborative writing of the play, the herbs are treated in a light-hearted manner:

> SIBBY. And is that all you have to put in it?
> TRAMP. Nothing at all but that, — only maybe a bit of an herb for fear the enchantment might slip away from it. You wouldn't have a bit of Slán-lus in the house ma'am, that was cut with a black-handled knife?
> SIBBY. No indeed, I have none of that in the house.
> TRAMP. Or a bit of the Fearaván that was picked when the wind was from the north?
> SIBBY. No, indeed, I'm sorry there's none.
> TRAMP. Or a sprig of the Athair-talav, the father of herbs?
> JOHN. There's plenty of it by the hedge. I'll go out and get it for you.
> TRAMP. O, don't mind taking so much trouble; those leaves beside me will do well enough. (Yeats and Gregory 2006b: 107-8)

Following this, a stage direction reads that "[*h*]*e takes a couple of good handfuls of the cabbage and onions and puts them in*" the pot (2006b: 108). The joke is, under the pretence of making a mystical concoction, the tramp is merely making soup. When the tramp asks for the "Slán-lus" and "Fearaván", Sibby's reply is "[n]o, indeed", and this response remains the same (albeit with a semi-colon following "indeed" in lieu of a comma) even in the earliest typescript prompt resource in existence (2006b: 107-8). Even when the "sprig of the Athair-talav" is near at hand, Gregory's voice speaks through the tramp as he instructs John not to "mind taking so much trouble" (2006b: 108). The tramp pretends to have knowledge of herbs and healing, and he boils the stone, pretending it can produce food. The comedy emanates from the division between what the audience are being told versus what they are seeing on the stage.

In response to the tramp's question about the slanlus, Sibby replies, "No, indeed, I have none of that in the house" (1966d: 243). This opens a chasm that allows the tramp to ask another question involving herbs: "Or a bit of the Fearavan that was picked when the wind was from the north?" (1966d: 243). Again, this herb belongs in Gregory's list that she recorded from Ruane's lesson because "[t]his is the *Fearaban* (water-buttercup); and it's good for every bone of your body" (1903a: 113). When Sibby again responds, "No, indeed, I'm sorry there's none" (1966d: 243), Gregory sees the opportunity to explain a third herb. The tramp asks, "Or a sprig of the Athair-talav, the father of herbs?" (1966d: 243). Like the other herbs that Gregory employed in the play, this one is also associated with revival, preservation, and longevity. Gregory dictates Ruane's words about the "*Athair-talav*, the father of all herbs (wild camomile)" in "Herb-Healing", where she writes that "if you put a bit of this with every other herb you drink, you'll live for ever" and that "[m]y grandmother used to put a bit with everything she took, and she lived to be over a hundred" (1903a: 113). It is fascinating that the three herbs that Gregory chooses to feature in *The Pot of Broth* are associated with preservation and revival. Ruane dictates that the *slanlus* can "bring back the dead", the *fearavan* is "good for every bone" in the body and the *athair-talav* is propitious for longevity.

Gregory completed her ten-year transformation as a new woman with a fresh vision for her life. She fostered a deliberate selective memory and self-selective process, which enabled her to forget her past and become a spiritual self-portrait of Cathleen Ni Houlihan and a medical mirror image of Biddy Early. Based on the rejuvenated *cailleach* and the folk healer, Gregory put into practice a new lifestyle that focussed on reviving Ireland, restoring the health of her neighbourhood, and challenging colonialism. Her own rejuvenation and Ireland's were inextricably linked. The history of colonial exploitation in the Persse and Gregory family, and Augusta's resistance to this, illuminates the reading of *The Pot of Broth*. Gregory imagined her role as a dramatist and editor in medical terms: "I am rather a good play doctor", she wrote in

a letter to writer Thomas Joseph Kiernan on November 28, 1928, when she was telling him that "I have been helping some of our authors –old & new– to get their plays right" (New York Public Library 1968: 26). However, her interest in healing was not just metaphorical: her works feature a symbolic language of healing herbs. *Poets and Dreamers*, *The Pot of Broth* and *Visions and Beliefs* all draw on the work of her herbalism teacher Ruane, and each text brings Ruane's knowledge of healing and cures into the compass of the Irish Revival. In following these near-invisible threads, we can dwell on the forgotten role of non-elite women and their role in Irish culture. In reuniting the story of Revival to its hidden contributors, we might restore the memory of these lesser-known culture-givers to the record of a crucial period in Ireland's modern history.

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