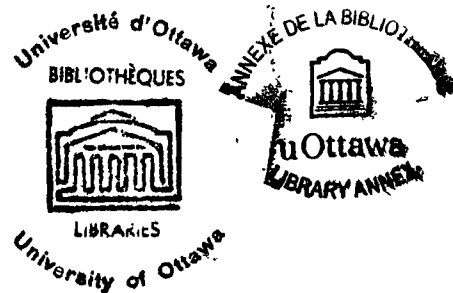


CONFABULATION AS A COMIC TECHNIQUE
IN SIX PLAYS BY LADY GREGORY

By Michael P. J. Kennedy



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of the University of Ottawa as partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

Michael P. J. Kennedy was born 28 April, 1947, and he received the Bachelor of Arts degree from Iona College, New Rochelle, New York, in 1969.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the early decades of the twentieth century, the Irish Literary Movement reached its popular and artistic peak. Through the efforts of William Butler Yeats, Douglas Hyde, George Moore, Edward Martyn, Lady Gregory, and others, this movement was successful in its attempt to awaken the people of Ireland to their native literary tradition.¹ One result of this new enthusiasm for a distinctly Irish literature was the creation of an Irish theatre. Founded in 1898 by W. B. Yeats, Edward Martyn, and Lady Augusta Gregory, the Irish Literary Theatre (later known as the Abbey Theatre) sought to ". . . bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland."² This new theatre not only provided a platform for the transmission of genuine Irish culture to the people, but it also fostered the native literary genius through the production of original plays in both English and Gaelic.

¹For further discussion of the development of the Irish Literary Movement, see books such as Ernest A. Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance (New York: John Lane Company, 1916) or Howard Howarth, The Irish Writers 1880-1940 (New York: Hill & Wang, 1958).

²Lady Augusta Gregory, Our Irish Theatre (New York: Capricorn Books, 1965), p. 9. Although the idea of the theatre was conceived in the autumn of 1898, the first performance did not take place until 8 May, 1899.

A substantial portion of the artistic and popular success of this new Irish National Theatre was due to the efforts of Lady Isabella Augusta Persse Gregory. She demonstrated her concern for the preservation and expansion of native Irish culture by her administrative and artistic contributions to this new dramatic venture. Prior to and concomitant with her years of labour at the Abbey, Lady Gregory acquired a thorough knowledge of the Irish literary tradition from the principal preservers of native culture to that time, the peasants.

Her experience with the Irish country folk served as the substance from which much of her comic success grew. One characteristic of these people, as she saw them, was their ability to reshape their mundane existence into the extraordinary through the use of imagination. It is this facet of the Irish rural people and its influence upon Lady Gregory's dramatic canon which is the subject under investigation in this thesis.

The rural people of her era were simple, hard-working peasants who relied upon their imaginations to give their lives added significance. As will be shown, this tendency to seek added meaning in life through the imagination was present in their approach to religion, history, folklore, and superstition. Present, too, was the peasants' ability to create a more exciting world for themselves through imaginative talk.

As a dramatic artist, Lady Gregory was able to transform the imaginative tendency of the Irish peasantry into a comic technique. Her use of this device was not to satirize the rural inhabitants themselves, but rather to create humorous situations. Lady Gregory employs the imaginative talk of the Irish country people partially for its mirthful deviation from reality, but principally as a device to create predicaments and situations which are funny. Although the basic procedure of creating a person's character or a situation through imaginative talk remains the same, the repercussions of it vary with the characters and plot situations involved. Consequently, Lady Gregory's understanding of the Irish country people played an important part in shaping her dramatic canon.

This insight into the peasant character was the result of her own efforts, both as a child and in later years, to become acquainted with the native people of her country. Despite her title and ascendancy heritage, she came to know and understand the Irish peasantry to the greatest extent possible for one of Anglo-Irish blood. Indeed, this comprehension gave birth to an interest in and respect for the cultural heritage of Ireland. As a result of her personal contact with the neighbouring country folk, Lady Gregory was able to collect and transcribe the tales and myths that had formerly been maintained through oral tradition. This accomplishment is noteworthy because she, of the Anglo-Irish

landed class, would normally be expected to display little concern for the lives of her tenants and their cultural traditions.³ Throughout her life, however, Lady Gregory demonstrated her involvement with and understanding of the Irish peasantry.

Although she was raised amidst a large family of the landed gentry which was staunchly Protestant in its religious persuasion, the young Augusta revealed a keen interest in the peasants who lived and worked on her father's estate.⁴ In her youth, the future Lady Gregory would listen for hours to the folk tales and legends of the Red Branch, Fianna, and others as related by her Irish nurse, Mary Sheridan.⁵ As the rebel of her despotic Orange family, Augusta wrote letters for those illiterate tenants who had relatives in North America.⁶ Another example of her sincere

³It is noted by T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin in The Course of Irish History (Dublin: The Mercier Press, 1967), p. 265, that the Anglo-Irish landlords of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ". . . cared little about what went on on their estates so long as they yielded the maximum money income." It was not until after the Land Reform Acts were passed near the beginning of the present century that the landlords were forced to take an interest in their peasant tenants.

⁴William Butler Yeats, Dramatis Personae (London: Macmillan & Co. Limited, 1936), p. 12.

⁵This common biographical knowledge is perhaps best stated by the playwright herself. Lady Augusta Gregory, Cuchulain of Muirthemne; The Story of the Men of the Red Branch of Ulster (London: John Murray, 1907), p. VI.

⁶Lady Gregory Selected Plays, selected by Elizabeth Coxhead (London: Putnam & Company Limited, 1962), p. 11.

concern for the peasants is the fact that she established a shop upon the estate where she herself sold goods so that the shopkeepers might be pressured to bring down their exorbitant prices.⁷ Consequently, Augusta came to be well respected by the country folk and, as a result, they gladly disclosed their traditional stories and tales to her when she visited their cottages.

Lady Gregory developed a deep fondness for the simple peasants whom she came to know so well: ". . . I have always felt the strongest sense of duty towards my tenants and I have had a great affection for them."⁸ This affection was repaid by the people through their own feeling for her. In an interview with an old peasant of the district, W. B. Yeats was told: "She [Lady Gregory] has been . . . like a serving-maid among us. She is plain and simple, like the Mother of God, and that was the greatest lady that ever lived."⁹ Rising from her early encounters with the country folk on the family estate was an understanding and appreciation of the tales and myths as well as the "folklore side of Catholicism" which these people revealed.¹⁰

⁷Yeats, Dramatis Personae, p. 13.

⁸Lennox Robinson, ed., Lady Gregory's Journals 1916-1930 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), p. 11.

⁹Yeats, Dramatis Personae, p. 14.

¹⁰Elizabeth Coxhead, Lady Gregory: A Literary Portrait (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961), p. 8.

She was able to comprehend the fact that the peasantry had a deeply rooted cultural, historical, and religious heritage, a heritage that both fascinated and impressed this Anglo-Irish girl.

During the twelve years of her marriage to Sir William Gregory, Augusta travelled extensively and developed a rich literary and cultural awareness.¹¹ Meanwhile, she had the incentive and found the opportunity to observe and write about the serving people and tenants at Coole.¹² Her concern for the peasantry never diminished; and after Sir William died in 1912, Lady Gregory took an even greater interest in the culture and character of the Irish country folk. Welcome to visit the cottages of her tenants and the country people of neighbouring farms, she progressed in her understanding of their way of life as well as their talent for fostering the ancient Celtic mythology.

During subsequent years, Lady Gregory's compilation of notes as well as personal insight into the indigenous culture of the country folk grew to substantial proportions. In 1897, she took Yeats on one of her many visits among her tenants: ". . . Lady Gregory brought me from cottage to cottage collecting folklore. Every night she wrote out what we had heard in the dialect of the cottages."¹³ From such

¹¹Coxhead, Literary Portrait, pp. 14, 23, 26-27, 32.

¹²Ibid., p. 28.

¹³Yeats, Dramatis Personae, p. 19.

visits she obtained the basic material from which she later molded her dramatic canon. Thus, it was through the mutual respect shown by Lady Gregory and her tenants that the playwright was able to delve beneath the surface of the Irish peasantry and discover their true character and culture.

Lorna Young comments on this achievement:

The people on their part, possessed their inbred traditions of myth, legend and lore--and they returned Lady Gregory's interest and affection in good measure with their store of folktales often richly embellished with their own roving fancies. She came to know the people so intimately and to sympathise with them so warmly, that they became, so to speak, her personal idiom; it was through the folk mind and character, so exuberant and imaginative and humorous, that this well-born, intellectual lady discovered and established her own special mode and manner of artistic expression, first in her realistic comedies and later in her serious historical and symbolical plays. It became her goal to think like a wise man and express herself like the people.¹⁴

Lady Gregory used her experience in drawing characters and plot situations in her plays. The playwright herself has explicitly stated her indebtedness to the country people from whom she has extracted the details of numerous incidents.¹⁵ With these stories and events as a basis,

¹⁴Lorna D. Young, The Plays of Lady Gregory (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1958), p. 5.

¹⁵Throughout her canon, Lady Gregory has appended notes to indicate some sources of her plots and themes. The concept of "image-making" came from an old story of the peasantry. See The Image (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, Ltd., no publication data available), pp. 97-100. Similarly, she was inspired by her knowledge of the country people in writing Spreading the News. See Selected Plays (London: Putnam & Company Limited, 1962), p. 51. Lady Gregory also

Lady Gregory, through a process of selection and adaptation, created many popular dramatic presentations.

As posited earlier, one aspect of the Irish peasant character which Lady Gregory understood and was able to transform into successful comedy was the country people's active use of imagination. This faculty of the mind by which one can form images or concepts beyond those derived from the senses¹⁶ was an integral part of the Irish peasant's personality. This tendency can be seen to operate in certain approaches to religion and history as well as in the most mundane activities, including conversation itself.

In addition to Lady Gregory, numerous other observers of the Irish country people have noted the peasant's substantial reliance upon imagination. A brief review of other commentators' views on this aspect of the rural folk's personality will aid in achieving a better understanding of the playwright's adaptation of this essentially peasant characteristic into a dramatic technique.

gives reference to her indebtedness to the rural people in her appended note to Seven Short Plays (Dublin: Maunsell & Co. Ltd., 1911), pp. 206-07.

¹⁶The use of "imagination" here is in agreement with the definition set forth in The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles, ed. by C. T. Onions (2 Vols., 3rd rev. ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), I, 958. 1. "The action of imagining, or forming a mental concept of what is not actually present to the senses" and 4. "The power which the mind has of forming concepts beyond those derived from external objects."

The Irish countryman of Lady Gregory's era was a poor farmer who sought to make a living from an often insufficient area of land.¹⁷ Like farmers everywhere, the Irish peasant suffered from the vicissitudes of weather. Of special hardship, however, was the reality that this peasant majority (greater than fifty per cent of the people of Lady Gregory's period made their living from small farms)¹⁸ was at the economic mercy of the Anglo-Irish landlord class. Unlike Lady Gregory, many of her Anglo-Irish and ascendancy fellows charged their peasant tenants exorbitant rents. If the payments were not made, the countryman and his family were apt to be evicted from their home.¹⁹

¹⁷According to 1841 figures in Moody and Martin, The Course of Irish History, p. 267, only seven per cent of the agricultural holdings were over thirty acres. Although the post-famine years during which Lady Gregory lived (after 1851) saw a gradual increase in the amount of acreage per farm, in 1961 greater than fifty per cent of the farms in Ireland were of less than thirty acres with only one-tenth exceeding 100 acres. See Encyclopedia of Ireland (Dublin: Allen Figgis Ltd., 1968), p.157.

¹⁸Statistics based on Country Books of the census in Ireland as quoted from Rt. Honourable Sir James O'Connor, History of Ireland 1798-1924 (2 Vols.; London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1911), II, 220.

¹⁹Prior to the "Land War" of 1879-82 in which the peasants introduced non-violent techniques of group pressure (withholding of rent, embargoes, and the initiation of the first boycott) to achieve their ends, landlords freely evicted tenants who were unable to pay the rent or produced fewer farm crops than were demanded. See Moody and Martin, The Course of Irish History, pp. 285-88. Peasant life remained relatively unstable, however, until after the turn of the century when greater legislative guarantees were passed.

The day-to-day existence of the peasant of the late nineteenth century was neither comfortable nor secure. Indeed, a rather grim account of the multitude of human hardships faced by the rural people of that era is presented in Thomas Davis' Essays on Ireland:

Consider his [Irish peasant's] griefs: They begin in the cradle--they end in the grave.

Suckled by a breast that is supplied from unwholesome or insufficient food, and that is fevered with anxiety--reeking with the smoke of an almost chimneyless cabin--assailed by wind and rain when the weather rages--breathing, when it is calm, the exhalations of a rotten roof, of clay walls, and of manure, which gives his only change of food--he is apt to perish in his infancy.²⁰

Advancing youth brings him labour, and manhood increases it; but youth and manhood leave his roof rotten, his chimney one hole, his window another, his clothes rags--his furniture a pot, a table, a few hay chairs and rickety stools--his food lumpers and water--his bedding straw and coverlet--his enemies the landlord, the tax-gatherer, and the law.²¹

This sober sketch by Davis was later substantiated by the observations of John Cohane that the Irish peasantry was ". . . badly educated, badly housed with a standard of living as poor as anywhere in Europe, and a seeming incapacity to lift themselves out of the squalor of the past."²²

Life for the peasant population of Ireland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would appear

²⁰ Thomas Davis, Prose Writings: Essays on Ireland (London: Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd., 1908), p. 179.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 179-80.

²² John Philip Cohane, The Indestructible Irish (New York: Meredith Press, 1969), p. 4.

to have been an almost constant struggle to cope with social and economic problems. Such a grim picture, however, is not entirely accurate because the life of the Irish country folk, although difficult, was not without its brighter elements. Indeed, the peasantry had a strong penchant for using their minds to form concepts beyond those derived from the senses. Capitalizing on this power of imagination, the rural folk injected new spirit into their lives which enabled them to persevere in their agricultural labours. Through her dramatic presentation of the small town and rustic Irishmen, Lady Gregory captures this positive aspect of their otherwise toilsome lives. The playwright portrays the country people as a simple and poor populace who find vitality and purpose in their lives through imagination.

The Irish imagination expressed itself in a variety of ways. One such externalization was the combination of imagination with certain elements of religion.²³ Through the Catholic Church's teaching that man's days on earth are but a period of struggle and temptation necessary to achieve heaven, the rural folk found hope in the anticipation of what that "next life" would bring. The imagination enriched

²³For a further discussion of religion and its traditional role in the lives of the Irish, see Sean O'Faolain, The Irish: A Character Study (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1949); Daniel Corkery, Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature: A Study (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1965); and Arland Ussher, The Face and Mind of Ireland (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1950).

this religious belief to give new purpose to the toiling peasant's life: "He is not unconsolated. Faith in the joys of another world heightened by his woe in this give him hours when he serenely looks down on the torments that encircle him--the moon on a troubled sky."²⁴

This religious belief offered the Irish peasant the hope of an ideal existence after death, an existence which would be completely free from the hardships of the land. He could therefore temporarily disregard the immediate problems of famine, disease, oppression, and daily labour through his vision of the glories of the next world as preached in religion.

Arland Ussher views the Irish peasant as one who is in part "something of a mystic."²⁵ Through religion the Irish "live by preference in eternity" and embrace a "distant hierarchy" that gives them a "bigger than life" escape from reality.²⁶ Ussher also states his belief that a religious escape from the mundane world to another world is at the very core of the Irish character. Furthermore, he asserts that the ". . . Irish mind is imbred with a deep innate disillusionment and disbelief in life, that was

²⁴ Davis, Essays on Ireland, p. 179.

²⁵ Ussher, Mind of Ireland, p. 132.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 105-06.

here even before Christianity came to our shores and found such a quick response in our people."²⁷

The Irish peasant, according to Ussher's outlook, would appear to be a chronic escapist with little or no interest in the physical world. This position, however, is extreme, especially in light of the agricultural accomplishments of the rural class in Ireland.²⁸ Perhaps a more accurate description is one that recognizes both the peasant's knowledge and acceptance of the real problems and requirements of farm life as well as his use of imagination to look with hope and anticipation toward a better life as promised in religion. Through this other world offered by religion, the peasant found added significance in his day-to-day activities.

Another manner in which imagination played a key role in the character of the Irish peasantry, especially during the early years of the twentieth century, was in the more glorious elements of national history and, in particular, hero-worship. Calling to mind past glories of the country in her conflicts with England was a source of joyful pride for the peasant on an Anglo-Irish estate. Thus, the

²⁷Ussher, Mind of Ireland, p. 137.

²⁸Statistics from the turn of the century proclaim that most of Ireland's export income was obtained through agriculture. Indeed, the average annual export value of farm goods far exceeded all commercial exports combined. See O'Connor, History of Ireland, p. 220.

agrarian populace often turned to the accounts (and exaggerations) of past Irish heroes who fought with valour against the Imperial British. These reminiscences would usually be in the form of written or oral stories dwelling upon the more fantastic or glamorous exploits of their heroes. Brian Inglis cites an example of this practice:

But the Irish not only remember, they live with their history. Wolfe Tone, the founder of the first separatist society in the country, died more than a century and a half ago; but he is more alive in the public mind than most present-day cabinet ministers, and his influence is still debated hotly in periodicals, almost down to the Peg's Paper level.²⁹

This imaginative spirit enabled the Irish to re-create accounts of their more illustrious past history and thus, for a time at least, to cast aside many of their current difficulties. The impoverished peasantry could see little hope for economic or social improvement in their lifetime, and the past achievements of their national heroes offered something with which they could proudly identify. In effect, the imaginative approach to religion and past history (as embodied in Irish heroes) granted the Irish peasant a temporary hiatus from the struggle against uncertain weather conditions, financial problems, health deficiencies, and contemporary politics.

Yet another example of the Irish countryman's tendency to make active use of imagination can be seen in the

²⁹Brian Inglis, The Story of Ireland (London: Faber and Faber, Limited, 1965), p. 22.

formation and transmission of the traditional Celtic myths. Throughout Galway (Lady Gregory's home county) and the other rural areas of Ireland, the peasants orally perpetuated the ancient Irish folk tales. In these tales the original Celtic myth-makers used their inventive minds to interject preternatural elements into basically historical fact. The resultant stories were exaggerated and sometimes fabulous accounts of the exploits of the ancient Celtic race. The art within the folk tales is, as Yeats has said, "extravagant" and the Celts have thus ". . . reshaped the world according to their heart's desire."³⁰

As with certain religious beliefs and historical accounts, the Irish penchant for integrating imaginative fancy with reality can be seen in the Celtic tales. These sagas represent the amalgamation of the observed and the historical with the purely imaginative and the exaggerated.

Sean O'Faolain in evaluating the folk tales of Ireland has labelled them "magic and history."³¹ The accounts of the Tuatha and The Red Branch cycle, for example, are liberally spiced with the presence of wizards and demigods. Consequently, victories were not won by forces of men defeating their enemies, but rather by one man (Cuchulain) withstanding the onslaught of hundreds of

³⁰William Butler Yeats, The Cutting of an Agate (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912), p. 6.

³¹O'Faolain, The Irish, p. 4.

Connacht men or, for another example, the wizards giving drinking water only to the favoured contestants while drying up the enemy's supply. The epic is mingled with fantasy, and history is fused with romance.³²

W. B. Yeats observed that this element of wonder or fantasy appears throughout the Celtic sagas:

A wondering lyric moon must knead and kindle perpetually that moving world of cloaks made out of the fleece of Mananon; of armed men who change themselves into sea-birds; of goddesses who become crows; of trees that bear fruit and flower at the same time.³³

Sean O'Faolain has made a similar observation with regard to the famous Tain Bo Cuailgne: "All one can feel certain of is that this strange medley of myth and realism must have been forged by a strongly dual mind oscillating perpetually between the wonderful and the familiar . . ."³⁴

It can be seen, then, that the imaginative tendency observed in the peasantry of Lady Gregory's era had ancestral precedent. Not only did imagination play a vital role in the original shaping of the Celtic myths, but it also enabled the peasantry of successive generations to look away from the contemporary problems of existence on the land to view the more pleasant world of wonder transmitted through native tales and myths. The rural folk kept alive their

³²O'Faolain, The Irish, p. 4.

³³Yeats, The Cutting of An Agate, pp. 6-7.

³⁴O'Faolain, The Irish, p. 17.

native legends through oral tradition. As O'Faolain has noted:

It is the poor and simple of heart who come closest to the gods, cherish them long after they have been cast out elsewhere. The tenant, or Irish peasant, is the child of time. He is its guardian and its slave.³⁵

The Irish peasantry has persevered despite a long history of foreign occupation and the traditional struggles of an agrarian class to produce a livelihood from the land. This fact can be traced in part to their seemingly inherent capacity for imagination, an imagination which enabled the peasant to leave behind the world of the senses to face happily the wonder and hope of a religious life after death or the almost magical world of heroes from the near and ancient past. To enliven their daily activities, the peasants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries looked toward the more imaginative and fantastic worlds which their physical strivings alone could not produce.

Similarly, the perpetuation of numerous superstitions relied in no small part upon the imaginative powers of the rural inhabitants. Superstition played an integral role in the peasant's daily existence:

A farmer's wife is, for instance, in grave danger if she throws out dirty water after dark, for she may throw it onto a passing fairy, or worse still down a fairy chimney. Of course a good housewife would have

³⁵O'Faolain, The Irish, p. 94.

her washing done well before dark and generally it is remarkable that the requirements of the fairies are those normally observed by a conscientious wife and mother. Special domestic fairies called cluricauns punish the slovenly by turning the milk sour or putting the fire out or hiding things, but they reward the good housewife by giving her magical help, so that nothing gets lost and her house is always bright and clean. This strange state of affairs exists in other countries, I am sure, but the reason for it is not as well understood as it is in Ireland.³⁶

Such superstitions served to give added significance to the performance of many domestic chores and activities on the farm. The process of childbirth, for example, was seen in light of the fairy influence. The country woman who was about to give birth was certain to keep a knife at her bedside to prevent evil fairies from stealing the baby and substituting a changeling. Of course, the fact that a knife was useful in severing the umbilical cord was merely incidental!³⁷

Even though one can readily see that the average Irish peasant did not sit in a pub all day relating magnificent tales or singing romantic ballads, he did maintain a certain fanciful element within his personality. While the peasant may not have adhered to the characteristics of the stereotyped stage Irishman³⁸, neither could he accurately be

³⁶Walter Bryon, The Improbable Irish (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1969), pp. 45-46.

³⁷Ibid., p. 47.

³⁸The Irishman has traditionally been depicted in British drama as a buffoon who drinks too much and uses his unique talent of "blarney" to win the favours of female

described as a stoical realist. Perhaps George Bernard Shaw has said it best when he stated that these people exhibited a ". . . subtle and . . . fastidious imagination, yet with one eye always on things as they are."³⁹

Shaw's brief comment serves as a capsule statement of the character of the Irish peasantry. It would appear that the country folk of Lady Gregory's era maintained a duality of personality. A part of them was deeply rooted in the mundane and physical world of farm labour, which (as Davis' account clearly indicates) taxed their physical and financial resources to the bone. Despite (or because of) this practical awareness of life's hardships, the peasants also maintained an active imagination, an imagination which played a substantial role in their daily lives.

This active penchant for using the imagination, although not necessarily restricted to the Irish country folk, does appear as a significant part of their character. From her rare position as an educated yet sympathetic Anglo-Irish woman, Lady Gregory could view from a sufficient distance the rural people and quite accurately observe the characteristics of their behaviour. One aspect of the Irish

listeners and the price of a drink from his male companions. See Horatio Sheafe Krans, Irish Life in Irish Fiction (New York: A.M.S. Press, Inc., 1966), pp. 224-25.

³⁹George Bernard Shaw, "Preface to John Bull's Other Island" in The Matter With Ireland, edited by David H. Greene and Dan H. Laurence (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), p. 35.

peasant character that she came to understand and skilfully incorporate into her dramatic writings was the country folk's active use of imagination and, in particular, imaginative talk.

Simple conversation provided additional opportunity for pleasure during the peasant's day of agricultural and domestic activities. For the rural Irish of Lady Gregory's era, neighbourly conversation was one of the few opportunities for recreation during a laborious day on the farm. These people, as Ann Saddlemyer comments, viewed "the talk" as a major diversion in an otherwise toilsome day.⁴⁰ Referring to the Irish peasantry, George Bernard Shaw has stated: "The people being poor, and not expecting one another to be rich, they have a good deal of time for thinking and a good deal of time for talking."⁴¹

Often the peasant's conversation was given added significance through the speaker's use of imagination. In this way, the country people would interpret a situation and then give life to that interpretation through talk. This talk, however, was more than a mere tale or story. Indeed, the fantasy fused with the speech to create for the peasant a new reality. The process by which this new

⁴⁰Ann Saddlemyer, In Defence of Lady Gregory Playwright (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1966), p. 26.

⁴¹Shaw, "Socialism in Ireland" in The Matter With Ireland, p. 218.

reality is formed, through the integration of the imagination and the talk, can be labelled confabulation.⁴² A confabulator would view an ordinary incident such as a dog romping down a road as some extraordinary event. Predisposed to see the fantastical in the mundane, he might reshape the occurrence so that the dog becomes a monstrous threat to the community.

Confabulation, like religious belief in an ideal life after death, the exaggerated praise of historical and folk tale figures, and superstitions, gave a certain excitement or zest to the routine of daily life in the Irish countryside or village. For those involved, the confabulation became a part of reality and, as such, the people conducted their lives in accordance with it.

Lady Gregory's knowledge of this Irish penchant for glorified talk and the ensuing imaginative visions is discussed by Ann Saddlemyer: "Her first insight into this 'craving for talk' and the resulting fantasy occurred during her search for folk tales 'among the imaginative class, the holders of the traditions of Ireland', the country people in the fields and the workhouses."⁴³

Through her personal observations of the rural class, Lady Gregory came to appreciate the special gift of

⁴²For a more detailed discussion of the etymology of confabulation and its use in this thesis, see Appendix.

⁴³Saddlemyer, Defence of Lady Gregory, p. 25.

imagination which these impoverished people possessed:

But as I listened, I was moved by the strange contrast between the poverty of the tellers and the splendours of the tales It seemed as if their lives had been so poor and rigid in circumstance that they did not fix their minds, as more prosperous people might do, on thoughts of customary pleasure. The stories that they love are of quite visionary things; of swans that turn into kings' daughters, and of castles with crowns over the doors, and lovers' flights on the backs of eagles, and music-loving water-witches, and journeys to the other world, and sleeps that last for seven hundred years.⁴⁴

.
I think it has always been to such poor people with little of wealth or comfort to keep their thoughts bound to the things about them, that dreams and visions have been given.⁴⁵

This tendency to imaginatively create a better world through talk was deeply ingrained in the Irish country folk, and Lady Gregory saw how this confabulation could lead to incidents and complications worthy of comedy. Consequently, she used confabulation as a device to create humorous situations in her drama.

To say that the playwright was cognizant of the expression "confabulation" and consciously set out to define and incorporate it into her comedy would be irresponsible. What can be substantiated and, indeed, what is at the heart of this thesis is Lady Gregory's keen comprehension of the peasant character and, in particular, his propensity for a

⁴⁴Lady Augusta Gregory, Poets and Dreamers: Studies and Translations from the Irish (London: John Murray, 1903), p. 129.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 130.

special type of imaginative talk. She viewed what is defined here as confabulation as a real element of the peasant personality, one which she used as a technique on stage to produce comedy.

This device is at the core of many of Lady Gregory's best comic characters and plot situations. To varying degrees she incorporated the peasant penchant for confabulation into The Image, Hyacinth Halvey, Hanrahan's Oath, Sancho's Master, Spreading the News, and The Full Moon.

Rising from a cast of credible characters, the technique of confabulation produces numerous comic predicaments and incidents often bordering on farce. Distinctly non-farcical, however, are the warm and human characters in the plays discussed. Sufficiently distant so as not to threaten or intimidate the audience, the people who live in the dramatic world of Lady Gregory's plays remain recognizable with their desires and foibles, not the least of which is an active use of imagination. These characters are not (with the notable exception of the Magistrate in Spreading the News) buffoons worthy of satire. Indeed, an audience is readily sympathetic to the human motivations of these characters as they search for the fantastic and extraordinary in life through their imaginative talk. As observed by Yeats: "Lady Gregory alone writes out of a spirit of pure comedy, and laughs without bitterness and with no thought

but to laugh. She has perfect sympathy with her characters
... "46

Each of the plays to be discussed presents characters who are warm and credible. Although she does not satirize the Irish peasantry, the playwright captures the imaginative quality of the Irish country people of her era. From this base of distinct characterizations, Lady Gregory uses confabulation as a technique to set up humorous complications and predicaments.

This paper is an attempt to isolate and analyze this comic device as it appears in six of Lady Gregory's dramas. Through the isolation and explanation of both the essential and ancillary roles of confabulation within these plays, a better appreciation of Lady Gregory's awareness of this particular aspect of the Irish peasantry can be developed. Consequently, a further acknowledgement of the playwright's transmission of this concept into highly enjoyable comedy will be possible. In short, any real examination and full appreciation of Lady Gregory's achievement with comedy must take into account her successful use of the device here termed confabulation.

⁴⁶W. B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1923), p. 142.

CHAPTER II

CONFABULATED CHARACTER

The imaginative ability of the Irish country folk to confabulate can be seen throughout Lady Gregory's dramatic works. The playwright not only adapted her knowledge of the country people to her plays, but she also availed herself of the rural environment of the cottage and small village as a realistic backdrop for her characters' comic escapades. Although the basic technique of creating a person's character or a situation through imaginative talk remains the same, the repercussions of that confabulation vary with the characters and plot situations involved. Thus, the dramatic consequences of what has been here called confabulation, while always humorous, vary considerably in The Image, Hyacinth Halvey, Hanrahan's Oath, Spreading the News, The Full Moon, and Sancho's Master.

In an attempt to isolate and evaluate Lady Gregory's dramatic use of this Irish peasant quality of imaginative talk, a breakdown of confabulation into confabulated character and confabulated situation will be useful. Both types rely upon the imaginative and verbal abilities of the characters involved, yet the subject of the confabulation differs. In the first case, a person's character or

reputation is devised or restructured through the imaginative talk of one or more of the individuals in the play. The confabulated situation, on the other hand, entails the misinterpretation or reshaping of an event. This latter type of imaginative talk will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Lady Gregory successfully uses the confabulated character in four plays to be examined in this chapter. The principal function of these instances of imaginative talk is as a dramatic device to produce humorous predicaments or complications for the characters on stage. In addition to these consequences, some mild humour is also effected by the process of confabulation itself. Thus, the extent to which the character must reach beyond reality to fulfil his desire for excitement is often in itself the source of gentle comedy. In the main, however, the playwright relies upon confabulation of character as a technique to produce humorous complications or problems for the characters in the play.

The creation or alteration of another's character or reputation in this way is in keeping with the aforementioned quality common among the Irish rural class. A new excitement or zest is given to the fanciful person's life when he uses his talk to create a fantasy world in which he can attribute to another person qualities and achievements having little or no foundation in fact. In short, he creates an extra-

ordinary world which for him is reality.

Perhaps one of the best examples of this type of humour in Lady Gregory's canon is to be seen in The Image.⁴⁷

This three act play, which was completed and presented on the Abbey stage in 1909,⁴⁸ makes extensive use of the Irish peasants' imaginative tendency and, in particular, imaginative talk. Indeed, as Ann Saddlemyer has observed:

The entire plot is based on hearsay, elaborated and embroidered by the characters. . . . The reality of the background, a village street with thatched houses against grey sea and grey hills, is contrasted with the soaring vision of the inhabitants.

.
But the theme around which the plot revolves, the emotion for the structured fable, is man in relation to his dream . . .⁴⁹

The building of a fictitious character is but one of these dreams or images created by the people of the village.⁵⁰
As the drama proceeds, the fantastic images held by the

⁴⁷Lady Augusta Gregory, The Image (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons Ltd., no publication date given). All future references to The Image will be from this edition and cited in the text of the paper by (Image, p.).

⁴⁸Lennox Robinson, ed., Ireland's Abbey Theatre: A History 1899-1951 (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1968), p. 104.

⁴⁹Saddlemyer, Defence of Lady Gregory, p. 80.

⁵⁰Although all the characters in The Image are not strictly peasants or farmers, they are in keeping with the aforementioned qualities of Irish country folk and live and work in the non-urban environment of a small rustic village. The characters in The Image and Lady Gregory's other plays often reside in a village or small community.

different people on stage becomes apparent. The stonecutter, Coppinger, imagines that he will someday gain fame by making a tomb for a famous person (Image, pp. 8, 9, 17). His wife seeks to emigrate to the United States, a country that she fancies to be a utopia (Image, p. 7). The farmer from Connacht, Brian Hosty, believes his own county to be a land of perfection (Image, pp. 18-19).

The images which they have created are imaginative fancy and bear little relation to the factual situation. Indeed, Coppinger is a small town stonecutter who will not logically be chosen to fashion the tomb of any national or international hero. Similarly, neither the United States nor Connacht is a land of perfect contentment and wealth. When these images are compared with the realistic situation, they become the source of mild humour.⁵¹ Of prime importance to the play, however, is the image of Hugh O'Lorrha developed by the country man, Malachi Naughton, which affects the entire district.

Following a severe storm, the seaside community of Druim-na-Cuan discovers that two giant whales have been washed ashore. The people of the area have begun to discuss how they will spend the financial benefits that will accrue

⁵¹The comedy produced here is that of warm amusement generated by the extent to which these people use their imaginations to create fancy. Because the village folk are portrayed as simple and sincere in their imaginative wanderings, the humour is that of mild amusement rather than that of ridicule or satire.

from the sale of whale oil to be taken from the two beached mammals. The three eldest village men--Thomas Coppinger, a stonecutter; Brian Hosty, a farmer from the other side of the provincial wall in Connacht; and Darby Costello, a seaweed hawker--are given the responsibility of choosing some project worthy of the unexpected community income. These old men seem unable to agree on anything, yet they ultimately decide to erect a statue in honour of some hero. The manner in which the hero is chosen and proclaimed is essentially the result of the creation of character through imaginative talk.

The principal confabulated character in this play is Hugh O'Lorrha, whose reputation and qualities are developed and disseminated by the mountain peasant, Malachi Naughton. Early in the play, Malachi is observed to be a man who gives added significance to life by interpreting its vicissitudes through his imagination (Image, pp. 10-13). He construes the sights and sounds of a storm as part of a night "full of signs and of wonders" (Image, p. 11). Malachi relates to Mr. and Mrs. Coppinger that his goat had broken loose during the previous night's disturbance. When found the following morning at the ocean shore, the wayward beast had given birth to two kids (Image, p. 12). To these supposed "wonders", Malachi links the discovery of a weathered board upon which the goat was found to be nibbling. The ability of this

rural farmer to see wonder in what would appear to be typical events in nature is worthy comic material.

Malachi's imagination, however, has just begun its creative work. Displaying the worn piece of wood that he found, he asks Mrs. Coppinger to interpret the letters inscribed upon it:

MRS. COPPINGER: So there is a name on it in painted printing--H, H, u, g, h--Hugh--Hugh O'Lorrha.

MALACHI: Hugh O'Lorrha--I was thinking, and I was near certain, the time I saw the letters it was the name of the same person was in it, that had sent some message into my hand. Tell me now, ma'am, have you any account at all, or did you ever you hear it told who was Hugh O'Lorrha? (Image, p. 13)

From this apparently meaningless piece of wood, the inventive Malachi begins to speculate about the significance of his discovery as well as that of the mysterious name which it bears:

MALACHI: There should be some meaning in it and some message. No doubt about it at all, it was a night full of wonders--Down in the tide there to be the noise as of hundreds, the bird in the rafters making its own outcry, and its call--the goat to be bringing me to that bit of a board--Hugh O'Lorrha, that should be a very high sounding name. What it is at all he is calling to me, and bidding me for to do? (Image, p. 13)

The inscribed board becomes for this rural Irishman the springboard to some deeper meaning. "No doubt about it at all," he says, and his imagination gropes for some clue to the identity of Hugh O'Lorrha:

MALACHI: It was those beasts whales so, brought that name and that board of timber. Who now in the wide

earthly world will tell me who was Hugh O'Lorrha?
(Goes off.) (Image, p. 17)

Recognizing Malachi's over-exuberance for a board washed ashore in the previous night's storm, the apparently more realistic Hosty and Mrs. Coppinger comment on the mountain man's statements:

HOSTY: (To Mrs. Coppinger, who has come to door.) What at all is Malachi raving about, Mrs. Coppinger, with his cracked talk and his questioning?

MRS. COPPINGER: Ah, that is the way he is, and something gone queer in his head. There is nothing left to him in life but high flighting thoughts. (Image, p. 17)

To these ordinary people who look at an inscribed board for its face value alone, the mountain man's talk is considered folly. Malachi's groping for a fanciful meaning to such a natural occurrence is imaginative fancy and adds humour to the drama. Yet for Malachi, portrayed by the playwright as a hermit-farmer, the mysterious Hugh O'Lorrha provides the means for excitement.

By Act II, Malachi has begun to envisage what wonderful character Hugh O'Lorrha must have had. His thoughts about the mysterious man whose name appears on the board are demonstrated in his conversation with the old midwife, Peggy Mahon:

MALACHI: It is long you are in this world, Peggy Mahon, and you knew a power of people from birth to age, and heard many histories. Tell me, now, did ever you know or did ever you hear tell of one Hugh O'Lorrha?
(Image, p. 37)

.....

PEGGY: Ah, it's near gone from me. All such things are gone from me, with the dint of fretting after them that flew away.

MALACHI: You cannot but tell it. It is through miracles his name was brought to this place. I tell you it was not brought without wonders. (Image, p. 38)

It is at this point in the play that the imaginative wanderings of Malachi are transformed into confabulation. As Peggy proceeds to satisfy the demanding Malachi with conjectural information about a hero, Malachi inserts his own conclusions to fulfil the description that he himself wants O'Lorrha to have. Consequently, the character of O'Lorrha becomes one based solely upon the fantasy and talk of the rural mountain man:

PEGGY: To leave his mother's house he did--

MALACHI: So he would too. What would happen to the world the like of him to have stopped at home? He wasn't one would be sitting through the week the same as the police, having his feet in the ashes.

PEGGY: Out fighting on the road he went--

MALACHI: There were always good fighters in Ireland till this present times. The people have no fight in them now worth while, so lagging they are grown to be and so liary.

PEGGY: Fighting, fighting. To get into some trouble he did--it is hardly he escaped from the Naked Hangman--

MALACHI: It is the Sassonach twisted the rope for him so. Terrible wicked they were, and God save us, I believe they are every bit as wicked yet. Go on, ma'am, sound it out. Well, it was the one hand sent the whales steering over the tide, and brought me here to yourself gathering newses. (Image, pp. 38-39)

Malachi has taken the half-completed speculations of Peggy and transformed them into definite qualities of the wandering fighter, Hugh O'Lorrha. He was a man ("the like of him") who was clearly active and not one to waste his time. Malachi becomes excited about his new hero and tells Peggy of his intention to ". . . put up the name of Hugh O'Lorrha, and to sound it in the ears of the entire world" (Image, p. 39). The discovery of the board has presented the aged peasant with an opportunity to confabulate. The confabulation, in turn, has created for him a new reality, a reality that has given his life new purpose.

As mentioned in passing, the other inhabitants of Druim-na-Cuan sense the air of fabrication in the mountain man's talk:

PEGGY: Have you no one of your own to keep in mind, Malachi Naughton, that you should go battling for a name is no more to you than any other, and not to be content with your own dead?

For Peggy Mahon, Malachi's belief in the character that he attributes to O'Lorrha becomes little more than the source of mild amusement. For the countryman, however, O'Lorrha has become a definite part of reality. Thus, Malachi raises the character of O'Lorrha an ever increasing distance from the ground of reality:

MALACHI: It is more to me than any other name. It is a name I would go walking the world for, without a shoe to my foot! And why would I do that for any common person, would be maybe as ugly as the people I do be seeing every day, and as cross and as crabbed? What call would I have going through hardship for a

man would he no better maybe, and no better looking, than myself? (Image, p. 40)

O'Lorrha, an unknown entity, has been given the character of a great patriot. Although it appears that the townsfolk recognize the fantasy and wish-fulfilment in Malachi's statements, they, too, will eventually fall prey to the fanciful belief in the qualities of O'Lorrha. It is this consequence of Malachi's confabulation which embodies the central humour of the comedy.

The townspeople seek to honour some great hero with a statue to be built with the monies obtained through the sale of whale oil. Because the three eldest members of the community (Coppinger, Hosty, and Costello) quibble about who should be honoured (Image, p. 49), Malachi has an excellent opportunity to expand his praise for the name and reputation of his hero:

MALACHI: You need not go far looking for that hero . It is I myself am able to give you a name is worth while. As if blown away on the wind it was, till it was brought back this day, with messengers were not common messenger, but strange. You may believe me telling you he is the fittest man. (Image, p. 49)

With an inquisitive gathering eager to hear of anyone to whom a statue might be erected, Malachi's imagination and talk combine to create an ever heightening description of the wondrous O'Lorrha:

COPPINGER: Who might he be so, and where is he presently?

MALACHI: He not to be out of the world what would he want with miracles? He to be in it at this time

wouldn't he be well able to cut a way for himself and ask no help from anyone at all.

COPPINGER: Tell us out who was he so?

MALACHI: A man he was that left his mother's house where he was reared, and went out fighting on the roads of the world.

COPPINGER: There is many a one did that in the last seven hundred years. It was maybe following after Sarsfield he went, and the Limerick Treaty broken?

MALACHI: It was out against the English he went--

HOSTY: A '98 man maybe?

MALACHI: It is hardly he escaped from the Naked Hangman--

COSTELLO: No, but a '48 man. There was few that escaped in '98.

COPPINGER: It's often their story wasn't put down right by the illiterate people in the old time. Tell out his name now till we'll see what do we know about it. (Image, pp. 49-50)

It can be seen by the above dialogue that Costello, Coppinger, and Hosty are eager to discover any hero of the past; they themselves rationalize how it might be that they had never heard of him. Malachi, aware of their interest, reveals the name of his hero:

MALACHI: A great name, a great name will go sounding through the world. It is I myself got the charge to bring it to mind. Though my clothes are poor my story is high! Did ever any of ye hear till today the name of Hugh O'Lorrha? (Image, p. 50)

Similar to the skepticism demonstrated by Mrs. Coppinger, the three old men begin to doubt the credibility of Malachi's information regarding O'Lorrha:

HOSTY: I never did. I think it is but foolish talk he is giving out, that we are fools ourselves listening to.

.....
 COPPINGER: It is not to a mountainy man it would be left to make that name known, and it being the name of any big man. And I myself never hearing it at all. (Goes and sits at his own door.)

HOSTY: It is down from the mountains the whole country is destroyed, so wild and so unruly as ye do be, and so ready to give an opinion on everything in the world wide. (He sits down at Peggy's door.) (Image, p. 50)

Coppinger, aware that the names of the famous and the infamous alike are often transmitted through Irish history in song, consults his wife on the matter of Hugh O'Lorrha:

COPPINGER: Tell me this, Mary, you that have that much songs a horse wouldn't carry the load of them, did you meet in ere a verse of them with the name of Hugh O'Lorrha? (Image, p. 51)

Before she can reply, Malachi admits that, although a great hero, O'Lorrha has gone virtually unhonoured in song or monument:

MALACHI: She did not to be sure. His name to be in song, what would he want with stones or with monuments? Wouldn't any man at all be satisfied, his name to be going through the generations in a song. My grief that I haven't the wit to make a poem for him or a ballad, and it is a great pity I am not prone to versify! (Image, p. 51)

Despite his failure to convince the three old gentlemen of the village, it is obvious that Malachi has thoroughly persuaded himself of O'Lorrha's former existence. More than a hero, O'Lorrha is viewed by the mountain man as a patriot whose achievements have been sadly neglected in history. Consequently, the raising up of the name and reputation of

O'Lorrha becomes his personal mission. As his unqualified praise grows in momentum, so too does the humour of the situation. This is possible through the knowledge that Malachi's statements are factually unfounded. The humour, not unmixed with a sympathetic understanding, is elicited through the playwright's portrayal of Malachi as a simple mountain man who becomes sincerely dedicated to his con-fabulation. The laughter is not directed at the man, but rather at the extent to which his fantasy world has deviated from the reality observed. The humour produced by the con-fabulation itself, however, is only a small part of the overall effect that this device has on the play.

The principal comic result of the fabrication of O'Lorrha's character is achieved through the village quest for a hero to whom they can dedicate their new statue. At first, Coppinger, Hosty, and Costello ignore Malachi's suggestion that it should be erected in honour of Hugh O'Lorrha. Yet, as time for the decision runs out, a seemingly hopeless stalemate is apparent. The debate involves whether to build a statue for the Munster hero, O'Connell, or the Connacht man, Parnell (Image, pp. 52-57). With the discussion at its height, Malachi redoubles his efforts on behalf of his hero, O'Lorrha:

MRS. COPPINGER: What is ailing you? Be mannerly in your anger anyway. Yourself and your Hugh O'Lorrha, that was maybe some sort of an idolator or a foreigner, that went breaking all the commandments!

MALACHI: Whatever he was I'd go to the north side of hell for seven year for him! The whole fleet of ye together are not worthy the smallest rib of his hair!

HOSTY: In my opinion he was an innocent or a fool the same as yourself, or you would not be infatuated with him the way you are! (All laugh.) (Image, pp. 58-59)

Malachi's belief in his own confabulation remains steadfast despite the laughter and ridicule of the village people. Indeed, when the others belittle the hero that he has created, the mountain man reacts furiously:

MALACHI: That will be a dear laugh to you! Is it defaming the character ye are of my darling man? But I'll put terror on ye! I'll give you a clout will knock your head as solid as any stone in the wall! (Flourishes board.)

.....
MALACHI: (Calling out as he goes.) Time is a good story-teller! Ye will do the business for me yet, till his name will be sung through the seven kingdoms! What is allotted cannot be blotted. (Image, p. 60)

Malachi is led off a bitter and angry man who has been injured because of his own imaginative talk. He had created for himself an unreal world.

If one accepts the premise that laughter is the reaction to something which is incongruous to that which is socially considered normal, then the entire Malachi incident is at least worthy of understanding laughter.⁵² The village folk, operating in their own social system, view with doubt and amusement the extravagant statements of Malachi. For these people, Malachi's assertions regarding O'Lorrha are

⁵²Allardyce Nicoll, An Introduction to Dramatic Theory (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1923), pp. 153-56.

merely the imaginative wanderings of a fanciful old man. The drama as a whole benefits from the amusing inconsistency that exists between the facts of the situation and the fantastic statements of Malachi.

Throughout the play's first two acts, Malachi has been ridiculed by his neighbours for his dedication to his fabricated hero, O'Lorrha. In Act Three, however, the humorous repercussions of the imaginative talk increase when the village people find themselves in the position of having to support the fantasy world developed by Malachi. This departure by the people of Druim-na-Cuan from their normal world into the realm of confabulation becomes exceptionally funny. Lady Gregory is skilful in this transition so that it remains dramatically credible yet effectively amusing.

With the debate to determine who should be honoured with the soon to be erected statue at an impasse, the three elders give a secret voice vote to the representative of the priest and Board of Guardians, Peter Mannion. In a move toward compromise, yet not putting forth a vote for their fellows' selections, each of the old men refrains from voting for his favourite candidate and instead gives his support to the neutral candidate, Hugh O'Lorrha:

COPPINGER: Did ever you hear now any person to have been a picture or a likeness of Malachi Naughton's man?

MANNION: I cannot bring to mind that ever I did.

COPPINGER: I give my voice and my vote so for Hugh O'Lorrha. (Image, p. 64)

.....
 COSTELLO: It is impossible to say what men would be best, and good and bad being together in the whole of them. And all I would wish is the name of some man that never gave offence, and had ne'er an enemy worth while--and it's likely that would be the mountainy man's choice, Hugh O'Lorrha. (Image, p. 65)

.....
 HOSTY: They to have agreed, it is some plan they have made to get the mastery over myself and over Connacht. I never told a lie but two or three, and you may believe me saying that if there were two hundred Dan O'Connells, and twenty thousand Mr. Parnells, and a sovereign in their hands for every vote I'd vote, I'd give it to none of them, but to a man I'm sure and certain sure Darby or Thomas, or his wife, never gave out a challenge for, and never blew the horn for, and that is the fool's man, Hugh O'Lorrha! (Image, p. 66)

Each of the three men votes for O'Lorrha out of default rather than personal favour, and all are surprised when Mannion announces their unanimous selection:

MANNION: (Beckoning the others in.) Let ye draw near to me now. Come up here Mrs. Coppinger, till I'll count out the returns. By the opinion, and the judgment, of the three fairest men, and the three choice men of Druim-na-cuan, and they voting together the same as children of one house, without deceit or trickery, the image is to be reared on this headland is to stand for the honour and the memory and for the great name and face of Hugh O'Lorrha.

ALL: Hugh O'Lorrha! (They raise their hands in astonishment and look at one another.) (Image, p. 66)

Although the group itself has not confabulated the character of O'Lorrha and has never truly accepted all that Malachi has said, much of the humour of the play is elicited from the old men's refusal to admit to Mannion that they actually know nothing of this alleged hero. Consequently, the effect of confabulated character extends beyond the mind

and speech of Malachi to the village elders. Indeed, the entire village and surrounding district enthusiastically prepare for the construction of the new statue to honour Hugh O'Lorrha. Everyone--Members of Parliament, the clergy, and neighbours alike--assumes that Hugh O'Lorrha is merely a forgotten yet worthy hero of old. The local people's gullible simplicity as they search for a hero to add excitement to their lives is in keeping with the Irish peasantry's penchant for hero worship discussed in Chapter I.

The entire district is fascinated by the growing reputation of Hugh O'Lorrha, and the district officials smugly chide the neighbouring leaders for not previously honouring O'Lorrha:

COPPINGER: And more than that again, the Board of Guardians gave out a great lacerating to all the rest of the Unions of the two provinces, where they had never stretched a hand to raise up the memory, or so much as to change the address on a street, to the great high up name of Hugh O'Lorrha. (Image, p. 74)

Although the whole community has innocently taken up the praise of Hugh O'Lorrha, it should be remembered that no one really knows who he was; the only clue to his existence remains the board found by Malachi in Act I. Despite the fact that the statue's form is to be based upon the portrait of a stylized orator, more details are needed for its inscription. Mannion solicits these details from the three old men just before the festive ground-breaking ceremony is about to take place:

MANNION: That's it. The name and the date of Hugh O'Lorrha's birth, and the place he was reared, and the length of his years, and the deeds he has done. Write me out a docket now having that put down upon it clear and plain. (Image, p. 78)

The elderly men, having no real knowledge of Hugh O'Lorrha, avoid Mannion's questions:

COPPINGER: Ah, what are you wanting to put down? His christened name we have, and the name of his family and his tribe, and that is more than was wrote down of some of the world's great men, such as Homer that spoke Greek and never wrote a lie.

MANNION: It is likely that will not be enough. Reporters that were asking in the town, what place was Hugh O'Lorrha born.

COPPINGER: You should know that Brian Hosty, where your memory has no burdens on it like my own.

HOSTY: I forget it as good as yourself.

MANNION: Well, who is it has the whole account? Sure it must have been written down at some time, in a history or in a testament. (Image, p. 79)

In desperation they turn to Malachi for these vital statistics. He, however, uses the opportunity to further develop the grand character of his O'Lorrha. The comic result is to create a greater distance between known fact and imaginative fancy:

COSTELLO: Who would have it but Malachi Naughton? He'll remember us of it. (Image, p. 79)

.....
COPPINGER: Give out now, Malachi, if you can give it, the deeds and the greatness of the man is to be set up on a stone in this spot. (Image, p. 80)

.....
MALACHI: Why wouldn't I know about him, and I after seeing him with my two eyes?

COPPINGER: Is it to see him you are saying you did?

MALACHI: Clear and plain I saw him in the night time.
If I didn't why would my heart leap up with him the way it does.

COPPINGER: Is it with yourself you were, seeing him?

MALACHI: I have no witnesses but the great God and myself. Crowds and crowds of people I saw. Men like jockeys that were racing--and one that was the leader of them, on a bayish horse--the sun and the moon never shone upon his like--eyes he had were more shining than our eyes, and as to comeliness, there was no more to be found. The champions of Greece, and to put all of them together, would not equal the flower of one drop of his strong blood. (Image, p. 80)

The more Malachi talks, the greater O'Lorrha's qualities become. O'Lorrha is granted almost preternatural qualities as the imagination is given free reign through talk:

MALACHI: You would stand to look at him in a fair I say. Fair hair on him the colour of amber. Twelve handsome riders and he before them all-- (Image, p. 81)

.....
MALACHI: A man that had seven colours in his eyes!
That was for beauty and for strength beyond a hundred!
His name in lines of golden letters written on his own blue sword!
A man could whip the world and that broke every gap!--Sure you have no action in you, no action at all, without liveliness, without a nod. The devil himself wouldn't take you or the like of you! (Image, pp. 82-83)

Eventually the true identity of O'Lorrha is discovered with the realization that the mysterious board was part of a hooker named Hugh O'Lorrha which had broken up in the storm mentioned in Act I (Image, pp. 10, 84). Once the townsfolk consult the village register, they find that the only Hugh O'Lorrha listed was born the previous day, and he was named in honour of the sunken boat (Image, p. 87). The

unknown O'Lorrha for whom the boat was named is then found to be the infamous rogue described in a folk tale:

COSTELLO: My dearest life! I was thinking the same thing before. Sure that is a folk-tale my grandfather used to be telling in the years gone by.

MRS. COPPINGER: Can you tell us now at what time did he live?

PEGGY: How would I know? I suppose at the time of the giants. He came in one day to his mother. "Go boil a hew for me and bake a cake for me," says he, "till I'll travel as far as the Court and ask the King's daughter."

COSTELLO: I know it through and through. It is nothing at all but a story-teller's yarn.

COPPINGER: Is that truth you are saying?

COSTELLO: To the best of my belief I am speaking the truth. I can tell it through to the binding. To take the life he did of the Naked Hangman, that was hid in the egg of a duck.

MRS. COPPINGER: Why didn't you tell us before now, Darby Costello, that you knew Hugh O'Lorrha to be but a deception and an empty tale.

COSTELLO: I was someway shy and fearful to be going against the whole of ye. And sure when we had to believe it, we must believe it.

HOSTY: And is it only in the poets' stories he is, and nothing but a name upon the wind? What way did it fail you to know that, Thomas Coppinger, and that Malachi had put his own skin upon the story. (Image, pp. 91-92)

Consequently, all the festivities regarding the statue and the district's belief in the newly discovered hero O'Lorrha are seen to be the results of Malachi's confabulation. Thus, through her knowledge of the peasant penchant for imaginative talk, Lady Gregory has woven a successful

comedy based upon a confabulated character. In The Image, it is a mountain rustic, Malachi Naughton, who uses his imaginative and verbal powers to produce the qualities and attributes of Hugh O'Lorrha. From this foundation of manufactured data and personal fantasy, the humour is gradually developed as first Malachi, then his neighbours, and ultimately the entire district come under the influence of the confabulated hero, O'Lorrha.

Lady Gregory uses confabulation to create humour. Part of this humour is elicited from the disparity that exists between Malachi's praise of O'Lorrha and the factual evidence upon which that praise is based. The lack of congruity between the two becomes obvious. The playwright employs the confabulation of character as something more than an isolated incident of humour. Indeed, the predicaments that develop from the initial fabrication are the source of much of the play's comedy and essential to its success. Despite the villagers' early pronouncement of Malachi as a talkative fabricator (Image, p. 17), the entire district ultimately falls under the influence of the rural man's confabulation. The humorous climax of the play is attained when the heroic O'Lorrha is discovered to have been little more than a balladeer's common rogue.

In her one act comedy Hyacinth Halvey,⁵³ Lady Gregory

⁵³Lady Augusta Gregory, Hyacinth Halvey in Lady Gregory's Selected Plays, chosen by Elizabeth Coxhead

demonstrates yet another instance of confabulated character which aids in the success of her drama. In this play, completed in 1906⁵⁴ and produced in 1910,⁵⁵ the imaginative talk of an entire village reshapes the average character of Hyacinth Halvey so that he becomes the community hero.

The setting of the play is the small country village of Cloon where Hyacinth Halvey, a new Sub-Sanitary Inspector, is scheduled to arrive by train. As the play opens, the postmistress (Mrs. Delane) and butcher (James Quirke) discuss the reputation of the future neighbour:

MRS. DELANE: So he is, one Hyacinth Halvey; and, indeed, if all that is said is true, or if a quarter of it is true, he will be a credit to this town.

MR. QUIRKE: Is that so?

MRS. DELANE: Testimonials he has by the score. To Father Gregan they were sent. Registered they were coming and going. Would you believe me telling you that they weighed up to three pounds?

MR. QUIRKE: There must be a great bulk in them indeed.

MRS. DELANE: It is no wonder he to get the job. He must have a great character so many persons to write for him as what they did. (Halvey, pp. 55-56)

As a harbinger of the exaggeration of good character to follow, the local Sergeant announces the title of a lecture to be given by a representative of the Department

(London: Putnam & Company Limited, 1962), pp. 54-82. All future references to Hyacinth Halvey will be from this edition and cited in the text by (Halvey, p.).

⁵⁴Saddlemyer, Defence of Lady Gregory, p. 110.

⁵⁵Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, pp. 49, 95.

of Agriculture: "A lecture will be given this evening in Cloon court-house . . . The subject of the lecture is 'The Building of Character'" (Halvey, pp. 56-57). Thus, Lady Gregory has prepared the audience for the appearance of the new fellow in town, Hyacinth Halvey, a man who will himself be the subject of the town's "building of character".

Halvey enters the scene armed with a substantial number of character letters:

HYACINTH: Good evening to you. I was bid to come to the post office--

SERGEANT: I suppose you are Hyacinth Halvey? I had a letter about you from the Resident Magistrate.

HYACINTH: I heard he was writing. It was my mother got a friend he deals with to ask him. (Halvey, p. 58)

Halvey readily admits that the letter sent to the Sergeant was not an accurate assessment of his qualifications by someone familiar with his work, but rather a product of patronage. The Sergeant, however, disregards this factual statement:

SERGEANT: He gives you a very high character.

HYACINTH: It is very kind of him indeed, and he not knowing me at all. But indeed all the neighbours were very friendly. Anything anyone could do to help me they did it. (Halvey, p. 58)

The country folk of Cloon are eager to have an extraordinary personage in their little community and ignore Halvey's remark. Indeed, they desire to view more of the letters that he has brought from his home town of Carrow. The decision by the people of Cloon to opt for the fantastic

or exaggerated rather than for the factual evidence stated by Halvey himself serves as an indication of their imaginative tendency. They proceed to read the extravagant letters

MRS. DELANE: I'll engage it is the testimonials you have in your parcel? I know the wrapping paper, but they grew in bulk since I handled them.

HYACINTH: Indeed I was getting them to the last. There was not one refused me. It is what my mother was saying, a good character is no burden.

FARDY: I would believe that indeed.

SERGEANT: Let us have a look at the testimonials.
(Hyacinth Halvey opens parcel, and a large number of envelopes fall out.)

SERGEANT: (Opening and reading one by one.) *He possesses the fire of the Gael, the strength of the Norman, the vigour of the Dane, the stolidity of the Saxon*--

HYACINTH: It was the Chairman of the Poor Law Guardians wrote that.

SERGEANT: *A magnificent example to old and young*--

HYACINTH: That was the Secretary of the De Wet Hurling Club--

SERGEANT: *A shining example of the value conferred by an eminently careful and high class education*--

HYACINTH: That was the National Schoolmaster.

SERGEANT: *Devoted to the highest ideals of his Motherland to such an extent as is compatible with a hitherto non-parliamentary career*--

HYACINTH: That was the Member for Carrow.

SERGEANT: *A splendid exponent of the purity of the race*--

HYACINTH: The editor of the Carrow Champion.

SERGEANT: 'Admirably adapted for the efficient discharge of all possible duties that may in future be laid upon him'--

HYACINTH: The new Station-master. (Halvey, pp. 58-59)

The people of Cloon are oblivious to the exaggeration and inappropriateness of the testimonials that they read. Indeed, they appear predisposed to believe anything good that is written despite Halvey's honest revelation of the various social and community positions held by the writers in his former home.

The village folk are eager to build up a fantastic character, and so they shall through their imaginative talk. Lady Gregory has stated in her note to Hyacinth Halvey that ". . . 'character' is built up or destroyed by a password or an emotion, rather than by experience and deliberation" (Halvey, p. 82). Throughout the play this statement will hold true as the people of Cloon attribute qualities to Halvey on the basis of the obviously exaggerated and inappropriate recommendation letters. In effect, they create a heroic character in whom they steadfastly believe. Despite Halvey's questionable behaviour as the play progresses, the community people create an ideal character for him which they will not deny. For the imaginative country folk, the exaggerated letters are all the impetus needed to begin their own reshaping of Halvey's character to fit their fancy.

Lady Gregory relies on the imaginative talk of the townspeople to support the play's principal theme of character building. The confabulation of character is perhaps best exemplified by the actions of Miss Joyce and Mrs. Delane. These women, through the fusion of their imaginations with talk, create the type of character that they feel Halvey surely must be. It would appear that they have conceived their extraordinary idea of the man from the fabulous letters of recommendation. These exaggerated letters serve as the impetus for their fabrication and magnification of the character of their idol. Indeed, Halvey becomes the personification of all the attributes that they would hope to be present in the ideal man.

This becomes evident when Hyacinth Halvey requests information regarding rooming accommodations in the village. The two women know that he will be only too happy in the room that they recommend, when in fact even a canonized saint would find its restrictive atmosphere stifling! They discuss the room with Halvey and a hapless telegraph boy, Fardy Farrell:

MISS JOYCE: Alongside of it and the barrack yard behind. And that's not all. It is opposite to the priest's house.

HYACINTH: Opposite, is it?

MISS JOYCE: A very respectable place, indeed, and a very clean room you will get. I know it well. The curate can see into it from his window.

HYACINTH: Could he now?

FARDY: There was a good many, I am thinking, went into that lodging and left it after.

MISS JOYCE: (Sharply.) It is a lodging you will never be let into or let stop in, Fardy. If they did go they were a good riddance.

FARDY: John Hart, the plumber, left it--

MISS JOYCE: If he did it was because he dared not pass the police coming in, as he used, with a rabbit he was after snaring in his hand.

FARDY: The schoolmaster himself left it.

MISS JOYCE: He needn't have left it if he hadn't taken to card-playing. What way could you say your prayers, and shadows shuffling and dealing before you on the blind? (Halvey, p. 60)

The "cloistered" atmosphere of this room does not appeal to Halvey, and he politely seeks to discourage the suggestion of Miss Joyce and Mrs. Delane:

HYACINTH: I think maybe I'd best look around a bit before I'll settle in a lodging--

The women, having already created Halvey's character, will not accept less than the saintly hero that they have pictured. The comical essence of this confabulation is demonstrated when the women discuss what they believe to be Mr. Halvey's leisure activities. They draw conclusions about what such a grand man's recreational pursuits must be as well as the activities that he would spurn:

MISS JOYCE: Not at all. You won't be wanting to pull down the blind.

MRS. DELANE: It is not likely you will be snaring rabbits.

MISS JOYCE: Or bringing in a bottle and taking an odd glass the way James Kelly did.

MRS. DELANE: Or writing threatening notices, and the police taking a view of you from the rear.

MISS JOYCE: Or going to roadside dances or running after good-for-nothing young girls-- (Halvey, p. 61)

Halvey, in a fruitless endeavour, attempts to inform the women that he is indeed human and not the high character that they believe him to be:

HYACINTH: I give you my word I'm not so harmless as you think.

MRS. DELANE: Would you be putting a lie on these, Mr. Halvey? (Touching testimonials.) I know well the way you will be spending the evenings, writing letters to your relations--

MISS JOYCE: Learning O'Growney's exercises--

MRS. DELANE: Sticking post cards in an album for the convent bazaar.

MISS JOYCE: Reading the Catholic Young Man--

MRS. DELANE: Playing the melodies on a melodeon--

MISS JOYCE: Looking at the pictures in the Lives of the Saints. I'll hurry on and engage the room for you. (Halvey, p. 61)

This instance epitomizes confabulation of character. The women use their imaginations to create what they consider to be the ideal man and then expand upon this creation through their talk. In effect, they are talking themselves into believing (as Malachi had done with O'Lorrha in The Image) that their hero fantasy is reality. As a result, a fictitious picture of Halvey is disseminated throughout the village. Comedy is produced when the character depicted in

Miss Joyce and Mrs. Delane's talk is seen to be quite different from Halvey's real personality.

With the exception of the inappropriate recommendation letters, the first hint given concerning Halvey's true character is his complaint about his newly acquired reputation to Fardy:

HYACINTH: To have left Carrow, if it was a poor place, where I had my comrades, and an odd spree, and a game of cards--and a coursing match coming on, and I promised a new greyhound from the city of Cork. I'll die in this place, the way I am. I'll be too much closed in.

• • • • •
HYACINTH: That is what I said. Aren't you after hearing the great character they are after putting on me?

FARDY: That is a good thing to have.

HYACINTH: It is not. It's the worst in the world. If I hadn't it, I wouldn't be like a price mangold at a show with every person praising me. (Halvey, p. 62)

Fardy, in light of Halvey's complaint about the situation, asks the remonstrative Halvey if perhaps ". . . you're not so, what those papers make you out to be?" (Halvey, p. 62). Halvey's reply is rapid and to the point:

HYACINTH: How would I be what they make me out to be? Was there ever any person of that sort since the world was a world, unless it might be Saint Antony of Padua looking down from the chapel wall? If it is like that I was, isn't it in Mount Mellecay I would be, or with the Friars at Esker? Why would I be living in the world at all, or doing the world's work?

FARDY: (Taking up parcel.) Who would think, now, there would be so much lies in a small place like Carrow?

HYACINTH: It was my mother's cousin did it. He said I was not reared for labouring--he gave me a new suit and bid me never to come back again. I daren't

go back to face him--the neighbours knew my mother had a long family--bad luck to them the day they gave me these. (Tears letters and scatters them.) I'm done with testimonials. (Halvey, pp. 62-63)

Hyacinth's revelation of how he has obtained so many testimonials sheds further light on the earlier observation that the recommendation letters seemed to be inappropriate or unrealistic products of their authors. The people of Cloon, however, are eager to believe that Hyacinth Halvey is a truly wondrous man. Indeed, Miss Joyce and Mrs. Delane ascribe yet greater qualities to the character of Halvey. Their praise rests solely upon the recommendations and thus proves worthy of laughter, especially in comparison with Halvey's true character as seen through his own statements and behaviour (Halvey, pp. 62-63). Although humorous in itself for the manner in which it is built up, the confabulation of character leads to yet other comic situations.

The first consequence of the women's reshaping of Halvey's character has already been seen in his attempt to locate a room. It is this type of predicament that gives rise to Hyacinth Halvey's wish to rid himself of his idealized character. Lady Gregory, however, presents Halvey as a meek man who is afraid to go against public opinion and directly deny the good character attributed to him. Instead, he seeks to commit crimes which will force the people of Cloon to see him in a different way. The result of this is his involvement in several humorous situations, all of

which are linked to the initial confabulation. These other events are themselves imaginatively interpreted and will be discussed in Chapter III.

The division of confabulation into two areas, confabulated character and confabulated situation, is intended to aid in the examination of this device; and there is bound to be some overlapping of these categories. In Hanrahan's Oath such an overlapping of confabulated character and situation occurs. The principal situation within this play deals with one man being characterized by others. Consequently, it might be prudent to discuss the subject in this chapter.

Hanrahan's Oath⁵⁶ was written in 1915⁵⁷ and first produced at the Abbey in 1918.⁵⁸ The main character, Owen Hanrahan, is a wandering poet with a reputation throughout the district as a man of fine talk and enjoyable tales. Two women in the town vie for his affection--Mary Gillis, who seeks to obtain his love by deception; and Margaret Rooney, who merely lauds the qualities of the man whom she admires.

⁵⁶Lady Augusta Gregory, Hanrahan's Oath (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, Ltd., no publication date given). All future references to Hanrahan's Oath will be from this edition and cited in the text of the paper by (Oath, p.).

⁵⁷Young, The Plays of Lady Gregory, p. 258.

⁵⁸Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, pp. 100, 117.

Early in the play, Hanrahan is said to have fallen under the spell of a reforming friar. The knowledge that the lusty and entertaining Hanrahan has turned to a more serious life style upsets Mary Gillis (Oath, pp. 4-5). Accordingly, she plans to trick Hanrahan into remaining in the village where, hopefully, he will return to his normal behaviour. Mary recalls that Hanrahan, while drunk, had revealed to her the account of how his friend Feeney had assaulted a gauger (Oath, p. 5). She uses this story in an attempt to keep Hanrahan close at hand. When they meet, Mary lies to Hanrahan by telling him that Feeney has been formally charged with assaulting the gauger and that Hanrahan, too, is suspected of participating in the crime:

MARY GILLIS: You didn't know he was taken and charged and brought to the Tuam assizes? (Oath, p. 8)

.....
 MARY GILLIS: They are saying there was another man along with Feeney at the bog-still.

HANRAHAN: What harm if they are saying that?

MARY GILLIS: It will be well for that man not to be rambling the countryside, but to stop here in the shelter of the town where it is not known. It is likely his name is given out through the baronies of Galway and to the merings of County Mayo.

HANRAHAN: Little I care they to know I was in it. What could they lay to my charge?

MARY GILLIS: You had drink taken. You have no recollection what you said in the spree-house in Monivea. It is the name of an informer you have gained in those districts, where you gave out the account of Feeney's deed, in the hearing of spies and of Government men. (Oath, pp. 8-9)

Hanrahan, however, is not afraid to face the consequences and says that he will gladly disclose his involvement. Mary, not about to let her man get away, replies that it is too late and that Feeney has already been put in exile. Hanrahan's response is not what the scheming Mary Gillis had anticipated:

HANRAHAN: To have sent a man to his chastisement through chattering! That is not of the nature of friendship. That is surely one of the seven deadly sins!

MARY GILLIS: Sure there is nothing standing to you only your share of talk.

HANRAHAN: It is that was my ruin! It would be better for me be born without it, the same as a blessed sheep! It is the sin of the tongue is surely the blackest of all! (Oath, pp. 10-11)

As a sign of sorrow and mortification for his loose tongue, Hanrahan, as might realistically be the case for a rural Irish Catholic, takes a vow of silence (Oath, pp. 12-13). Nevertheless, he continues to break this vow for some minutes after it is made:

HANRAHAN: So I will be dumb and live in dumbness, if I have my mind laid to it! I will make an oath with myself. (Puts up hands.) By the red heat of anger and by the hard strength of the wind I will speak no word to any living person through the length of a year and a day! I will earn Feeney's pardon doing that! I'll be praying for him on all my beads!

.
HANRAHAN: (Sitting down and taking off boots.) Bring away my shoes to some safe place to the end of my penance, that I will not be tempted to break away! Mind them well till the time I will be wanting them again. (Oath, p. 13)

Mary Gillis is flabbergasted at Hanrahan's righteous reaction to her tale and replies angrily, while Hanrahan fruitlessly attempts to remain loyal to his oath:

MARY GILLIS: It is a big fool you are and a cracked thief and a blockhead and a headstrong ignorant man!

HANRAHAN: I am not in this place for wrasling! It is good back-answers I could give you, if it wasn't that I am dumb!

MARY GILLIS: I'm in no dread of your answers! I'd put curses out of my own mouth as quick as another the time I would be vexed!

HANRAHAN: Get out now of this! The devil himself couldn't do his repentance with the noise and the chat of you! (Threatens her.) (Oath, pp. 13-14)

After a heated exchange of less than pious words, Hanrahan seizes a stick as he chases Mary out the door:

MARY GILLIS: (Who has rushed off looking back.) Your oath is it? You may believe me telling you, it will foil you for one day only to keep a god upon your tongue! (Goes.)

(Hanrahan shakes fist at her and sits down. Rocks himself and moans.

A ragged man with a sack of seaweed comes in and looks at him timidly.) (Oath, p. 15)

With the exit of Mary and the entrance of the ragged man, the environment is ripe for confabulation. The shabbily dressed man is Coey. He is ignorant of Hanrahan's identity and of the recently taken oath:

COEY: Fine day! (Hanrahan takes no notice.) Fine day! (Louder.) Fine day, the Lord be praised! . . . (Hanrahan scowls.) What is on you? FINE DAY! Is it deaf you are . . . Is it maybe after taking drink you are? To put your head down in the spring well below would maybe serve you. (Hanrahan shakes head indignantly.) Is it that you are after being bet? A puck on the poll is apt to put confusion in the mind.

(Another indignant shake.) Tell me out now, what is on you or what happened you at all?

(Hanrahan gets up. Makes same dumb show as he did to Mary Gillis, stoops, picks up stone, rushes as if to threaten Coey.)

COEY: The Lord be between us and harm! It is surely a wild man is in it! (He throws down basket and rushes off right.)

HANRAHAN: Ah, what is it ails you? That you may never be better this side of Christmas . . . What am I doing? Is it speaking in spite of myself I am? What at all can I do! I to speak, I am breaking my oath; and I not to speak, I have the world terrified . . . (Oath, pp. 15-16)

Hanrahan's frustration is humorous. Lady Gregory, however, does not miss the opportunity to add to this humour through her use of peasant imagination and talk. The act of confabulating the character of Hanrahan is in itself amusing, and the resultant fantastic person is one of the more comic aspects of the drama.

Coey, who fled from the seemingly mad Hanrahan, returns with his wife to retrieve a bag that he had left behind. Cautiously, he enters the room where Hanrahan sits:

(Coey and Mrs. Coey come on and look at him from behind.)

COEY: A wild man I tell you he is, wild and shy.

MRS. COEY: Wording a prayer he would seem to be, letting deep sighs out of himself. A wild man would be apt to be a pagan or an unbeliever.

COEY: I tell you he rose up and made a plunge at me and rose a stone over my poll. If it wasn't for getting the bag I left after me, I wouldn't go anear him. It's a good thought I had taking out of it the two shillings I got for the winkles I sold from the stand, and giving them into your own charge . . . Take care would he turn and make a run at me! (Oath, p. 17)

Both Mr. Coey and his wife speculate as to what manner of man Hanrahan must be:

MRS. COEY: He is no wild man, but a spoiled priest or a crazed saint or something of the sort.

COEY: Striving to put curses on me he was, but it failed him to bring them out. It might be that he was born a dummy into the world, and drivelling from his birth out.
(Hanrahan listens.)

MRS. COEY: Would you say now would he be Cassidy Baun, the troubled Friar, that the love of a woman put astray in his wits?

COEY: A half-fool I would say him to be. But it might be that he has a pain in the jaw or a tooth that would want to drawn. Or is it that the tongue was cut from him by some person had a cause against him.
(Hanrahan turns indignantly and puts tongue out.)

MRS. COEY: He is not maimed or ailing. It is long I was coveting to see such a one that would have power to show miracles and wonder, or to do cures with a gospel, or put away the wildfire with herbs. (Oath, p. 18)

Coey judges Hanrahan by his behaviour alone and suspects that the silent stranger is a mad man. Mrs. Coey, on the other hand, imagines Hanrahan to be a saint or holy person. Hanrahan's true position as a wandering poet and man of drink and fun makes this latter perception rather amusing. The humour stems from the implied comparison between the real Hanrahan as seen through his words and actions earlier in the play and the confabulated Hanrahan as pictured by Mrs. Coey. Although the poet is indeed keeping a semi-religious oath, the mere suggestion that he is a saint is funny. Hanrahan's mounting frustration becomes the

source of humour as Mrs. Coey interprets his actions according to her notion of him as a holy man.

Using her imagination and talk in place of factual evidence, Mrs. Coey begins to speak of the miraculous acts that the pious man can likely accomplish. Her attitude is one that is predisposed to view all that he does in light of the character that she has created for him. She demonstrates conviction (similar to that of the women in Hyacinth Halvey who built the character of Halvey) and staunchly professes that such a quiet and apparently pensive man must be a holy man who performs wonders and cures. Coey, however, remains skeptical:

COEY: Let him show a miracle or do something out of the way, and I'll believe it.

MRS. COEY: If he does, it is to myself he will show it. I am the most one is worthy.

COEY: Have a care. He is about to turn around. (Oath p. 18)

Mrs. Coey, a peasant woman with an active imagination, fully expects to see a miracle performed by the mysterious Hanrahan. She inadvertently sets the stage for such a miracle when she takes from her shawl the boots which Hanrahan had earlier given to Mary Gillis. Because they are his boots, the mute Hanrahan reacts angrily to Mrs. Coey's tale of having obtained them through a messenger from her cousin in England (Oath, p. 19):

(Hanrahan comes across quickly, seizes boots angrily and takes them away, shaking his fists at her.)

COEY: (Retreating.) There is coming on him a fit of frenzy! Run now, let you run!
(Hanrahan seizes and shakes her.) (Oath, p. 19)

In the eyes of Mrs. Coey, Hanrahan, the man of holy character and a miracle-maker for sure, has given her the angry shake as a chastisement for her lie. She views Hanrahan (who, of course, knows that she has lied about his boots) as a seer with mystical powers and reacts accordingly:

MRS. COEY: (On her knees.) Oh leave your hand off of me, blessed father! I'll confess all! Oh it is a miracle is after being worked on me! (Another shake.) A miracle to put shame on me where I told a lie, may God forgive me! on the head of the boots!

COEY: I was thinking it was lying you were.

MRS. COEY: How well he knew it, the dear and holy man! He that can read the hidden thoughts of my heart the same as if written on my brow!

COEY: Is it to steal them you did?

MRS. COEY: (To Hanrahan.) Do not look at me so terrible wicked, and I'll make my confession the same as if it was the Bishop was in it!

COEY: Is it that I am wedded with a thief and a robber!

MRS. COEY: I am not a thief, but to tell a lie I did, laying down that I got them from my first cousin, where I bought them from a woman going the road.
(Oath, p. 20)

Following Mrs. Coey's lengthy praise of the holy and wondrous Hanrahan (Oath, p. 20), Mr. Coey too believes in the strange man's preternatural powers:

COEY: You asked a miracle and you got a miracle you'll not forget this day. (Takes off hat.) I'll never go against such things from this out. A good saint he is, by hell! (Oath, pp. 20-21)

Hanrahan's seemingly innocent vow of silence is transformed into the silent meditation of a holy man through the imagination and talk of Mrs. Coey.

The interpretation of the boot incident by Mrs. Coey serves as the impetus for yet further imaginative talk about the attributes and qualities of Hanrahan. When Margaret Rooney arrives seeking Hanrahan (who hides in the shrubbery), both Coeys use the opportunity to tell her about the saint's wondrous powers:

MARGARET ROONEY: I am in search of a friend I have, that is gone travelling the road.

MRS. COEY: There is not a one in this place but the blessed saint is saying out prayers abroad under the bush where he hid when he saw Margaret coming .

MARGARET ROONEY: I knew no saint in this place. What sort is he?

COEY: You would say him to be a man that has not a great deal of talk.

MRS. COEY: He is a great saint; he is so saintly as that there couldn't be saintlier than what he is. He is living in the wilderness on nuts and the berries of the bush, and his two jaws being blooming all the time.

COEY: He to be known, the people will come drawing from this to Dublin till he will have them around him in throngs. (Oath, p. 21)

The Coeys have confabulated the character and attributes of Hanrahan from one misconstrued incident. So great is this imaginative spirit within them that Mrs. Coey states

to Margaret: "Hurry on and get news from that man is under the bush, before there might angels come would give him a horn and rise him through the sky!" (Oath, p. 23).

Ultimately, Hanrahan's true identity is revealed when first Margaret Rooney, then Feeney (Oath, p. 27) enter the scene. Throughout the play, however, the Coeys continue their imaginative talk:

MARGARET ROONEY: Will you draw down on these fools of the world that this is no saint, but Owen Hanrahan.

MRS. COEY: No, but she is under delusions! A man from God he is! Miracles he can do, and he living, and at the time he'll be dead there is apt to be great virtue in his bones. (Oath, p. 25)

.....
MRS. COEY: (Awed.) It is maybe away in a trance he might be, and the angels coming around him. It is in that way his miracles and wonders come to him.

COEY: (Getting behind him [Feeney] .) Mind yourself. He might likely burst demented out from his trance and destroy the world with one twist of the hand. (Oath, p. 29)

This characterization of Hanrahan as a preternatural personage is indeed real to the poor couple. The conflict between this imagined world of the Coeys and the real world in which they operate is funny. The principal humour of the confabulation, however, is to be seen in its ultimate consequences. Once Mrs. Coey reshapes Hanrahan's character into that of a saint, two main instances of humour are made possible. First, Hanrahan's chastisement of Mrs. Coey for possessing his boots becomes a miracle and, second, his hiding in the shrubs to avoid Margaret becomes an act of prayerful

retreat. Both of these are consequences of the initial confabulation as is Hanrahan's growing frustration as the Coeys continue to build up his character.

The playwright uses her knowledge of the simple peasantry and their search for excitement in ordinary life (often through religion and religious heroes) as a foundation from which comedy of confabulation can be developed. The usually talkative and vibrant Hanrahan is bound to his oath and comically grows in his frustration as the Coeys confabulate his behaviour into that of a holy man with supernatural powers. The principal concern of the play is the humorous repercussions that develop when the man attempts to keep silent. One of these consequences is skilfully produced through the technique of confabulation. In short, the amusing predicaments which result from the Coeys' confabulation of Hanrahan's character demonstrate the essential role of confabulation in this drama.

Unlike the previous three plays discussed in this chapter, Lady Gregory's Sancho's Master⁵⁹ is not a comedy. This adaptation of Cervantes' novel Don Quixote enables the playwright to present in her own language one of the greatest confabulators in all of literature. Lady Gregory's masterful depiction of Quixote and his self-directed imaginative

⁵⁹Lady Augusta Gregory, Sancho's Master in Three Last Plays (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons Ltd., 1928). All future references to Sancho's Master will be from this edition and cited in the text of the paper by (Master, p.).

reshaping of character is worthy of at least some discussion in this paper.

Don Quixote in Sancho's Master, like the other characters mentioned in this chapter, demonstrates an active imagination which he combines with talk. Noteworthy, however, is the fact that he uses imaginative talk not to build up the character of another, but of himself. Although not portrayed as an Irish peasant, his quality of imagination is surely in keeping with the tendency of the Irish country people to alter facts and create a new reality.⁶⁰

Don Quixote is a dreamer whose illusion grows through the interaction between his imagination and his talk. He sees himself as a knight moved by the ideals of chivalry. Although in the rural environment of Spain, Quixote begins to live a life similar to that portrayed in the medieval romances that he had read. Indeed, he sets out on a quest to correct the evils in the world. While the play itself is not a comedy, as some of its pathetic incidents attest, it contains several instances of mild humour generated through the reshaping of the characters of Don Quixote and Dulcinea.

⁶⁰ Quixote is a confabulator who talks and lives his dreams. As Lady Gregory herself has said in her notes to Sancho's Master: "Quixote's story belongs to the world, and some of us have whispered his name, fitting it to one or another dreamer who seeks to realise the perfect in a community not ready for the millenium, and where he is likely to meet with anger that strikes or ridicule that scorches, or to have the world flowing at him that was flowing by Festus at St. Paul." (Master, pp. 118-19)

Sancho's Master was first produced on the Abbey stage in 1927.⁶¹ The central figure in this play, Don Quixote (Senor Quesada), is described as a voracious reader of romances and fantastic stories of knights and folk heroes (Master, pp. 20-21). From the influence of these tales, he creates an idealized character for himself--Don Quixote de la Mancha. This character building is brought about by the organic combination of his active imagination (which is nourished by the tales that he reads) and his talk (which enables him to verbally convince himself that he is a knight).

Quixote believes that it is appropriate for him and Sancho Panza (a neighbour who serves as his squire) to set out to overcome all the wrongs in the world (Master, p. 22). The world of the quest is the real world for Don Quixote. Quixote's reality is seen to be wondrous and idealistic and the man himself, the middle-aged Mr. Quesada, merely wearing a bird cage and old armour. The humour lies in the results of his confabulation. His dress, his talk, and at least one of the predicaments that he brings upon himself are the sources of gentle laughter.

The entire plot emanates from Quixote's initial confabulation of character. Although amusing incidents do occur, it should be remembered that not all that develops

⁶¹Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, p. 140.

from this initial fabrication is humorous. Nevertheless, the importance of this character building by Quixote himself should be recognized.

Quixote also uses his imaginative talk to create a new character for Dulcie, a neighbourhood farm wench. In order to fulfil the fantasy that he has created for himself, she must be one worthy of a knight of his own status. Dulcie from Toboso thus becomes Dulcinea del Toboso (Master, p. 32). Consequently, when Sancho describes her activities on the farm as he has accurately observed them, Quixote refuses to believe him:

QUIXOTE: Can you believe what you say, that my lady Dulcinea was winnowing wheat? That was not wheat but grains of oriental peack!

SANCHO: That is what I saw her doing. A good hard-working girl.

QUIXOTE: (Threatening him.) I tell you Sancho, you are the greatest liar and rascal in all Spain! (Master, p. 46)

Sancho, aware of just how determined Quixote is in his fantasy, replies diplomatically:

SANCHO: (Jumping up and backing.) All right so. Maybe when I saw her at any time making a leap up on an ass, or salting a barrel of pork, it was an enchanter that changed all that picture in my eyes.

QUIXOTE: Yes, yes. Why did I not think of that. It is that wizard, my secret enemy. (Master, p. 47)

He fully believes in the physical reality of the two characters that he has fabricated, and throughout the play Quixote defends the name and honour of his Lady Dulcinea.

She is purely a confabulated character, for he has never seen her but merely used his mental and verbal powers to give the neighbourhood girl these attributes (Master, p. 47).

The contrast between the reality of Quixote's position as a middle-aged man in Spain⁶² and his self-imposed character of a strong and noble knight of old is humorous. Similarly, the conflict of realities between Dulcie, the farm girl, and Dulcinea, the honourable Lady of Toboso, is also evident. Most important, of course, is what the confabulation reveals about Don Quixote. He is an imaginative man, yet one who remains loyal to his fantastical character until the final curtain. The initial confabulation is the impetus for his quest as well as the harbinger of the incidents to follow. Don Quixote, like the Irish peasantry, creates for himself a new world from the combination of his imagination and talk. Unlike the other characters discussed, however, Quixote does not limit his confabulation to another's character or a specific incident; rather, he lives his entire life through his confabulation. This, then, is what renders Sancho's Master a tragedy while the other plays discussed are comedies. Lady Gregory shows her skill in seeing this

⁶²From the inclusion of various anachronistic elements in the play, Quixote is obviously operating in a period well after the era of knighthood. Thus, the stories of chivalry that he reads and the life that he seeks are at odds with a world which already knows guns (p. 9) and tennis balls (p. 47). Of added note is Quixote's familiarity with the Irish hero Cuchulain (p. 21).

basically Irish characteristic in the great Cervantes character. By adapting Don Quixote to the stage, she clearly demonstrates the difference between the sometimes humorous yet generally pathetic adventures of Quixote and the more laughable incidents of her own comedies.

In effect, each of the dramas discussed in this chapter relies to some degree upon the Irish country people's penchant for imaginative talk as observed by Lady Gregory. Her comic success in these plays is in no small part due to her versatile transformation of this Irish peasant characteristic into a variety of dramatic plots. The resultant canon is made up of distinctly different works which, nevertheless, remain united through their reliance upon confabulation as a comic technique. Never satiric or condescending, Lady Gregory uses the Irish country people (except in Sancho's Master) and their habit of imaginative talk as a means to achieve laughter in the theatre. Consequently, the confabulated character can be seen to be a significant comic technique employed in each of the four plays discussed.

CHAPTER III

CONFABULATED SITUATION

Lady Gregory's use of imaginative talk as a comic technique is not restricted to the reshaping of character; indeed, Hyacinth Halvey, Spreading the News, The Full Moon, and Sancho's Master all employ the confabulated situation. The confabulated situation arises from the search for an exciting explanation to an observed event by one or more characters. The achieved explanation and the subsequent expansion of that explanation rely upon the fusion of imagination and talk to create a new situation. This situation, in turn, becomes an accepted part of the real world for the people involved and gives rise to humorous complications and predicaments.

Examples of the confabulated situation as used by Lady Gregory are to be seen in Hyacinth Halvey. In this comedy, as discussed in the previous chapter, the Cloon townsfolk (in search of a village hero) view Halvey as a man of impeccable character. In an attempt to rid himself of his good name, Halvey plans to commit an evil act:

HYACINTH: (Stamping.) I'll stop their mouths. I'll show them I can be a terror for badness. I'll do some injury. I'll commit some crime. The first thing I'll do I'll go and get drunk. If I never did it before I'll do it now. I'll get drunk--then I'll

make an assault--I tell you I'd think as little of taking a life as of blowing out a candle.

FARDY: If you get drunk you are done for. Sure that will be held up as an excuse for any breaking of the law.

HYACINTH: I will break the law. Drunk or sober I'll break it. I'll do something that will have no excuse. What would you say is the worst crime that any man can do?

FARDY: I don't know. I heard the Sergeant saying one time it was to obstruct the police in the discharge of their duty--

HYACINTH: That won't do. It's a patriot I would be then, worse than before, with my picture in the weeklies. It's a red crime I must commit that will make all respectable people quit minding me. What can I do? Search your mind now. (Halvey, p. 63)

Halvey's ultimate choice of a crime that will free him from his burdensome good name is to steal a sheep carcass which hangs in Mr. Quirke's butcher shop (Halvey, p. 64).

Unknown to Halvey and Fardy, Mrs. Delane, the post-mistress, receives a telegram for Sergeant Carden and proceeds to disclose its contents to Quirke. It is an order for the Sergeant to confiscate all Quirke's meat (Halvey, pp. 65-67). The butcher admits to Mrs. Delane that his meat may have been tainted. Indeed, a sheep he had sold ". . . did not weigh as much as a lamb of two months" (Halvey, p. 69). He hastens, therefore, to hide the incriminating evidence--the one sheep carcass hanging in his shop. The sheep, however, is gone. Quirke, in search of an explanation for the missing meat, assumes that the Sergeant cunningly has already taken it:

MR. QUIRKE: . . . Give heed to me now. There must some other message have come. The Sergeant must have got some other message.

MRS. DELANE: (Sulkily.) If there is any way for a message to come that is quicker than to come by the wires, tell me what it is and I'll be obliged to you.

MR. QUIRKE: The Sergeant was up here making an excuse he was sticking up that notice. What was he doing here, I ask you?

MRS. DELANE: How would I know what brought him?

MR. QUIRKE: It is what he did; he made as if to go away--he turned back again and I shaving--he brought away the sheep--he will have it for evidence against me-- (Halvey, p. 68)

Mr. Quirke and Mrs. Delane expand upon this explanation through their imaginative talk. This expansion takes the form of a detailed prediction of the fate awaiting Mr. Quirke. Splendid comedy is produced as the two characters talk themselves into believing the details of Quirke's ultimate defence and punishment:

MRS. DELANE: It is likely the Inspector will bring it sheep carcass to Dublin?

MR. QUIRKE: The ribs of it streaky with the dint of patent medicines--

MRS. DELANE: I wonder is it to the Petty Sessions you'll be brought or is it to the Assizes?

MR. QUIRKE: I'll speak up to them. I'll make my defence. What can the army expect at fippence a pound?

MRS. DELANE: It is likely there will be no bail allowed? (Halvey, p. 69)

For both Mr. Quirke and Mrs. Delane, the speculation about events becomes an inevitable situation which they

view with alarm. Mrs. Delane expands this confabulated situation to include the projected fate of the entire Quirke family:

MRS. DELANE: It's not a fine will be put on you, I'm afraid. It's five years in gaol you will be apt to be getting. Well, I'll try and be a good neighbour to poor Mrs. Quirke.

(Mr. Quirke, who has been stamping up and down, sits down and weeps. Halvey comes in and stands on one side.)

MR. QUIRKE: Hadn't I heart--scalding enough before, striving to rear five weak children?

MRS. DELANE: I suppose they will be sent to the industrial Schools?

MR. QUIRKE: My poor wife--

MRS. DELANE: I'm afraid the workhouse--

MR. QUIRKE: And she out in an ass-car at this minute helping me to follow my trade.

MRS. DELANE: I hope they will not arrest her along with you.

MR. QUIRKE: I'll give myself up to justice. I'll plead guilty! I'll be recommended to mercy!

MRS. DELANE: It might be best for you.

MR. QUIRKE: Who would think so great a misfortune could come upon a family through the bringing away of one sheep? (Halvey, pp. 69-70)

Who, indeed, but a pair of confabulators with the imaginative abilities of Quirke and Mrs. Delane would think of such a misfortune!

With the revelation by Halvey that it was he who stole the sheep comes a new instance of confabulated situation. His attempt to lose his good name fails as both Quirke and

Mrs. Delane view his act through the subjective perspective of their own fantasy. Their explanation of Halvey's theft is that he took the sheep in order to save Quirke from conviction. As a consequence of their previously confabulated projection of the butcher's punishment, Quirke and Mrs. Delane expand upon their explanation so that Halvey becomes a saviour who has rescued the butcher from horrible punishment:

MR. QUIRKE: You yourself that brought it away and that hid it! I suppose it was coming in the train you got information about the message to the police.

HYACINTH: What now do you say to me?

MR. QUIRKE: Say! I say I am as glad to hear what you said as if it was the Lord telling me I'd be in heaven this minute.

HYACINTH: What are you going to do to me?

MR. QUIRKE: Do, is it? (Grasps his hand.) Any earthly thing you wish me to do. I will do it.

HYACINTH: I suppose you will tell--

MR. QUIRKE: Tell! It's I that will tell when all is quiet. It is I will give you the good name through the town!

HYACINTH: I don't well understand. (Halvey, p. 70)

Halvey's lack of understanding is the humorous consequence of the confabulated situation wherein his theft is interpreted as an act of service. This new confabulation could not take place, however, without the previous fabrication of Quirke's terrible destiny. Consequently, Quirke's praise is in direct relation to his relief at being spared the punishment:

MR. QUIRKE: (Embracing him.) The man that preserved me!

HYACINTH: That preserved you?

MR. QUIRKE: That kept me from ruin!

HYACINTH: From ruin?

MR. QUIRKE: That saved me from disgrace!

HYACINTH: (To Mrs. Delane.) What is he saying at all?

MR. QUIRKE: From the Inspector!

HYACINTH: What is he talking about?

MR. QUIRKE: From the magistrates!

HYACINTH: He is making some mistake.

MR. QUIRKE: From the Winter Assizes.

HYACINTH: Is he out of his wits?

MR. QUIRKE: Five years in gaol!

HYACINTH: Hasn't he the queer talk?

MR. QUIRKE: The loss of the contract!

HYACINTH: Are my own wits gone astray?

MR. QUIRKE: What way can I repay you?

HYACINTH: (Shouting.) I tell you I took the sheep--

MR. QUIRKE: You did, God reward you!

HYACINTH: I stole away with it--

MR. QUIRKE: The blessing of the poor on you!

HYACINTH: I put it out of sight--

MR. QUIRKE: The blessing of my five children.

HYACINTH: I may as well say nothing-- (Halvey, pp. 70-71)

As a result of Quirke's talk, Halvey is frustrated in his attempt to tarnish his image as a wondrous man. Indeed, the commission of the "red crime" has served as further support for his good character. Quirke and Mrs. Delane reveal to the Sergeant (who has subsequently searched the butcher's shop and found no tainted meat) how Halvey has rescued some anonymous family from a dire predicament:

MR. QUIRKE: A family and a long family, big and little, like sods of turf--and they depending on a--on one that might be on his way to dark trouble at this minute if it was not for his assistance. Believe me, he is the most sensible man, and the wittiest, and the kindest, and the best helper of the poor that ever stood before you in this square. Is not that so, Mrs. Delane?

MRS. DELANE: It is true indeed. Where he gets his wisdom and his wit and his information from I don't know, unless it might be that he is gifted from above. (Halvey, p. 72)

Halvey's fruitless endeavour to destroy his saintly image as well as his frustration with the seemingly absurd statements of praise are further complicated when Quirke, Mrs. Delane, and the Sergeant insist that he speak at the community lecture. Since the evening's programme is entitled "The Building of Character", they feel that he, the epitome of good character, will be an excellent model for all present (Halvey, p. 72). The comic significance of this lecture's title and Halvey's total predicament is readily seen. His ever-growing reputation and the accompanying frustration that it brings him are the consequences of confabulated situation.

Halvey makes a final effort to downgrade his own reputation. He, with the assistance of Fardy, steals the collection money from the Protestant church (Halvey, p. 74). It is Fardy, however, who is found with a half-crown and suspected of the crime:

SERGEANT: Now--who did you get it from?

FARDY: From that young chap come today, Mr. Halvey.

ALL: Mr. Halvey!

MR. QUIRKE: (Indignantly.) What are you saying, you young ruffian you? Hyacinth Halvey to be playing pitch and toss with the like of you!

FARDY: I didn't say that.

MISS JOYCE: You did say it. You said it now.

MR. QUIRKE: Hyacinth Halvey! The best man that ever came into this town! (Halvey, p. 77)

As might be expected, the village folk refuse to consider the possibility that their town hero could have anything to do with the theft. Consequently, when Halvey confesses his guilt to Quirke, the butcher creates his own explanation of the situation. This explanation is then expanded so that Halvey's admission of guilt becomes a totally heroic and selfless deed:

HYACINTH: It was I robbed the church. (Halvey, p. 79)

MR. QUIRKE: A walking saint he is! (Halvey, p. 80)

MR. QUIRKE: The preserver of the poor! Talk of the holy martyrs! They are nothing at all to what he is! Will you look at him! To save that poor boy he is going! To take the blame on himself he is going! To say he himself did the robbery he is going! Before the magistrate he is going! To gaol he is going!

Taking the blame on his own head! Putting the sin on his own shoulders! Letting on to have done a robbery! Telling a lie--that it may be forgiven him--to his own injury! Doing all that I tell you to save the character of a miserable slack lad, that rose in poverty.

(Murmur of admiration from all.)

SERGEANT: (Pressing his hand.) Mr. Halvey, you have given us all a lesson. To please you, I will make no information against the boy. . . . (Halvey, p. 80)

Mr. Quirke has used his imagination to convince himself and the village folk that Halvey's confession of guilt is the noble act of a great man. So effective is the con-fabulation of this situation that Fardy, the one person who has accepted Halvey's true character, is taken in by the words of Quirke and offers praise to the great hero--

Hyacinth Halvey:

FARDY: I'm obliged to you Mr. Halvey. You behaved very decent to me, very decent indeed. I'll never let a word be said against you if I live to be a hundred years.

SERGEANT: (Wiping eyes with a blue handkerchief.) I will tell it at the meeting. It will be a great encouragement to them to build up their character. I'll tell it to the priest and he taking the chair-- (Halvey, p. 80)

At the conclusion of the play, the man who has stolen a sheep and robbed a church is lauded as a saint and carried off as the hero of Cloon:

MR. QUIRKE: The chair. It's in the chair he himself should be. It's in a chair we will put him now. It's to chair him through the streets we will. Since he'll be an example and a blessing to the whole of the town. (Seizes Halvey and seats him in chair.) Now Sergeant, give a hand. Here, Fardy. (They all lift the chair with Halvey in it, wildly protesting.)

MR. QUIRKE: Come along now to the court-house. Three cheers for Hyacinth Halvey! Hip! Hip! Hooray!
(Halvey, pp. 80-81)

Quirke's imaginative talk persuades the entire village that Halvey's words are those of a saint, not a thief. As seen in Chapter II, these same people of Cloon were eager to believe Halvey a fine man on the sole basis of exaggerated and inappropriate recommendation letters. This gullibility is strongly influenced by their imaginative tendency to find a saint-hero in whom they can put credence. The mass acceptance of Quirke's words is a main source of comedy in the play.

Throughout the drama, Lady Gregory has successfully used the technique of confabulated situation and the manner in which it credibly touches the characters in the village. The first confabulation involves Quirke and Mrs. Delane's detailed projection of the butcher's fate at court and in prison. Aside from the intrinsic humour of the imaginative depiction of Quirke's fate, a further humorous consequence is seen in the second confabulated situation, the imaginative explanation of Halvey's sheep theft. This unites with the previous fabrication of Quirke's punishment so that Halvey is viewed not as a thief, but rather as a saviour who has rescued Quirke from disgrace and incarceration. Halvey's confusion when lauded by Quirke is also funny as is the ironic fact that the robbery has only served to enhance Halvey's grand name in Cloon. The third confabulation is

Quirke's interpretation of Halvey's confession of the church theft. The acceptance by the townsfolk of this explanation results in the heightening of Halvey's good character and his being carried off as a hero. An additional comic effect of Quirke's confabulation of situation is Fardy's acceptance of Halvey as a hero. The humour here is developed through the knowledge that Fardy alone of the people of Cloon is aware of the new Sub-Sanitary Inspector's true character.

These confabulated situations serve to enhance the previously mentioned confabulated character of Halvey. Together they demonstrate the essential function of this technique in the play. Indeed, the essence of humour in Hyacinth Halvey is developed through the amusing consequences of confabulation as the author presents the humorous predicament wherein a man who is afraid to refute directly public opinion can do nothing to rid himself of a good reputation.

Perhaps one of Lady Gregory's greatest successes in her comic adaptation of the Irish country folk's penchant for imaginative talk is to be found in Spreading the News,⁶³ produced in 1904.⁶⁴ This comedy involves country people at a fair and the humorous consequences which develop as they

⁶³Lady Augusta Gregory, Spreading the News in Lady Gregory: Selected Plays, chosen by Elizabeth Coxhead (London: Putnam & Company Limited, 1962), pp. 33-51. All future references to Spreading the News will be quoted from the Coxhead edition and cited in the text of the paper by (News, p.).

⁶⁴Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, p. 46.

disseminate that which they believe to be a factual story. The report of the news regarding a quarrel between Bartley Fallon and Jack Smith, the alleged murder of Smith by Fallon, and the revelation of an adulterous affair between the latter and Jack Smith's wife, Kitty Keary, are all products of confabulation. The humorous effect of the people's talk is multiplied as each person injects something from his own imagination when he spreads the news.

The situation has its foundation early in the play when the pessimistic Bartley Fallon and his wife arrive at the fair and visit the apple stall of the deaf Mrs. Tarpey (News, p. 36). As Bartley is telling Mrs. Tarpey of the hardships that continually beset him, the singing Jack Smith, on his way to hay at Five Acre Meadow, stops to chat (News, p. 37). While engaged in conversation with the Fallons, Smith sets down his hayfork in order to light his pipe (News, pp. 37-38). He abruptly leaves Mrs. Tarpey and the Fallons to assist in the capture of a young mare which breaks loose in the crowded fairgrounds. In his haste, however, Jack Smith leaves the pitchfork behind. Bartley Fallon sets off to return it, and in his quickness upsets his wife's market basket. Mrs. Tarpey, whose back had been turned, looks up and notices the overturned basket. When she asks what has happened, Mrs. Fallon replies that Bartley has upset it (News, p. 38).

From this event, Halvey chasing Jack Smith with a pitchfork, the country people proceed to create a new situation. The initial confabulator is Tim Casey, who desires to speak with Bartley Fallon:

TIM CASEY: Where is Bartley Fallon, Mrs. Fallon? I want a word with him before he'll leave the fair. I was afraid he might have gone home by this, for he's a temperate man.

MRS. FALLON: I wish he did go home! It'd be best for me if he went straight home from the fair green, or if he never came with me at all! Where is he is it? He's gone up the road (jerks elbow) following Jack Smith with a hayfork. (She goes out to left.) (News, p. 38)

The confabulated situation begins to take form immediately after Mrs. Fallon tells of her husband going "up the road following Jack Smith with a hayfork." It should be noted that there is no exclamation mark nor any other indication of excitement or concern on the part of Mrs. Fallon. Indeed, she merely gives a casual jerk of her elbow to indicate the direction taken by the men and then calmly walks away. The fanciful mind of Casey develops an exciting situation from this seemingly straightforward revelation of Fallon's activity. Following Mrs. Fallon's exit, Casey questions the deaf Mrs. Tarpey, whose description of the part of the incident that she observed adds more grist to his imaginative mill:

TIM CASEY: Following Jack Smith with a hayfork! Did ever anyone hear the like of that. (Shouts.) Did you hear that news, Mrs. Tarpey?

MRS. TARPEY: I heard no news at all.

TIM CASEY: Some dispute I suppose it was that rose between Jack Smith and Bartley Fallon, and it seems Jack made off, and Bartley is following him with a hayfork!

MRS. TARPEY: Is he now? Well, that was quick work! It's not ten minutes since the two of them were here, Bartley going home and Jack going to the Five Acre Meadow; and I had my apples to settle up, that Jo Muldoon of the police had scattered, and when I looked round again Jack Smith was gone, and Bartley Fallon was gone, and Mrs. Fallon's basket upset, and all in it strewed upon the ground--the tea here--the two pound of sugar there--the egg-cups there-- Look, now, what a great hardship the deafness puts upon me, that I didn't hear the commencement of the fight! Wait till I tell James Ryan that I see below; he is a neighbour of Bartley's, it would be a pity if he wouldn't hear the news! (News, pp. 38-39)

Casey appears to be searching for a more exciting explanation of the event as he interprets Fallon's pursuit of Smith to be the result of a quarrel. The imagination is given free reign through talk as first Casey, and then Mrs. Tarpey, draw factually unsubstantiated conclusions. As more people hear and then spread the news, the details of the situation grow in their exaggeration and deviation from the actual event. This is readily proven when Shawn Early and Mrs. Tully enter the scene:

TIM CASEY: Listen, Shawn Early! Listen, Mrs. Tully, to the news! Jack Smith and Bartley Fallon had a falling out, and Jack knocked Mrs. Fallon's basket into the road, and Bartley made an attack on him with a hayfork, and away with Jack, and Bartley after him. Look at the sugar here yet on the road! (News, p. 39)

With the spreading of the news comes the addition to the original incident of many fabricated details. The people at the fair seem to find substantial pleasure in

expanding the explanation of the hayfork incident with the liberal addition of their own thoughts:

SHAWN EARLY: Do you tell me so? Well, that's a queer thing, and Bartley Fallon so quiet a man!

MRS. TULLY: I wouldn't wonder at all. I would never think well of a man that would have that sort of a mouldering look. It's likely he has overtaken Jack by this. (News, p. 39)

Most of the group scatters to spread the news, but

Mrs. Tarpey remains and confronts Shawn Early:

MRS. TARPEY: Stop a minute, Shawn Early, and tell me did you see red Jack Smith's wife, Kitty Keary, in any place?

SHAWN EARLY: I did. At her own house she was, drying clothes on the hedge as I passed.

MRS. TARPEY: What did you say she was doing?

SHAWN EARLY: (Breaking away.) Laying out a sheet on the hedge. (He goes.) (News, p. 40)

The deaf Mrs. Tarpey assumes that the sheet is for a burial and deduces that Jack Smith is dead. With the return of Tim Casey, she explains in detail that Jack Smith has been slain and is "stretched in Five Acre Meadow." Nevertheless, Mrs. Tarpey, Casey, and ultimately the remainder of the group view the fabricated situation as a real occurrence (News, pp. 40-41).

The people's ability to convince themselves and their fellows that the situation involves a fight and murder leads to the eventual accusation that Bartley Fallon is a murderer. The predicament in which Fallon is placed as a result of the confabulation is the central comic complication of the play.

The entire gathering is soon caught up in a discussion of the alleged murder, yet no one appears to know what initiated the supposed altercation between Jack Smith and Bartley Fallon:

MRS. TULLY: You may be sure he had some cause. Why would he have made an end of him if he had not? (To Mrs. Tarpey, raising her voice.) What was it rose the dispute at all, Mrs. Tarpey?

MRS. TARPEY: Not a one of me knows. The last I saw of them, Jack Smith was standing there, and Bartley Fallon was standing there, quiet and easy, and he listening to the singing of 'the Red-haired Man's Wife'. (News, p. 41)

Since Jack Smith is a red-haired man (News, p. 37), the crowd draws only one conclusion:

MRS. TULLY: Do you hear that, Tim Casey? Do you hear that, Shawn Early and James Ryan? Bartley Fallon was here this morning listening to red Jack Smith's wife, Kitty Keary that was! Listening to her and whispering with her! It was she started the fight so!

SHAWN EARLY: She must have followed him from her own house. It is likely some person roused him.

TIM CASEY: I never knew before, Bartley Fallon was great with Jack Smith's wife. (News, p. 41)

Similar to the imaginative projection of Quirke's punishment in Hyacinth Halvey, the assembled group begins pondering the fate of Fallon and that of his alleged mistress:

SHAWN EARLY: Let Bartley Fallon take charge of her from this out so, and let him provide for her. It is little pity she will get from any person in this parish.

TIM CASEY: How can he take charge of her? Sure he has a wife of his own. Sure you don't think he'd turn souper and marry her in a Protestant church?

JAMES RYAN: It would be easy for him to marry her if he brought her to America.

SHAWN EARLY: With or without Kitty Keary, believe me it is for America he's making at this minute. I saw the new magistrate and Jo Muldoon of the police going into the post-office as I came up--there was hurry on them--you may be sure it was to telegraph they went, the way he'll be stopped in the docks at Queenstown!

MRS. TULLY: It's likely Kitty Keary is gone with him, and not minding a sheet or a wake at all. The poor man, to be deserted by his own wife, and the breath hardly gone out yet from his body that is lying bloody in the field! (News, pp. 41-48)

With virtually the entire group fascinated by their own imaginative talk, only the lately returned Mrs. Fallon offers any defence for Bartley: "It's too much talk you have," she says vehemently (News, p. 42). Her loyalty to her husband is short-lived, however, as she eventually comes to believe his accusers. This occurs immediately following her neighbours' disclosure of Bartley's alleged affair with Kitty Keary (News, pp. 48-49).

When the village folk had accused her husband of killing Jack Smith, she upheld his innocence (News, pp. 47-48). Indeed, she reacted angrily to the indictment of her spouse. Nevertheless, when they say that Bartley has committed the murder because of another woman (Kitty Keary), Mrs. Fallon believes him capable of any crime (News, p. 48). Her ability to put credence in certain confabulations is dependent upon her personal fantasies and doubts. The fantasy has, in effect, fallen to the level of her own

imaginative realm (i.e. that Bartley may have had a lover), and she rapidly becomes a believer.

The expansion of the situation is the source of ever-increasing humour. Lady Gregory is skilful in her incorporation and adaptation of the imaginative qualities of the Irish country people into this highly successful comedy. She presents individual characters who freely employ imaginative talk in their explanation of an incident and the subsequent expansion of the explanation to create comic predicaments.

In Spreading the News, the technique of confabulation is essential to the comic success of the play. In search for excitement (and perhaps danger) which will give zest to their lives, Casey, Mrs. Tarpey, and the rest of the people at the fair confabulate a thrilling situation from a simple event. Lady Gregory demonstrates what humorous consequences develop from the imaginative interpretation of Fallon's running after Jack Smith with a hayfork. The consequences, of course, involve the community's accusation that Bartley Fallon is a murderer and adulterer. The humour of this completely confabulated situation is seen through comparison with the event that actually took place.

The confabulation in Spreading the News delineates not only the comical extent to which people inject their own additions to news as they disseminate it, but also serves as a means to spotlight the character of Bartley Fallon. A

pessimist of the highest degree, Fallon is the hapless victim of the confabulated news and is humorously depicted as such throughout the play.

All the aforementioned cases of confabulation have been presented by the playwright through her deft use of characters with whom an audience can feel sympathy. By way of contrast, however, the Magistrate in Spreading the News is seen as an egocentric and pompous buffoon. From the outset, the Magistrate shows himself to be a character who is different from the Irish peasant as portrayed throughout Lady Gregory's canon.

He is quite deft at combining his imagination and talk to restructure a situation, yet he is not of the peasant class. Indeed, he is an agent of the Crown and, if not British, is Anglo-Irish. Lady Gregory, however, is aware (as her portrayal of Don Quixote in Sancho's Master would further substantiate) that the penchant for imaginative talk or confabulation that she observed in the Irish peasantry could be applied to other people as well in creating humour for the theatre.

It can be seen, however, that the Magistrate alone is a man with whom the author has little sympathy. Unlike the simple Malachi who is in search of a hero and excitement or Quixote who attempts to rid the world of evil, the impetus for the Magistrate's confabulation is strictly ego satisfaction.

From the outset of Spreading the News, the Magistrate is predisposed to discover a situation worthy of his self-proclaimed talents. The fair green becomes for the new official an environment in which disorganization and crime are rampant:

MAGISTRATE: So that is the Fair Green. Cattle and sheep and mud. No system. What a repulsive sight!

POLICEMAN: That is so, indeed.

MAGISTRATE: I suppose there is a good deal of disorder in this place?

POLICEMAN: There is.

MAGISTRATE: Common assault?

POLICEMAN: It's common enough.

MAGISTRATE: Agrarian crime, no doubt?

POLICEMAN: That is so. (News, p. 35)

Finding no resistance from the accommodating policeman, the imaginative talk of the new official continues:

MAGISTRATE: Boycotting? Maiming of cattle? Firing into houses?

The Magistrate's expansion of the situation develops as he talks. Needless to say, the underling constable only encourages the Magistrate with a non-offensive, if not agreeable, reply:

POLICEMAN: There was one time, and there might be again.

MAGISTRATE: [Pleased with the gravity of the situation] That is bad. Does it go any farther than that? (News, p. 35)

The obliging Muldoon refuses to destroy the new official's interpretation of reality and thus continues to lead him on:

POLICEMAN: Far enough, indeed. (News, p. 35)

The Magistrate is further encouraged by the constable's reply:

MAGISTRATE: Homicide, then! This district has been shamefully neglected! I will change all that. When I was in the Andamon Islands, my system never failed. Yes, yes, I will change all that. (News, p. 35)

The Magistrate creates a situation which, especially when viewed from the perspective of the play in its totality, is exaggerated to the point of absurdity. Rather than admit that he has been posted to an insignificant agrarian village, he talks himself into believing that the situation which he finds there is serious. Once he has created a set of circumstances worthy of his self-proclaimed capabilities (remember the Andamon Islands), he will not concede that the situation is anything less than what he has posited.

The character of the Magistrate as presented by the playwright is one which is clearly egocentric. Consequently, his suspicions and accusations are not viewed as the warmly humorous fantasy of a simple man, but rather as the ludicrous, pompous statements of a braggard and buffoon. The Magistrate, unlike any of the other characters discussed in this paper, becomes the butt of humour through his own confabulation of a situation.

The Magistrate's suspicions and accusations concerning the people at the fair are totally incongruous with the

real activity involved. He has created his own reality, a reality in which, for example, Mrs. Tarpey's apple cart becomes an obvious hiding place for unlicensed goods and worthy of a scrupulous inspection by the policeman:

MAGISTRATE: Just see if there are any unlicensed goods underneath--spirits or the like. We had evasions of the salt tax in the Andamon Islands.

POLICEMAN: (Sniffing cautiously and upsetting a heap of apples.) I see no spirits here--or salt. (News, p. 35)

The suspicious nature of the Magistrate is developed through a combination of imagination and inflated ego. The suspicions of the new official, when viewed in relation to the actual events at the fair, are unfounded and ridiculous. Following the apple cart incident, the official once again calls upon the constable to investigate one of his suspicions:

MAGISTRATE: The smoke from that man's pipe had a greenish look; he may be growing unlicensed tobacco at home. I wish I had brought my telegraph to this district. (News, p. 36)

The Magistrate may be of English heritage, but his ability to confabulate a situation is truly of the calibre that Lady Gregory has heretofore presented through Irish country types. Unlike the Irish characters (and Don Quixote as well) with whom the playwright has sympathy, the Magistrate is revealed as a pompous fool to be laughed at. His behaviour is motivated by his inflated ego.

When the news that Fallon has murdered Jack Smith is spread, the Magistrate is quick to see the justification for

his earlier observation of the district crime situation:

MAGISTRATE: I knew the district was in a bad state, but I did not expect to be confronted with a murder at the first fair I came to.

POLICEMAN: I am sure you did not, indeed.

MAGISTRATE: It was well I had gone home. I caught a few words here and there that roused my suspicions.

POLICEMAN: So they would, too.

MAGISTRATE: You heard the same story from everyone you asked? (News, p. 45)

The policeman, although not deceitful, obviously seeks to please his new superior and states in reply: "The same story--or if it was not altogether the same, anyway it was no less than the first story" (News, p. 45).

Following the Magistrate's questioning of Bartley Fallon (News, pp. 46-47), a healthy Jack Smith enters the scene and is confused by talk of his alleged death. For the country people at the fair, Jack's appearance enables them to recognize the folly of their former conclusions. The Magistrate, however, refuses to let truth destroy the confabulated situation of crime and trouble that he has fostered. He knows there is something wrong and that a situation worthy of his experience and ability must be present. Ignoring the fact that Jack Smith and Bartley Fallon are standing beside him, he perpetuates his imaginative fancy:

MAGISTRATE: (Pointing to Jack Smith.) Policeman, put the handcuffs on this man. I see it all now. A case of false impersonation, a conspiracy to defeat the

ends of justice. There was a case in the Andamon Islands, a murderer of the Mopsa tribe, a religious enthusiast--

POLICEMAN: So he might be, too.

MAGISTRATE: We must take both these men to the scene of the murder. We must confront them with the body of the real Jack Smith. (News, p. 50)

The confabulation of the entire situation at the fair, and the Fallon case in particular, has become so real for the Magistrate that he stubbornly refuses to accept evidence to the contrary when it appears. This man lives continually in a self-centred world; a world in which he sees crime and evil worthy of his attention as a master in the administration of justice.

Another of Lady Gregory's plays that relies heavily upon the imaginative talk of its characters to produce humour is The Full Moon.⁶⁵ First produced on the Abbey stage in 1910,⁶⁶ The Full Moon features two characters already made popular in Lady Gregory's dramatic canon; Hyacinth Halvey and Bartley Fallon. Both characters are intimately involved with confabulated situation; Fallon, who expands upon the group's imaginative explanation of an event, and Halvey, who is the object of a separate confabulation by the people of Cloon.

⁶⁵Lady Augusta Gregory, The Full Moon (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913). All future quotations from The Full Moon will be taken from this edition and cited in the text of the paper by (Moon, p.).

⁶⁶Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, p. 105.

When the play opens, a gathering of Cloon townspeople (Hyacinth Halvey, Mrs. Broderick, Peter Tannian, Shawn Early, Bartley Fallon, and Miss Joyce) waits in a railway shed for the parish priest's return to the village. The group is led by the impeccably dressed, moral champion of the community, Hyacinth Halvey. They are joined on the platform by Cracked Mary, just released from the insane asylum (Moon, p. 7), and her brother Davideen. At this point in the play, a disturbance is heard outside the shed and all but Halvey (who is considered too well dressed to step out into the dust!), Cracked Mary, and her brother, go to investigate. When they return, Halvey inquires as to the source of the commotion. Shawn and Bartley reply:

SHAWN EARLY: Nothing at all but some lads that were running in pursuit of a dog.

BARTLEY FALLON: Near knocked us they did, and they coming round the corner of the wall. (Moon, p. 14)

The event is merely that of a dog romping through the town. From this common incident, however, Fallon and the assembled group confabulate a more exciting situation which they accept as reality.

Halvey, still curious about the occurrence, asks whether or not the dog might have been mad (Moon, p. 14). Tannian wisely disregards this suggestion, but the remainder of the group (aided by the ravings of Cracked Mary) are quick to consider this exciting explanation:

PETER TANNIAN: Ah, what mad? Mad dogs are done away with now by the head Government and muzzles and the police.

BARTLEY FALLON: They are more watchful over them than they used. But all the same, you to see a strange dog afar off, you would be uneasy, thinking it might be yourself he would be searching out as his prey.

MRS. BRODERICK: Sure, there did a dog go round through Galway, and the whole town rose against him, and flocked him into a corner, and shot him there. He did no harm after, he being made an end of at first.

SHAWN EARLY: It might be that dog that they were pursuing after was mad, on the head of being under the full moon.

CRACKED MARY: (Jumping up excitedly.) That mad dog, he is a Dublin dog; he is betune you and Belfast-- he is running ahead--you couldn't keep up with him.

HYACINTH HALVEY: There is one, so, mad upon the road.

CRACKED MARY: There is police after him, but they cannot come up with him; he destroyed a splendid sow; nine bonavs they buried or less.

SHAWN EARLY: What place is he gone now?

CRACKED MARY: He made off towards Craughwell, and he bit a fine young man.

BARTLEY FALLON: So he would too. Sure, when a mad dog would be going about, on horseback or wherever you are, you're ruined. (Moon, pp. 14-15)

The talk of Cracked Mary is taken literally by the group. Whether it is simply incoherent rambling or, in fact, symbolic talk,⁶⁷ the Cloon townsfolk listen with interest as Mary relates her extraordinary tale of the mad dog:

⁶⁷ It has been suggested by Dr. Young in The Plays of Lady Gregory, pp. 206-08, that the mad dog from Dublin described by Cracked Mary is symbolic of "sane society" or the society of reason: "It goes roaming through the country, scattering venom wherever it goes; it destroys nature

CRACKED MARY: That dog is going on all the time; he would n't stop, but go ahead and bring that mouthful with him. He is still on the road; he is keeping the middle of the road; they say he is as big as a calf.

HYACINTH HALVEY: It is the police I have a right to forewarn to go after him.

CRACKED MARY: The motor cars is going to get out to track him, for fear he would destroy the world!

MRS. BRODERICK: That is a very nice thought now, to be sending the motor cars after him to overturn and to crush him the same as an ass-car in their path.

CRACKED MARY: You can't save yourself from a dog; he is after his own equals, dogs. He is doing every harm. They are out night and day.

SHAWN EARLY: Sure, a mad dog would go from this to Kinvara in a minute, like the train.

CRACKED MARY: He won't stay in this country down--he goes the straight road--he takes by the wind. He is as big as a yearling calf.

MRS. BRODERICK: I would n't ever forgive myself I to see him.

CRACKED MARY: He is not very heavy yet. There is only the relics in him.

HYACINTH HALVEY: They have a right to bring their rifles in their hand.

CRACKED MARY: The police is afraid of their life. They wrote for motor cars to follow him. Sure, he'd destroy the beasts of the field. A milch cow, he to grab at her, she's settled. Terrible wicked he is; he's as big as five dogs, and he does be very strong. I hope in the Lord he'll be caught. It will be a blessing from the Almighty God to kill that dog.
(Moon, pp. 15-17)

represented by the sow and the milch cow, and it bit a 'fine young man' or contaminated fresh unspoiled youth, here represented by Hyacinth. The police are always trying to catch it. . . . It outgrows its size, becomes 'as big as a calf', is always bursting its bounds and rushing from city to city, spreading its contamination along the country lanes."

For the people of Cloon, who seek to add excitement to their lives, the spirited dog in their village streets becomes the mad dog of Cracked Mary's tale. They are creating an exciting experience for themselves:

HYACINTH HALVEY: He is surely the one is raging through the street.

PETER TANNIAN: Why would n't he be him? Is it likely there would be two of them in it at the one time?

SHAWN EARLY: A queer cut of a dog he was; a lurcher, a bastard hound.

PETER TANNIAN: I would say him to be about the size of the foal of a horse. (Moon, p. 17)

The imagination is combined with the talk, and the interpretation of the loose dog occurrence becomes exaggerated beyond all recognition. Similar to the hayfork incident in Spreading the News, this event in The Full Moon is explained by confabulation and results in much of the play's humour.

Mrs. Broderick, who believes that the dog is mad, is thankful that no one was infected by the venomous canine: "Did n't he behave well not to do ourselves an injury?" (Moon, p. 17). This is all the impetus needed for the imaginative, pessimistic Fallon to convince himself and the rest of the group that he has been infected by the dog's bite:

BARTLEY FALLON: I'm in dread it is I myself was got the venom into my blood.

HYACINTH HALVEY: What makes you think that?

BARTLEY FALLON: It's a sort of a thing would be apt to happen to me, and any malice to fall within the town at all. (Moon, p. 21)

Eager for more excitement, the assembled people expand upon the confabulated situation:

HYACINTH HALVEY: Is it that you are feeling any pain as of a wound or a sore?

BARTLEY FALLON: Some sort of a little catch I'm thinking there is in under my knee. I would feel no pain unless I would turn it contrary.

HYACINTH HALVEY: What class of feeling would you say you are feeling?

BARTLEY FALLON: I am feeling as if the five fingers of my hand to be lessening from me, the same as five farthing dips the heat of the sun would be sweating the tallow from.

HYACINTH HALVEY: That is a strange account.

BARTLEY FALLON: And a sort of a megrim in my head, the same as a sheep would get a fit of staggers in a field.

HYACINTH HALVEY: That is what I would look for. Is there some sort of a roaring in your ear?

BARTLEY FALLON: There is, there is, as if I would hear voices would be talking.

HYACINTH HALVEY: Would you feel any wish to go tearing and destroying?

BARTLEY FALLON: I would indeed, and there to be an enemy upon my path. Would you say now, Widow Broderick, am I getting anyway flushy in the face?

MRS. BRODERICK: Don't leave your eye off him for pity's sake. He is reddening as red as a rose.

BARTLEY FALLON: I could as if walk on the wind with lightness. Something that is rising in my veins the same as froth would be rising on a pint. (Moon, pp. 22-23)

The country people's desire to create a new situation from the simple event of a romping dog has been expanded to this extent. They ignore the fact that the dog came near no one (Moon, p. 17) and readily accept without examination Bartley Fallon's claim that he has been bitten. By suggesting cures, their surrender to the confabulated situation is complete. As a humorous consequence of Fallon's fabricated statements, the people of Cloon offer various remedies for his alleged dog bite ranging from amputation of his leg (Moon, p. 25) to the placing of the dog's hair in the wound (Moon, p. 26).

The townspeople ultimately request Mary, the supposed expert on insanity, to confirm the belief that Bartley has been infected:

HYACINTH HALVEY: That dog you were talking of, that is raging through the district and the town--did it leave any madness after it?

CRACKED MARY: It will go in the wind, there is a certain time for that. It might go off in the wind again. It might go shaping off and do no harm.

.....
CRACKED MARY: Raging ever and always it is, raging wild. Sure, that is a dog was in it before the foundations of the world.

PETER TANNIAN: Who is it now that venom fell on, whatever beast's jaws may have scattered it?

CRACKED MARY: It is the full moon knows that. The moon to slacken it is safe, there is no harm in it. Almighty God will do that much. He'll slacken it like you'd slacken line.

SHAWN EARLY: There is reason in what she is saying. Set open the door and let the full moon call its own! (Moon, p. 28)

Eager for more evidence to support the situation that they have created, the superstitious group looks to the moonlight theory to verify Bartley's insanity. They are surprised, however, when Halvey opens the door and the moon appears to be shining on him! (Moon, p. 30). Halvey is the victim of the superstition (moonlight shines on a mad person) and Cracked Mary's words.

The astonished villagers seek an explanation to the event and, despite the fact that Halvey had remained in the shed while the others went out to view the dog commotion, they conclude that Halvey has at some time in his life been infected by a rabid dog:

PETER TANNIAN: (Closing the door, and pointing at Hyacinth, who stands gazing after them, and when the door is shut sits down thinking deeply.) It is on him her early judgment fell, and a clear judgment.

SHAWN EARLY: She gave out that award fair enough.

PETER TANNIAN: Did you take notice, and he coming into the shed, he had like some sort of a little twist in his walk?

MRS. BRODERICK: I would be loth to think there would be any poison lurking in his veins. Where now would it come from, and Cracked Mary's dog being as good as no dog at all?

PETER TANNIAN: It might chance, and he a child in the cradle, to get the bite of a dog. It might be only now, its full time being come, its power would begin to work.

MRS. BRODERICK: So it would too, and he but to see the shadow of the dog bit him in a body glass, or in the waves, and he himself looking over a boat, and as if called to throw himself in the tide. But I would not have thought it of Mr. Halvey. Well, it's as hard to know what might be spreading abroad in any person's

mind, as to put the body of a horse out through a cambric needle. (Hyacinth looks at them.) (Moon, pp. 31-32)

Mrs. Broderick and Tannian are aware that the mad dog in their locality could not possibly have bitten Halvey, yet they have used their imaginative talk to explain fantastically how Halvey might have been bitten as a child.

Halvey, disgusted with the present situation and the character which has been attributed to him, speaks out against these people and their irresponsible talk:

HYACINTH HALVEY: I made a great mistake coming into this place.

.....
HYACINTH HALVEY: It is foolishness kept me in it ever since. It is too big a name was put upon me.

.....
HYACINTH HALVEY: Every person in the town giving me out for more than I am. I got too much of that in the heel. (Moon, p. 33)

For the people of Cloon, Halvey's denunciation of the village folk serves as proof that he is indeed mad. Certainly their image of Halvey as a sobre gentleman of impeccable behaviour couldn't be incorrect! They therefore reason that only the effects of madness could force this bastion of propriety to make such outrageous statements:

SHAWN EARLY: He is talking queer now anyway.

HYACINTH HALVEY: Calling to me every little minute-- expecting me to do this thing and that thing--watching me the same as a watchdog, their eyes as if fixed upon my face.

MRS. BRODERICK: To be giving out such strange thoughts, he has n't much brains left around him.

HYACINTH HALVEY: I looking to be Clerk of the Union, and the place I had giving me enough to do, and too much to do. Tied on this side, tied on that side. I to be bothered with business through the holy live-long day! (Moon, p. 33)

Halvey, at last announcing his true feelings, continues his raving by discussing the suggestion that he wed the conservative Miss Joyce:

HYACINTH HALVEY: In danger to be linked and wed--I never ambitioned it--with a woman would want me to be earning through every day of the year.

SHAWN EARLY: He is a gone mad surely.

HYACINTH HALVEY: The wide ridge of the world before me, and to have no one to look to for orders; that would be better than roast and boiled and all the comforts of the day. I declare to goodness, and I'd nearly take my oath, I'd sooner be among a fleet of tinkers, than attending meetings of the Board!

MRS. BRODERICK: If there are fairies in it, it is in the fairies he is.

PETER TANNIAN: Give me a hold of that chain.

MRS. BRODERICK: What is it you are about to do?

PETER TANNIAN: To bind him to the chair. I will before he will burst out wild mad. Come over here, Bartley Fallon, and lend a hand if you can. (Moon, pp. 33-34)

Fallon, however, has comically covered his head with a crate (to keep out the accusing moon rays) (Moon, pp. 34-35) and renders little aid as the others put chains on the frustrated and angry Halvey. This chaining of Halvey is a direct humorous consequence of the confabulation of Halvey's madness:

SHAWN EARLY: Oh he is stark, staring mad!

HYACINTH HALVEY: Mad, am I? Bit by a dog, am I? You'll see am I mad! I'll show madness to you! Let go your hold or I'll skin you. I'll destroy you! I'll bite you! I'm a red enemy to the whole of you! Leave go your grip! Yes, I'm mad! Bow wow, wow, wow wow!
 (They let go and fall back in terror, and he rushes out of the door.) (Moon, p. 36)

Halvey cleverly uses the confabulated situation to his advantage by feigning madness ("Bow wow") in order to rid himself of Cloon and the trappings of his idealized character. He escapes by train to the fair in Carrow, where he can return to the uninhibited and happy life that he had experienced before coming to Cloon.

The incident of escape, however, only adds to the group's fantastic view of what has happened. This is made clear in the exaggerated explanation to Miss Joyce of the occurrences during her absence from the railway shed:

MISS JOYCE: What at all has happened? Where is he gone?

SHAWN EARLY: To the train he is gone, and away in it he is gone.

MISS JOYCE: He gave some sort of bark or a howl.

SHAWN EARLY: He is gone clean mad. Great arguing he had, and leaping and roaring.

BARTLEY FALLON: (Taking off crate.) He went very near to tear us all asunder. I declare I am n't worth a match.

MRS. BRODERICK: He made a reel in my head, till I don't know am I right myself.

SHAWN EARLY: Bawling his life out, tearing his clothes, tearing and eating them. Look at his top-coat he left after him.

BARTLEY FALLON: He poured all over with pure white foam.

.....

SHAWN EARLY: Bit he was with the mad dog that went tearing, and lads chasing him a while ago. (Moon, p. 37)

Ultimately, the first confabulated situation (i.e. that the romping dog was mad) is destroyed when Miss Joyce reveals that the alleged mad dog had been Tannian's own pet:

MISS JOYCE: Sure that was Tannian's own dog, that had a bit of meat snapped from Quirke's ass-car. He is without this door now. (All look out.) He has the appearance of having a full meal taken. (Moon, p. 37)

With the new information, the expansion of the mad dog situation by Fallon has also been destroyed. He thus attempts to blame the others for talking him into believing that he was bitten:

BARTLEY FALLON: And they to be saying I went mad. That is the way always, and a thing to be tasked to me that was not in it at all. (Moon, p. 37)

The confabulated situation of Halvey's madness is maintained, however, as Mrs. Broderick continues to stress that he was surely infected:

MRS. BRODERICK: (Laying her hand on Miss Joyce's shoulder.) Take comfort now; and if it was the moon done all, and has your bachelor swept, let you not begrudge it its full share of praise for the hand it had in banishing a strange bird, might have gone wild and howling like eleven, and you after being wed with him, and would maybe have put a match to the roof. And had n't you the luck of the world now, that you did not give notice to the priest! (Moon, p. 38)

In summary, it may be seen that Lady Gregory has successfully used the technique of confabulated situation in The Full Moon. From the event of a romping dog comes the imaginative explanation that it is mad and the subsequent

expansion of that explanation to include Fallon's alleged infection. The humorous consequences of this confabulation are the labelling of Fallon as a mad man and the suggestion of numerous cures for the infection. The second confabulation stems from the event of the full moon shining on Hyacinth Halvey. The group interpret this event as a sign that Halvey is mad and believe that he was infected in earlier years by a rabid dog. The comic consequences of the confabulated situation are that Halvey is considered to be mad and is subsequently chained.

Aside from the principal comic repercussions of confabulation in The Full Moon, another effect of this device is the further development of the characters of Hyacinth Halvey and Bartley Fallon. For the latter, confabulation of the dog incident by the people of Cloon enables him to find an excuse for being pessimistic. This event gives added depth to the pessimistic character of Fallon introduced in Spreading the News. Halvey's character is also developed in The Full Moon. Indeed, his reluctance to balk at the exaggerated recommendation letters that he carried to Cloon and his subsequent refusal to speak out against his being proclaimed town hero were seen in Hyacinth Halvey as evidence of his meekness. In The Full Moon, Halvey again is the victim of public opinion when he is labelled mad, yet ultimately he rebukes the imaginative people of Cloon and relinquishes his social position in the

town for a new life of freedom at Carrow. Humorously, it is his final revelation of his true opinion of the people of Cloon that proves his madness in their eyes. Consequently, it can be seen how Lady Gregory uses confabulation not only as a device to produce comic consequences which are essential to the overall success of the play, but also as a means to deepen the characters of Fallon and Halvey for yet further comedy.

Although the aforementioned cases of confabulated situation appear to be the most prominent in Lady Gregory's dramas, Don Quixote's view of a particular event in Sancho's Master is also worthy of mention here. The imaginative creation of a new situation through talk plays a minor but humorous role in this play. Lady Gregory shows an awareness through her characterization of Don Quixote (as well as that of the Magistrate in Spreading the News) that the penchant for imaginative talk or confabulation that she observed in the Irish peasantry could be applied to other groups of people as well in creating humour for the theatre. Her success in accomplishing this is testified to by her adaptation of Don Quixote to the theatre, Sancho's Master, which reached the Dublin stage in 1927.⁶⁸ In this presentation, the character involved is not Irish; yet, as discussed in Chapter II, his imagination is truly in keeping with that

⁶⁸Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre, p. 140.

of the Irish country folk portrayed by Lady Gregory elsewhere. Thus, it is in the spirit of the imaginative explanation of an event through talk that one can enjoy the humour of the fantastic mental wanderings of Don Quixote.

From the event of a group of prisoners being led by guards down a road, Quixote confabulates a new situation. The prisoners, who have been seen only by Sancho, are on their way to confinement as a result of various civil crimes. Don Quixote, however, cannot accept the explanation that these men have committed evil deeds. Instead, he talks himself into believing that the prisoners are innocent men who are victims of injustice:

QUIXOTE: Ha! Chained! Where were they going?

SANCHO: Where they are forced by the King. That is to row in the galleys.

QUIXOTE: Forced?

SANCHO: Condemned for their crimes to serve the King as galley slaves.

QUIXOTE: Brought there against their will?

SANCHO: Anyway, it is not with their own liking.

QUIXOTE: It seems this is some of my business. To defeat violence--to succour and help the miserable-- (Starts up.)

CARASCO: (Putting hand on his arm.) Have sense, sir.

QUIXOTE: That is no sense, to sit idle, while all the oppressors of the world make slaves of their fellow men at their ease! There is no one of those old knights but would have gone out hearing that! (Master, p. 27)

Later, when he personally comes in contact with the prisoners and their guard on the road, the fanciful knight again interprets the prisoners' situation to be the result of an act of injustice. He speaks of unjust imprisonment and cruelty on the part of the guards despite the prisoners' own admission of guilt (Master, pp. 48-52). Facts and common sense notwithstanding, Quixote expands upon his earlier explanation of why these men are under guard:

QUIXOTE: . . . I see my dear brothers that you are going to your punishment against your liking and against your will. But it may be that the judge by some twisting or wresting of the law has led to your condemnation; or the want of money or friends. (Master, p. 52)

As an amusing consequence of the confabulated situation Quixote releases the prisoners and is thanklessly drubbed for his trouble (Master, pp. 54-55). This predicament is the direct result of confabulated situation, and Quixote is the victim of his own imaginative folly.

The role of the confabulated situation in Sancho's Master is to assist the overall plot and character development. Although the overriding tone of the play elicits sympathy or pity, this brief episode is merely an aid to the successful flow. Indeed, some may consider the aberration from reality by Quixote to be almost pathetic in effect. Nevertheless, the creation through imaginative talk of a situation which is at odds with reality leads to somewhat amusing consequences and is thus worthy of note in this

paper. In addition to its role of eliciting humorous consequences, it also serves to give greater depth to the amusingly simple, yet pathetically sincere character of Don Quixote.

Each of the plays discussed in this chapter uses, to varying degrees, the confabulated situation as a device for humour and, at times, character development. Hyacinth Halvey, Spreading the News, The Full Moon, and Sancho's Master all demonstrate how the imaginative talk observed by Lady Gregory in the country people of Ireland could be transformed into a theatrical technique. The playwright skilfully deploys the confabulated situation as a device to create humorous predicaments and problems. The confabulation of situation, then, plays an important role in the overall success of each of the four plays discussed.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Lady Gregory's knowledge of the Irish country people served as the substance from which much of her comic success grew. The playwright's familiarity with the peasantry, gained throughout her life in Galway, enabled her to understand these people's substantial reliance upon imagination in their daily lives. Religion, history, folklore, and superstition were all tempered with imaginative fancy, which gave additional significance to the peasant's laborious existence on the land. By using their imaginative powers in their daily conversation, the country folk were able to reshape or fantastically explain ordinary reality. In effect, they were creating for themselves characters and situations which would add excitement to their day-to-day existence.

Lady Gregory used the process of confabulation in several of her dramatic works as a comic technique. The Image, Hyacinth Halvey, Hanrahan's Oath, Sancho's Master, Spreading the News, and The Full Moon all demonstrate the playwright's successful transformation of the confabulated character and situation to the stage.

Although mildly amusing in itself for the extent to which it reaches beyond reality, confabulation is deployed by Lady Gregory primarily as a device to create comic consequences. These consequences, in turn, perform either principal or ancillary roles in the overall success of the plays discussed. Part of her skill is the ability to use the imaginative talk in a variety of dramatic plots. In each of the works, however, the technique is similar in that one or more of the characters uses his imagination either to reshape character or situation. In both cases, humour is elicited from the complications which result from the confabulation and, to a lesser degree, from the extent to which the imaginative person deviates from reality.

The effect of the playwright's dramatic endeavours is to elicit a gentle humour which W. B. Yeats describes as "pure comedy", a comedy "without bitterness".⁶⁹ Her characters are readily perceived as people of simple yet warmly human qualities who maintain an active imagination. Lady Gregory is sympathetic with her characters (with the exception of the Magistrate in Spreading the News); and while their imaginative habits serve as the impetus for numerous comic consequences throughout her plays, she never satirizes the country people for this penchant. Indeed, these people whom the playwright knew so well became, as it were, her

⁶⁹Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 142.

means for portraying what is universally funny. Ann Saddlemyer has commented that Lady Gregory ". . . recognized the universality of the themes which appealed to her and then wrote of them through the framework of Kiltartan."⁷⁰ As Elizabeth Coxhead has stated, the playwright ". . . drew an accurate picture of Galway peasant life, and yet has reached down into the universal that lies beneath dialect and social class."⁷¹

The tendency of the Irish country folk to seek a new reality through fantasy is something which is present in all people. Indeed, Lady Gregory herself was inspired to write Hyacinth Halvey after observing ". . . a well-brushed well-dressed man in the theatre stalls . . ." (Halvey, p. 82). Her use of non-Irish confabulators, such as Don Quixote and the Magistrate, would further support this point of view. Without a doubt, the universal understanding of comic situations resulting from imaginative fancy can be appreciated. Lady Gregory, however, saw in the Irish peasantry a believable means of transmitting her comedy of confabulation. The technique of confabulation when demonstrated through these people is a most effective medium for developing humorous situations or predicaments.

⁷⁰Saddlemyer, Defence of Lady Gregory, p. 33.

⁷¹Elizabeth Coxhead, J. M. Synge and Lady Gregory, The British Council and the National Book League, Writers and Their Work No. 149 (London: Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1962), p. 26.

In The Image, Lady Gregory has used confabulation as a major device in developing her play. The imaginative Malachi creates a hero (Hugh O'Lorrha) who becomes the central "image" of the play. The confabulation of O'Lorrha's character gives new purpose and excitement to Malachi's life. Not only does O'Lorrha become a real part of Malachi's world, but also a credible hero for the people of the village. The confabulation reveals the inhabitants of Drum-na-Cuan to be simple, gullible, hero-starved people who readily believe in the preternatural O'Lorrha. The humorous results arising from the confabulation are the ceremony and preparation for the erection of a statue to the non-existent hero. The play is concluded with the final revelation that O'Lorrha was nothing but a balladeer's rogue. Lady Gregory, then, has used her understanding of the simple nature of the Irish people with the technique of confabulation to demonstrate what humorous consequences can ensue when man imaginatively builds up images of heroes.

Hyacinth Halvey is another play that demonstrates how the playwright successfully adapted confabulation as a technique for the stage. The people of Cloon are eager to believe the exaggerated recommendation letters regarding the new Sub-Sanitary Inspector. This gullibility is strongly influenced by their imaginative tendency to find a saint-hero in whom they can put credence. The meek Halvey is afraid to deny directly the good character attributed to

him. Instead, he seeks to commit crimes which will force the people to see him in a new light. Quirke, Mrs. Delane, and their neighbours, however, refuse to let their hero become human and interpret his actions as those of a selfless hero. The humorous consequences of confabulation of character and situation are seen throughout the play. Halvey's growing frustration at the mounting praise that he receives, the insistence of the two women that he reside in a "cloistered" room, and the insistence that he speak at the village lecture programme are the predicaments that stem from confabulation. Lady Gregory uses the confabulation device to present the comical situation wherein a man who is afraid to speak out or go against public opinion is given a good reputation and can do nothing to rid himself of that reputation. Confabulation, then, plays a substantial role in the success of Hyacinth Halvey.

The comedy in Hanrahan's Oath revolves around the repercussions faced by Hanrahan after he has taken an oath of silence. Confabulation of Hanrahan's character as a saint by the Coeys adds to the frustration of the self-silenced balladeer. For the simple and impoverished Coeys, the silent and seemingly unusual behaviour of Hanrahan is interpreted as the actions of a holy man. This fanciful interpretation when contrasted with the dramatically developed character of Hanrahan as a lusty poet-wanderer is humorous.

The playwright uses these peasants' simplicity and their search for excitement in ordinary life as a foundation from which comedy of confabulation can be developed. The usually talkative and vibrant Hanrahan is bound to his oath and humorously grows in his frustration as the Coeys confabulate his behaviour into that of a holy man with supernatural powers. The principal concern of the play is the humorous repercussions developed when man attempts to keep silent. One of these consequences is skilfully produced through the technique of confabulation. In short, the humorous predicaments of the Coeys' confabulation of Hanrahan's character demonstrate the essential role of confabulation in this drama.

In Spreading the News, the technique of confabulation contributes greatly to the comic success of the play. In search for excitement (and perhaps danger) which will give zest to their lives, Casey, Mrs. Tarpey, and the rest of the people at the fair confabulate a thrilling situation from a simple event. Lady Gregory demonstrates what humorous consequences result from the imaginative interpretation of Fallon's running after Jack Smith with a hayfork. The consequences, of course, involve the community's accusation that Bartley Fallon is a murderer and adulterer. The humour of this completely confabulated situation is seen through comparison with the event that actually took place.

The confabulation in Spreading the News delineates not only the comical extent to which people imaginatively inject their own additions to news as they disseminate it, but also serves to spotlight the character of Bartley Fallon. A pessimist of the highest degree, Fallon is the hapless victim of the confabulated news and is humorously depicted as such throughout the play. In Spreading the News, the confabulation of the Bartley Fallon-Jack Smith incident into a situation of murder is the central impetus of humour.

Spreading the News also presents the Magistrate as a confabulator. The playwright, however, portrays this representative of the Crown as an egotistical and pompous buffoon. Unlike the other characters in her canon, he becomes the subject of laughter for his self-centred personality and confabulation of situation. He uses his imaginative talk not in an innocent search for excitement, but rather for his own ego satisfaction. By way of contrast, his characterization demonstrates how warm and sympathetic the playwright's attitude is regarding the Irish peasantry and their imaginative power. The Magistrate alone, an agent of British authority and not an Irish peasant, is portrayed unsympathetically by the playwright. Consequently, the role of confabulation takes on added significance in this play.

A fifth play in which Lady Gregory uses confabulation as a comic technique is entitled The Full Moon. Set in the Irish village of Cloon, this play further develops the

characters of Bartley Fallon and Hyacinth Halvey. Through the explanation of the seemingly harmless event of a dog romping through Cloon, the village people confabulate a situation wherein that dog is deemed mad. The exciting possibilities which might be generated by such a rabid dog are exploited by Bartley Fallon. The eternal pessimist, Bartley complains of suffering from the supposed symptoms of a rabid dog's bite! Casting aside the fact that neither he nor the other people went near the dog, the people of Cloon offer humorous cures for his alleged infection. The playwright thus uses the confabulation to develop the pessimistic character of Bartley Fallon and create humour through his hypochondriac behaviour.

Hyacinth Halvey, still the saintly pillar of the Cloon community, is ultimately considered mad by the people of the village. This confabulation of his infection is in itself humorous in that the people explain that he must have been bitten as a child. The comic consequences of this confabulation (his being placed in chains and called insane) are central to the success of the comedy. The humorous effect is elicited from the juxtaposition of his real position in the play, as a meek and frustrated man, with that which is imaginatively attributed to him by the populace. Ultimately, Halvey speaks out and says that he has had enough of Cloon and its hero-worshipping people. For the first time in either Hyacinth Halvey or The Full Moon,

Halvey states his true feelings and denounces public opinion. As a consequence of his honesty, he is further suspect in the eyes of the Cloon people as a madman.

Lady Gregory, then, uses confabulation in The Full Moon not only as a device to produce comic consequences, but also as a means to delineate the humorous characters of Fallon and Halvey.

In Sancho's Master, the confabulation by Don Quixote of his own character and that of Dulcinea is essential to the Don Quixote story. Humorous for the immediate consequences of the imaginative reshaping of his own character into that of a chivalrous knight (bird cage on head, old rusty armour), the principal role of the initial confabulation is to create from a middle-aged man the knight-errant Don Quixote de la Mancha. The subsequent quest and idealistic conflicts arise directly from Quixote's initial confabulation.

Because he imaginatively views a village girl as a great lady and a group of prisoners as the victims of injustice, some humorous consequences are achieved in this play. It is the confabulation, too, which reveals the character of Don Quixote. He is an imaginative man yet one who remains loyal to his fantastical character until the final curtain. The initial confabulation is the impetus for his quest as well as the harbinger of the incidents to follow. Don Quixote, like the Irish peasantry, created for himself a

new world from the combination of his imagination and talk. Unlike the other characters discussed, however, Quixote does not limit his confabulation to another's character or a specific incident; rather, he lives his entire life through his confabulation. Significantly, this is what makes Sancho's Master a tragedy while the other plays are comedies. By adapting Don Quixote to the stage, Lady Gregory offers the opportunity to see the difference between the sometimes humorous yet generally pathetic Quixote and the more laughable incidents of her own comedies.

All the plays discussed use the technique of confabulation. The playwright, however, has created different plot situations and a variety of comic repercussions resulting from confabulation. The result is a canon of distinctly different works which remain united through their reliance upon confabulation as a source of humour. Never satiric or condescending, Lady Gregory used the Irish country people (with the exception of Don Quixote and the Magistrate) and their quality of imaginative talk to add excitement to their daily lives as a means to achieve laughter in the theatre. Confabulation, then, is a technique successfully employed by Lady Gregory in The Image, Hyacinth Halvey, Hanrahan's Oath, Sancho's Master, Spreading the News, and The Full Moon to produce comedy.

APPENDIX

The choice of the word "confabulation" to connote the special imaginative talk displayed by the Irish country folk and used as a predominant means for obtaining humour in much of Lady Gregory's comedy is based upon the word's traditional etymology as well as its contemporary usage.

The original Latin stem of the word is fabulari; this same stem developed into the modern word "fable" meaning, among other things, "not founded on fact". Since the words etymologically evolved from the same root and the word "fable" was also, until the sixteenth century, defined as "talk", "discourse", or "common talk", a merger of the two meanings to encompass this unique concept is possible.

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines the two words as follows:

CONFABULATE V. f. stem of L(atin) confabulari; See Fable. To talk familiarly together, converse, chat. (p. 365)

FABLE V. L(atin) fabulari to talk; 1. To talk, converse (obsolete) 1570. 2. To talk romance; To talk kindly (obsolete) 1653. 3. To talk falsehoods, lie 1530 4. To say or talk about fictitiously, To relate as in a fable; To fabricate, invent, 1533. (p. 665)

In addition to the two obsolete meanings of fable (1 and 2) and the Latin root itself, another fact that gives support to a combining of the "talk" and the "imaginative" or "unhistorical" in this word is to be found in an obsolete meaning of "fable" when used as a noun:

FABLE N. 1. A narrative or statement not founded on fact; a myth or legend (now rare); a foolish story; a fabrication, falsehood. 2. A short story devised to convey some useful lesson; an apologue (the most common sense). 3. The plot or story of a play or poem. 4. Talk; discourse, narration (obsolete) 1598. (p. 665)

It is definition 4 that links the "fabulous" elements with the talk and gives added weight to the contemporary psychological usage of the term "confabulation". This twentieth century usage is in harmony with the definition delineated in this thesis but is restricted to an essentially psychological attitude toward the word. The Encyclopedia of Human Behavior, edited by Robert M. Goldenson (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970), defines "confabulation" as follows:

CONFABULATION (pseudoreminiscence) A distortion of memory; or Paramnesia, in which gaps in recall are filled by fictional events and experiences.

.....
 Confabulation must also be distinguished from pseudologia fantastica, a clinical syndrome characterized by fantasies having no relation to reality. Typical examples are found among antisocial, or psychopathic individuals who tell tall tales to give their ego a lift or to get out of a tight situation. In most cases these tales are believed only momentarily and are dropped as soon as they are contradicted by evidence. The confabulator, on the other hand, sticks steadfastly to his story. (pp. 249-50)

Although the use of "confabulation" in this paper is not meant to describe the psychological state of the Irish country folk or indict them as "psychopathic" or "antisocial", parts of this admittedly specialized definition are appropriate for the technique under discussion. Indeed, the

denotation of confabulation as a "fictional tale" which becomes a reality for the confabulator is essential to the word's usage in this thesis. The imagination unites with the talk to create a new reality.

Paul Goodman's passing comment on confabulation as seen in the Bible adds yet another contemporary perspective to this word. In his article "On Not Speaking" in The New York Review of Books Volume 17, Number 9 (20 May, 1971), pp. 40-43, he implies that to "confabulate" is to "fictionalize" when he states: "Events occurred that were stupefying, catastrophically confusing; to preserve their sanity, people "confabulated" the Bible stories. Something occurred, but not what is written down." (p. 40)

The use of the word "confabulation" to connote the imaginative talk of the Irish peasantry as viewed by Lady Gregory and incorporated into her plays is one that relies upon both the traditional and contemporary definitions of the word. It is dependent, too, upon the etymological root of the word (fabulari) and its accompanying obsolete and traditional definitions.

It should be noted that this interpretation of the term "confabulation" according to its etymology is done for lack of any other suitable term. Since the concept being discussed rests upon the fusion of the talk with the fantasy (indeed, the fantasy is given life through the talk), a word that connotes this merger is required. Although Una Ellis-

Fermor and others use the term "myth-making", the word "myth" would seem to be inappropriate for the technique under discussion here.

Una Ellis-Fermor in The Irish Dramatic Movement (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1967), p. 145; Ann Saddlemyer in In Defence of Lady Gregory, Playwright (Dublin: Dolmen Press Limited, 1966), p. 25; and Elizabeth Coxhead in Lady Gregory: A Literary Portrait (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961), p. 81, all refer to Lady Gregory's statement regarding the Irish people and their "incorrigible genius for myth-making".

Both the term "myth" and Lady Gregory's statement concerning "myth-making" indicate a concept not wholly alien to the imaginative talk under discussion in this paper. There is, however, a notable difference between confabulation and myth-making which can be seen through an examination of Lady Gregory's statement and the term "myth" itself.

The full context of Lady Gregory's statement concerning myth-making is to be found in her appended note to the Bogie Men in New Comedies (New York and London: C. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913):

A message sent to America from Dublin that our Theatre had been "driven out with hisses"; an answering message from New York that the Playboy, the cause of battle was now "as dead as a doornail", set me musing with revered delight on our incorrigible genius for myth-making, the faculty that makes our traditional history a perpetual joy, because it is, like the Sidhe, an eternal Shape-changer. (p. 155)

This statement by Lady Gregory is in reference to the imaginative qualities of the Irish people and, in particular, their ability to add certain mythological elements to their historical tradition. This is in agreement with the previously discussed tendency of the Irish (and, in particular, the country people) to imaginatively accept a certain amount of unhistorical information concerning past heroes and their exploits as historically credible. Consequently, they are "myth-making" or mythologizing their history and past leaders or heroes.

To better understand what is meant by "myth", one may turn to Myth and Symbol, edited by Bernice Slote (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1962). This book defines "myth" as a word referring ". . . sometimes to a classical story . . . or it may function as a creative or symbolic metaphor. Myth embodies archetype." (p. V)

Richard Chase in his essay entitled "Myths as Literature" in Myth and Method: Modern Theories of Fiction, edited by James E. Miller, Jr. (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), in part states that ". . . the word 'myth' means story; a myth is a tale, a narrative, or a poem; myth is literature and must be considered as an aesthetic creation of the human imagination." (p. 129)

Myth, then, can be described as something symbolic or metaphoric and, perhaps more importantly, something literary or aesthetic yet fictitious. Confabulation, however, is not

literarily fictitious nor does it in itself embody any archetypal or metaphorical structure. Conversely, it is totally spontaneous in presentation and particular in scope, relying on no creative or aesthetic system. The myth is imaginatively created with metaphoric or symbolic overtones (i.e. Cuchulain the preternatural hero represents, in part, Ulster) from which future readers or listeners can garner meaningful instruction or entertainment. The confabulation, on the contrary, is a spontaneous act which involves no one but the confabulator and those with whom he comes in contact. The confabulation does not remain in artistic isolation as an aesthetic creation, but rather becomes an organic and essential part of the life of the confabulator. (See Chapters II and III for examples.)

When Ellis-Fermor, Saddlemyer, and Coxhead refer to Lady Gregory's statement concerning the Irish penchant for myth-making, they are most observant. It would seem, however, that this concept of imaginative creation or alteration of history is somewhat different from the unique qualities of the imaginative talk outlined in this thesis.

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Boyd's book deals with the early years of the Irish Literary Movement with three pages devoted to Lady Gregory and her contribution to the Abbey Theatre. He lauds her use of the peasant idiom as language which can be fully appreciated only on the stage, not in print.

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_____. "Lady Gregory: 1852-1932". Dublin Magazine, 18 (1933), 37-47.

This article, which serves as a critical

obituary for Lady Gregory, looks favourably upon the playwright and her work. Malone states that Lady Gregory ". . . secured the greatest laugh of the greatest number in the Irish Theatre."

. "The Plays of Lady Gregory". Yale Review, 14 (1925), 54-51.

This early review of Lady Gregory's work criticizes her "thin and anaemic" material. It serves as an interesting comparison to Malone's later observations in 1933 and 1965.

McCann, Sean, ed. The Story of The Abbey Theatre. London: The New English Library Limited, 1967.

Only a brief section on Spreading the News proved useful for this thesis.

McCarthy, Justin, et al., eds. Irish Literature. Vol. IV. Philadelphia: John D. Morris & Company, 1904.

Volume four of this ten-volume set presents a biographical sketch of Lady Gregory up to 1904.

Mercier, Vivian. The Irish Comic Tradition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.

Mercier presents an interesting outline of Irish humour throughout the ages in its various forms (fairy stories, satire, word wit, parody).

Miller, James E., Jr., ed. Myth and Method: Modern Theories of Fiction. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1960.

Miller's definition of "myth" is valuable in the discussion concerning confabulation.

Moody, T. W. and Martin, F. X. The Course of Irish History. Dublin: The Mercier Press, 1967.

A valuable historical source, this book presents a clear picture of the political, economic, and social events throughout Irish history.

Moore, George. "Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Synge". English Review, 16 (1914), 350-64.

Moore is highly critical of Lady Gregory's use of Kiltartan dialect in her drama.

Morgan, Arthur Eustace. Tendencies of Modern English Drama. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969.

Morgan dedicates a large portion of his book to "The Irish Pioneers", including Lady Gregory.

Morris, Lloyd R. The Celtic Dawn: A Survey of The Renaissance in Ireland 1889-1916. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917.

This is a good survey of the Irish Literary Movement up to 1916 but is not distant enough in time from Lady Gregory to be thorough. She is only briefly mentioned as an Abbey founder, folklorist, and minor playwright.

Nicoll, Allardyce. An Introduction to Dramatic Theory. London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1923.

Nicoll's discussion of laughter is of value to this paper.

Nic Shiubhlaigh, Marie and Kenny, Edward. The Splendid Years. Dublin: James Duffy & Co., Ltd., 1955.

A diary-type book, Splendid Years presents a pejorative evaluation of Lady Gregory's work at the Abbey.

O'Connor, Frank. A Short History of Irish Literature. New York: Capricorn Books, 1968.

O'Connor offers mainly negative comments in his all too brief mention of Lady Gregory.

O'Connor, Sir James. History of Ireland 1798-1924. Vol. II. London: Edward Arnold & Co. Ltd., 1911.

Irish history is presented from an English perspective in this interesting work.

O'Faolain, Sean. The Irish: A Character Study. New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1949.

The author's human insight into the Irish character is enlightening, and his avoidance of an exclusively historical, political, or sentimental approach is most effective.

O hAoda, Michael. The Abbey--Then and Now. Dublin: Sackville Press, 1969.

In this general yet enjoyable outline of the Abbey dramatists and actors of the past, O hAoda barely mentions Lady Gregory.

Onions, C. T., ed. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles. Vol. I. 3rd Rev. Ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.

This dictionary is invaluable for its fine etymological information, especially with regard to the term "confabulation".

Robinson, Lennox. Ireland's Abbey Theatre: A History 1899-1951. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press Inc., 1968.

This book contains a thorough listing of the dates and original casts of all first performances at the Abbey to 1951.

_____, ed. Lady Gregory's Journals 1916-1930. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947.

Lady Gregory's own account of this period in her life aids in an evaluation of her personality.

Saddlemyer, Ann. In Defence of Lady Gregory Playwright. Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1966.

Dr. Saddlemyer's book presents a more detailed study of Lady Gregory's plays than Coxhead's work. In addition to its brief yet informative critical comments on Lady Gregory's plays, a detailed bibliography of the playwright's canon is also included.

Shaw, Bernard. The Matter With Ireland. Edited by David H. Greene and Dan H. Laurence. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962.

Shaw's witty view of the Irish character is of significance to this paper.

Slote, Bernice, ed. Myth and Symbol. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1962.

The discussion of myth is valuable with regard to confabulation and its use in this paper.

Stamm, Rudolf, ed. Three Anglo-Irish Plays. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970.

This book was originally published as Volume V of Bibliotheca Anglicana (Texts and Studies) in 1943 by Franke Verlag Bern and contains a brief biographical sketch of Lady Gregory as well as a brief statement about the role of imagination in the life of the Irish.

T.,C. "Lady Gregory's Irish Plays". Contemporary Review, 102 No. 6 (December-July, 1911), 602-04.

This favourable review of Irish Folk History Plays praises Lady Gregory's "genius for the theatre" and intimacy with the Irish peasantry and their folklore.

Times Literary Supplement. (16 July, 1970). 761-62.

This sketch of Lady Gregory and her work is brief and offers no in depth discussion of her works.

Toksvig, Signe. "A Visit to Lady Gregory". North American Review. 214 No. 2 (August, 1921), 190-200.

Taken from an interview with Lady Gregory. Toksvig appears awe struck as she showers praise on Lady Gregory without adequate discussion of the plays.

Ussher, Arland. The Face and Mind of Ireland. London: Victor Gullancz Ltd., 1950.

Ussher is emphatic in his belief that the Irish mind has a disbelief in this life and is fond of dreams and enchantments created through the imagination.

Yeats, William Butler. The Cutting of an Agate. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912.

Of value to this paper is Yeats' discussion of the Irish mind and its tendency to romanticize historical tales.

_____. Dramatis Personae. London: MacMillan & Co. Limited, 1936.

Yeats' respect for Lady Gregory is evident throughout this book.

_____. Plays and Controversies. London: MacMillan & Co. Limited, 1923.

In a brief mention in this book, Yeats offers praise to Lady Gregory as a writer of excellent comedy.

Young, Lorna. The Plays of Lady Gregory. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1958.

Dr. Young's biographical and literary discussion of Lady Gregory is a most useful book. Each play is liberally quoted and thoroughly analyzed.

ABSTRACT

Lady Gregory's knowledge of the Irish country people served as the substance from which much of her comic success grew. The playwright's familiarity with the peasantry, gained throughout her life in Galway, enabled her to understand these people's substantial reliance upon imagination in their daily lives. Religion, history, folklore, and superstition were all tempered with imaginative fancy, which gave additional significance to the peasant's laborious existence on the land. By using their imaginative powers in their daily conversation, the country folk were able to reshape or fantastically explain ordinary reality. In effect, they were creating for themselves characters and situations which would add excitement to their day-to-day existence. This uniting of the talk with the imaginative fancy may be termed confabulation.

Lady Gregory used the process of confabulation in several of her dramatic works as a comic technique. The Image, Hyacinth Halvey, Hanrahan's Oath, Sancho's Master, Spreading the News, and The Full Moon all demonstrate the playwright's successful transformation of the confabulated character and situation to the stage.

Although mildly amusing in itself for the extent to which it reaches beyond reality, confabulation is deployed

by Lady Gregory primarily as a device to create comic consequences. These consequences, in turn, perform either principal or ancillary roles in the overall success of the plays discussed. Part of her skill is the ability to use the imaginative talk in a variety of dramatic plots. In each of the works, however, the technique is similar in that one or more of the characters uses his imagination either to reshape character or situation. In both cases, humour is elicited from the complications which result from the confabulation and, to a lesser degree, from the extent to which the imaginative person deviates from reality.

Her characters are readily perceived as people of simple yet warmly human qualities who maintain an active imagination. Lady Gregory is sympathetic with her characters (with the exception of the Magistrate in Spreading the News); and while their imaginative habits serve as the impetus for numerous comic consequences throughout her plays, she never satirizes the country people for this penchant. Indeed, these simple people whom the playwright knew so well became, as it were, her means for portraying what is universally funny.

Any real examination and full appreciation of Lady Gregory's achievement with the comedy should take into account her successful use of this device of confabulation.