

= Augusta , Lady Gregory =

Isabella Augusta , Lady Gregory ( née Persse ; 15 March 1852 ? 22 May 1932 ) was an Irish dramatist , folklorist and theatre manager . With William Butler Yeats and Edward Martyn , she co-@-@ founded the Irish Literary Theatre and the Abbey Theatre , and wrote numerous short works for both companies . Lady Gregory produced a number of books of retellings of stories taken from Irish mythology . Born into a class that identified closely with British rule , her conversion to cultural nationalism , as evidenced by her writings , was emblematic of many of the political struggles to occur in Ireland during her lifetime .

Lady Gregory is mainly remembered for her work behind the Irish Literary Revival . Her home at Coole Park , County Galway , served as an important meeting place for leading Revival figures , and her early work as a member of the board of the Abbey was at least as important for the theatre 's development as her creative writings . Lady Gregory 's motto was taken from Aristotle : " To think like a wise man , but to express oneself like the common people . "

= = Early life and marriage = =

Gregory was born at Roxborough , County Galway , the youngest daughter of the Anglo @-@ Irish gentry family Persse . Her mother , Frances Barry , was related to Viscount Guillamore , and her family home , Roxborough , was a 6 @,@ 000 @-@ acre ( 24 km <sup>2</sup> ) estate located between Gort and Loughrea , the main house of which was later burnt down during the Irish Civil War . She was educated at home , and her future career was strongly influenced by the family nurse ( i.e. nanny ) , Mary Sheridan , a Catholic and a native Irish speaker , who introduced the young Augusta to the history and legends of the local area .

She married Sir William Henry Gregory , a widower with an estate at Coole Park , near Gort , on 4 March 1880 in St Matthias ' Church , Dublin . Sir William , who was 35 years her elder , had just retired from his position as Governor of Ceylon ( now Sri Lanka ) , having previously served several terms as Member of Parliament for County Galway . He was a well @-@ educated man with many literary and artistic interests , and the house at Coole Park housed a large library and extensive art collection , both of which Lady Gregory was eager to explore . He also had a house in London , where the couple spent a considerable amount of time , holding weekly salons frequented by many leading literary and artistic figures of the day , including Robert Browning , Lord Tennyson , John Everett Millais and Henry James . Their only child , Robert Gregory , was born in 1881 . He was killed during the First World War , while serving as a pilot , an event which inspired Yeats ' poems " An Irish Airman Foresees His Death , " " In Memory of Major Robert Gregory , " and " Shepherd and Goatherd . "

= = Early writings = =

The Gregorys travelled in Ceylon , India , Spain , Italy and Egypt . While in Egypt , Lady Gregory had an affair with the English poet Wilfrid Scawen Blunt , during which she wrote a series of love poems , A Woman 's Sonnets .

Her earliest work to appear under her own name was Arabi and His Household ( 1882 ) , a pamphlet ? originally a letter to The Times ? in support of Ahmed Orabi Pasha , leader of what has come to be known as the Urabi Revolt , an 1879 Egyptian nationalist revolt against the oppressive regime of the Khedive and European domination of Egypt . She later said of this booklet , " whatever political indignation or energy was born with me may have run its course in that Egyptian year and worn itself out " . Despite this , in 1893 she published A Phantom 's Pilgrimage , or Home Ruin , an anti @-@ Nationalist pamphlet against William Ewart Gladstone 's proposed second Home Rule Act .

She continued to write prose during the period of her marriage . During the winter of 1883 , while her husband was in Ceylon , she worked on a series of memoirs of her childhood home with a view to publishing them under the title An Emigrant 's Notebook , but this plan was abandoned . She

wrote a series of pamphlets in 1887 called *Over the River* , in which she appealed for funds for the parish of St. Stephens in Southwark , south London . She also wrote a number of short stories in the years 1890 and 1891 , although these also never appeared in print . A number of unpublished poems from this period have also survived . When Sir William Gregory died in March 1892 , Lady Gregory went into mourning and returned to Coole Park where she edited her husband 's autobiography , which she published in 1894 . She was to write later , " If I had not married I should not have learned the quick enrichment of sentences that one gets in conversation ; had I not been widowed I should not have found the detachment of mind , the leisure for observation necessary to give insight into character , to express and interpret it . Loneliness made me rich ? ' full ' , as Bacon says . "

= = Cultural nationalism = =

A trip to Inisheer in the Aran Islands in 1893 re @-@ awoke an interest in the Irish language and in the folklore of the area in which she lived . She organised Irish lessons at the school at Coole and began collecting tales from the area around her home , especially from the residents of Gort workhouse . One of the tutors she employed , was Norma Borthwick , who would visit Coole numerous times . This activity led to the publication of a number of volumes of folk material , including *A Book of Saints and Wonders* ( 1906 ) , *The Kiltartan History Book* ( 1909 ) , and *The Kiltartan Wonder Book* ( 1910 ) . She also produced a number of collections of " Kiltartanese " versions of Irish myths , including *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* ( 1902 ) and *Gods and Fighting Men* ( 1904 ) . ( " Kiltartanese " is Lady Gregory 's term for English with Gaelic syntax , based on the dialect spoken in Kiltartan . ) In his introduction to the former , Yeats wrote " I think this book is the best that has come out of Ireland in my time . " James Joyce was to parody this claim in the *Scylla and Charybdis* chapter of his novel *Ulysses* .

Towards the end of 1894 , encouraged by the positive reception of the editing of her husband 's autobiography , Lady Gregory turned her attention to another editorial project . She decided to prepare selections from Sir William Gregory 's grandfather 's correspondence for publication as *Mr Gregory 's Letter @-@ Box 1813 ? 30* ( 1898 ) . This entailed researching Irish history of the period , and one outcome of this work was a shift in her own position from the " soft " Unionism of her earlier writing on Home Rule to a definite support of Irish nationalism and Republicanism and what she was later to describe as " a dislike and distrust of England " .

= = Founding of the Abbey = =

Edward Martyn was a neighbour of Lady Gregory 's , and it was during a visit to his home , Tullira Castle , in 1896 that she first met W. B. Yeats . Discussions between the three of them over the following year or so led to the founding of the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899 . Lady Gregory undertook fundraising , and the first programme consisted of Martyn 's *The Heather Field* and Yeats 's *The Countess Cathleen* .

The Irish Literary Theatre project lasted until 1901 , when it collapsed due to lack of funding . In 1904 , Lady Gregory , Martyn , Yeats , John Millington Synge , Æ , Annie Horniman and William and Frank Fay came together to form the Irish National Theatre Society . The first performances staged by the society took place in a building called the Molesworth Hall . When the Hibernian Theatre of Varieties in Lower Abbey Street and an adjacent building in Marlborough Street became available , Horniman and William Fay agreed to their purchase and refitting to meet the needs of the society .

On 11 May 1904 , the society formally accepted Horniman 's offer of the use of the building . As Horniman was not normally resident in Ireland , the Royal Letters Patent required were paid for by her but granted in the name of Lady Gregory . One of her own plays , *Spreading the News* was performed on the opening night , 27 December 1904 . At the opening of Synge 's *The Playboy of the Western World* in January 1907 , a significant portion of the crowd rioted , causing the remainder of the performances to be acted out in dumbshow . Lady Gregory did not think as highly of the play as Yeats did , but she defended Synge as a matter of principle . Her view of the affair is summed up in

a letter to Yeats where she wrote of the riots : " It is the old battle , between those who use a toothbrush and those who don 't . "

= = Later career = =

Lady Gregory remained an active director of the theatre until ill health led to her retirement in 1928 . During this time she wrote more than 19 plays , mainly for production at the Abbey . Many of these were written in an attempted transliteration of the Hiberno @-@ English dialect spoken around Coole Park that became widely known as Kiltartanese , from the nearby village of Kiltartan . Her plays had been among the most successful at the Abbey in the earlier years , but their popularity declined . Indeed , the Irish writer Oliver St John Gogarty once wrote " the perpetual presentation of her plays nearly ruined the Abbey " . In addition to her plays , she wrote a two @-@ volume study of the folklore of her native area called Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland in 1920 . She also played the lead role in three performances of Cathleen Ni Houlihan in 1919 .

During her time on the board of the Abbey , Coole Park remained her home and she spent her time in Dublin staying in a number of hotels . At the time of the 1911 national census for example , she was staying in a hotel at 16 South Frederick Street . In these , she ate frugally , often on food she brought with her from home . She frequently used her hotel rooms to interview would @-@ be Abbey dramatists and to entertain the company after opening nights of new plays . She spent many of her days working on her translations in the National Library of Ireland . She gained a reputation as being a somewhat conservative figure . For instance , when Denis Johnston submitted his first play Shadowdance to the Abbey , it was rejected by Lady Gregory and returned to the author with " The Old Lady says No " written on the title page . Johnson decided to rename the play , and The Old Lady Says ' No ' was eventually staged by the Gate Theatre in 1928 .

= = Retirement and death = =

When she retired from the Abbey board , Lady Gregory returned to live in Galway , although she continued to visit Dublin regularly . The house and demesne at Coole Park had been sold to the Irish Forestry Commission in 1927 , with Lady Gregory retaining life tenancy . Her Galway home had long been a focal point for the writers associated with the Irish Literary Revival and this continued after her retirement . On a tree in what were the grounds of the now demolished house , one can still see the carved initials of Synge , Æ , Yeats and his artist brother Jack , George Moore , Seán O 'Casey , George Bernard Shaw , Katharine Tynan and Violet Martin . Yeats wrote five poems about or set in the house and grounds : " The Wild Swans at Coole " , " I walked among the seven woods of Coole " , " In the Seven Woods " , " Coole Park , 1929 " and " Coole Park and Ballylee , 1931 " .

The woman Shaw once described as " the greatest living Irishwoman " died at home aged 80 from breast cancer , and is buried in the New Cemetery in Bohermore , County Galway . The entire contents of Coole Park were auctioned three months after her death and the house demolished in 1941 .

Her plays fell out of favour after her death and are now rarely performed . Many of the diaries and journals she kept for most of her adult life have been published , providing a rich source of information on Irish literary history during the first three decades of the 20th century .