



Neocolonialism and the Irish Playwright: Studies on Subalternity During the Celtic Tiger Period

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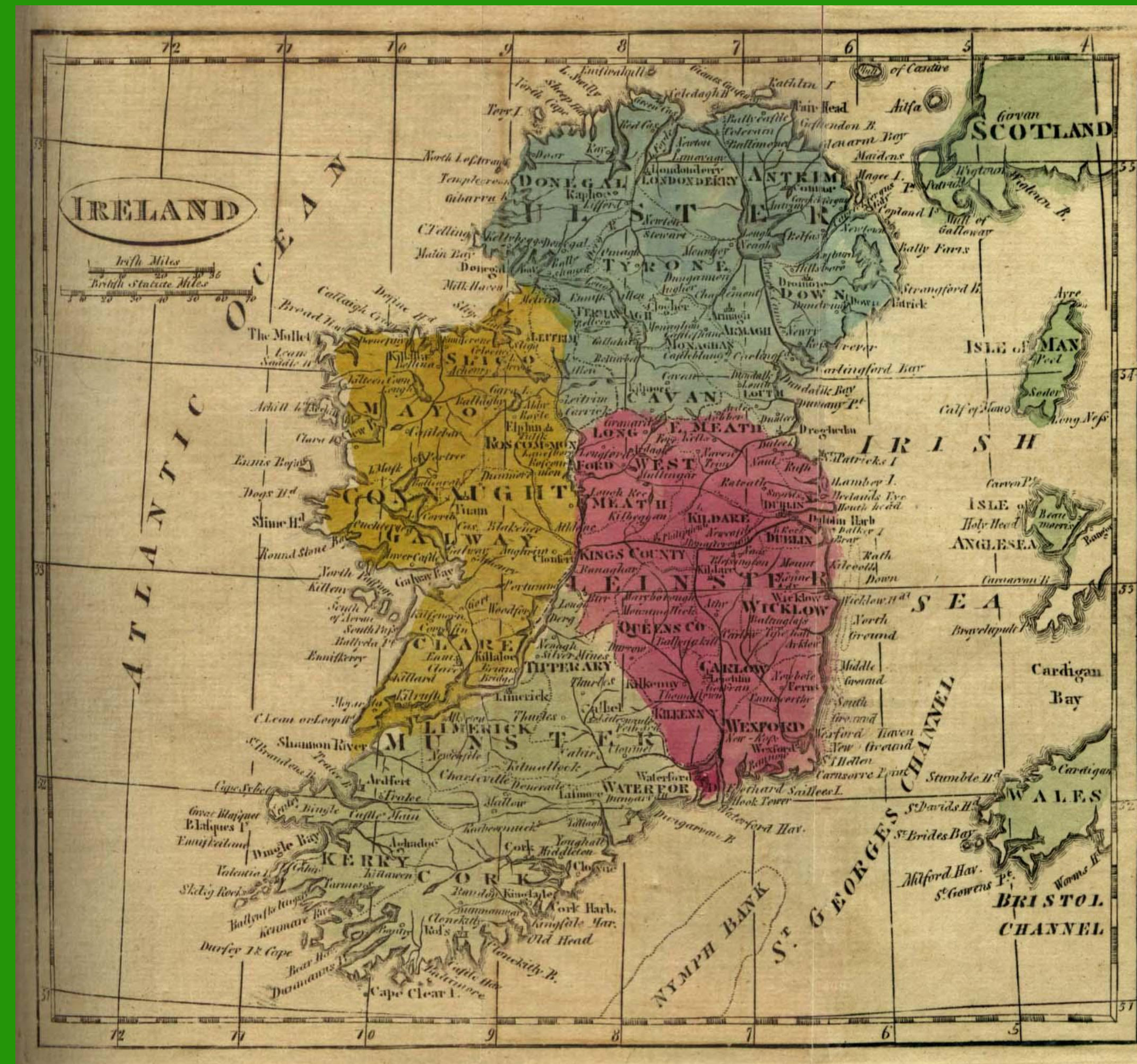


Research Question

Considering the economic prosperity of the Celtic Tiger Period in Ireland in the 1990s, did the position of lower-class women change at all? How can we analyze their position through drama?

Abstract

This essay will argue that the plays of the 1990s in Ireland should be studied with a neocolonial lens with a focus on globalization. Despite the usual postcolonial through line of overt political commentary, this essay follows the through line of the subalternity of women throughout Conor McPherson's *The Weir* (1997), Brian Friel's *Molly Sweeney* (1994), and Marina Carr's *Portia Coughlan* (1996). These plays reveal the tragic reality of lower-class women's position in Irish society; unchanged and unheard despite such immense cultural, political, and economic growth during the period of prosperity in Ireland known as the Celtic Tiger. For decades, a postcolonial lens has been applied to Irish drama. For example, it is easy to analyze one of the founding texts of the Irish Literary Theatre, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* by W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory, in a postcolonial position. The play is overtly political and is heavily interested in the political situation between Ireland and England at the turn of the 20th century, which Said's theories on postcolonialism can be easily applied. Many critics have applied postcolonial theory to the canonical Irish works of Friel, McGuinness, O'Casey, Synge, etc. Less frequently though, plays from the 1990s have been studied in this framework because they are not overtly political and they do not follow the traditional structures of postcolonial paradigms. The period of economic prosperity that has been labeled the Celtic Tiger does not invalidate the postcolonial framework, but demands that the theory be updated to late 20th century terms, allowing for accommodations for how globalization and neoliberalism has changed the way we understand postcolonial theory in the late 20th, early 21st century framework.



References

- Friel, Brian. *Molly Sweeney*. Plume, 1994.
- . *Translations*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1981.
- Gregory, Lady. *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, edited by John P. Harrington. W. W. Norton & Company, 2009, pp. 3-11.
- . "Our Irish Theatre." *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, edited by John P. Harrington. W. W. Norton & Company, 2009, pp. 401-409.

Methods

- Close reading analysis of Irish plays, histories, and postcolonial literary theories
- Analysis of live theatre performances at the Abbey and Gate theatres in Dublin

Significance

This study is an intervention into the incorrect binaries of the 21st century that propose a post-colonial world, and rather demonstrates that colonialism has modernized into the 21st century, as revealed by the relationship between Ireland and England today.

This essay further demonstrates that theatrical performance is, like all cultural products, doing political work all the time, and that cultural products are just as involved in globalization as militarization and occupation of other countries are.