The subjugation of Irish language, culture, and identity has suffered at the hands of British rule for a majority of the twentieth century. This attempt at eradicating the Irish culture is heavily reminiscent of the similar subjugation events that took place in various African states. Ireland’s resistance to complete British subjugation gave rise to a stronger sense of a national identity, one that was heavily supplemented through original Irish works from artists and playwrights.

William Butler Yeats is often considered to be one of the most influential and prolific poets of the 20th century. W.B Yeats’ work is able to offer a unique perspective as a postcolonial commentator who offers up the perspective of an Irish artist trying to lobby and advocate for decolonization. Common themes in his work highlight
the struggles of writers as they deal with decolonization, yet oftentimes seem to struggle with a colonial ideology that is heavily imbedded in Yeats work.

Born into a Protestant, Anglo-Irish minority that had a stronghold on Ireland’s social, political, and cultural norms during the 17th century. Many of the members in this close-knit group didn’t even consider themselves Irish, they believed that they were British citizens that happened to be born in Ireland, renouncing any Irish culture or language, except for Yeats. Yeats despite being raised in London for 14 years of his childhood as well as keeping a permanent residence there in his adulthood, believed his cultural roots belonged in Ireland. Yeats affirmed his Irish nationality through the characters that appeared within his poems and plays, many featured Irish folklore and heroes that appeared in Irish stories and legends. A lot of his inspiration for these Irish heavy works is his chance meeting with John O’Leary, an Irish patriot who had returned home to Ireland after serving 20 years imprisoned for revolutionary activities, plotting against the British rule in Ireland. O’Leary’s avid love for Irish stories and literature encouraged Yeats to adopt these characters into his own work, influencing his story structures and characters through the beginning of Yeats’ career.

While being strongly aligned to his Irish identity, Yeats still faced criticism for his elitist persona in how he portrayed himself as an artist. Yeats throughout his career had a difficult time dealing with the duality of his beautiful, poetic works presenting Irish culture and his outward persona of an elitist artist with privileged upbringing. His work reflects his interest in Irish subjects and driven by his desire to encourage Irish literary work in other aspiring artists, Yeats often felt the need to preserve Irish cultural identity through the emergence of more original Irish works.
In 1897, W.B Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Edward Martyn all published the “Manifesto for Irish Literary Theatre”, in which they proclaimed a desire to establish a national theatre for Ireland, ‘To bring upon the stage the deeper emotions of Ireland’.

The national theater of Ireland, now known as the Abbey Theatre, first opened to the public on the 27th of December 1904. It quickly became known as one of the country’s leading cultural institutions that’s original mission was meant to encourage young, Irish dramatists and writers to write and produce plays that embrace the Irish identity and culture. The premiering performance included W.B Yeats’ On Baile’s Strand and Spreading the News by Lady Gregory. The founders of the Abbey, including Yeats, sparked the Irish Literary Renaissance where more
Irish literary work shifted toward their Celtic roots, embracing Irish identity in resistance to British, upper-class rule in Ireland. This political nationalism influenced many Irish plays at the time, often running the risk of inciting riots through the controversial themes presented in the plays at the Abbey.

This influential establishment and literary movement all centered around the works of W.B Yeats, who helped preserve Irish heritage and culture through his works.
Works Cited


