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Think Piece: *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*

The story starts off a simple one. A man, Michael, is to be married the following day. The audience is introduced to the story through the parents and younger brother of the groom. As the story goes on we are introduced to Michael and soon after an old woman. When the old woman enters the story, the feeling and tone of the play begins to shift. The author entrances the reader with the old woman's presence, and most importantly the old woman's presence entrances Michael. He, at first, seems to be slightly wary of the woman, saying "I'd sooner a stranger not to come to the house the night before my wedding" (4). Then, he starts to become increasingly fascinated by the woman until she has him running out of the house, away from his bride to be, and towards war.

What I immediately found fascinating about this play is how Michael becomes so transfixed by this old woman he doesn't know. In class, we talked about how Cathleen, when depicted as a young woman, is a seductress getting men to go off and fight for Ireland, and when depicted as an old woman, she is a hag or a nagging mother beseeching men to head into war. However, in this story the old woman is not a hag, but instead she is a sort of seductress or succubus. The old woman deviates from the expected, which makes this story all the more compelling.

In the story, as soon as the old woman starts singing, Michael, after watching her curiously from the door, comes to her saying "what is it that you are singing, ma'am?" (5). The fact that her singing is what enticed Michael reminded me of the sirens in Greek mythology whose singing lured men to their deaths. Like we see in many stories involving sirens, the woman sang and the man came. After hearing the old woman sing a song, Michael says, "I do not know what that song means, but tell me something I can do for you" (8). The more the old woman sings the more entranced he becomes and the more willing he is to do anything she wants.

By the end of the story Michael has been completely hypnotised by the woman. He forgets that he is supposed to be getting ready to be married the next day, and has to be reminded by his parents. Even when his fiancée, Delia, finally gets to the house, he is so bewitched by the old woman that Delia has to repeatedly call his name to try to get his attention before he finally takes notice of her, and even then Delia, says "Why do you look at me like a stranger?" (8). Again, this shows the seductive power of what is supposed to be a nagging old woman. In the end, as much as his fiancée pleads, he bends to the will of the old woman and runs off to join the French in war.