



William G Fay

Date

1904

Primary Maker

John Butler Yeats

Medium

Oil on canvas

Dimensions

75.6 x 62.3 cm

Description

With his brother Frank, William G. Fay was closely associated with the Abbey Theatre he gained widespread critical attention for his role as Christy Mahon in J.M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* (1907). The

connection with William G Fay and his brother Frank proved the crucial turning point in the development of the Irish Theatre movement. The Irish Literary Theatre movement had imported professional English actors from London for its productions. this meant that not only could Irish playwrights could not develop their work through direct work with actors but also that the extent to which the group could realise its aim of creating a distinctly Irish theatre was in several ways limited. The Fays were Dubliners, passionate about the theatre, who had developed their own amateur theatre company and had been producing short dramatic acting pieces at whatever Dublin theatre halls they could gain access to. Yeats was impressed by them and at the end of a three year trial at the Irish Literary Theatre he offered them a play of their own. In cooperation with the patriotic women's organisation Inghinidh na hEireann the Fays company produced in April 1902 a landmark doublebill – George Russell's dreamy, symbolic *Deirdre* and Yeats's nationalistic *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, in which Maud Gonne played the title role: a mysterious old woman who embodies Ireland and coming into a peasant household in 1798 to inspire the son of the family to leave his parents and fiancée in order to join the doomed Irish rebels and French invaders at Killala. Despite the drafty chill of St. Theresa's Hall, where the production took place, and the distracting clamour from the billiard parlour next door, the play was electrifying.