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Emily Lawless's Grania: *Making for the Open*

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you will uncode all landscapes
(Seamus Heaney, "The Peninsula")

The man is walking boundaries
measuring He believes in what is his
the grass the waters underneath the air

the air through which child and mother
are running the boy singing
the woman eyes sharpened in the light
heart stumbling making for the open
(Adrienne Rich, "Mother-Right")

EMILY LAWLESS (1845-1913), a writer of novels, poems, tales, essays, and sketches, was in her day one of Ireland's best-known writers. William Butler Yeats mentioned two of her works in his list of the greatest Irish books.[1] Gladstone, the prime minister of England, was a great admirer of Lawless and proclaimed her work *Hurrish* to be essential for a comprehensive understanding of Ireland's political and social situation.[2] Yet today, Emily Lawless is conspicuously absent from the world of Irish studies. Now critics primarily mention her to comment on the arresting realism of the landscape in her novels,[3] often noting *Grania: The Story of an Island,* a novel considered by many critics to be her best work.[4]

1. Betty Webb Brewer, "'She Was a Part of It': Emily Lawless and the Irish Literary Canon," *Éire-Ireland* 18.4 (1983): 120-21.
2. Augustine Martin, "Prose Fiction 1880-1945," *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing,* ed. Seamus Deane (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), II, 1021.
3. This idea is directly stated by A. Norman Jeffares, "Place, Space and Personality and the Irish Writer," *Place, Personality, and the Irish Writer*, ed. Andrew Carpenter (Gerrards Cross, England: Colin Smythe, 1977), 22; Robert Hogan, *Dictionary of Irish Literature* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1990), 365; and alluded to by Roger McHugh and Maurice Harmon, *A Short History of Anglo-Irish Literature: From Its Origins to the Present Day* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1982), 183; Ann Owens Weekes, *Irish Women Writers: An Uncharted Tradition* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1990), 20; A. Norman Jeffares, *Anglo-Irish Literature* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988), 134-35; John Cronin, "The Nineteenth Century: A Retrospect," *The Genius of Irish Prose*, ed. Augustine Martin (Dublin: Mercier, 1985), 19; Robert Lee Wolff, Introduction, *Hurrish: A Study,* by Emily Lawless (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), vi; Brewer, 123.
4. James M. Cahalan, "Forging a Tradition: Emily Lawless and the Irish Literary Canon," *Colby Quarterly* 27.1 (1991): 82; Stephen Gwynn, *Irish Literature and Drama in the English Language: A Short Story* (The Folcroft Press, 1969), 114; Brewer, 122; McHugh and Harmon, 183.

The landscape in this book, which critics so frequently praise, works on a variety of levels. As most critics have noted, it serves as a vividly realistic setting; however, it also has two other functions. As Elizabeth Grubgeld has noted, it serves as a "reflection of her [Lawless's] thinking concerning personal consciousness, national affairs, and the scientific debates of the age."[5] Additionally, it acts as a structuring device on which the central metaphor of the novel, and therefore the primary meaning, rests. In *Grania*, the landscape is divided into two opposing metaphorical zones, the open sea and its counterpart, enclosing buildings. The main thrust of the novel therefore becomes not a conventional plot of exposition, climax, and resolution, but the relationship of the main character to these two zones. By utilizing the landscape in this fashion, Lawless moves away from the conventional novel structure based on plot towards a more modernist structure based on metaphor.

IT IS EASY TO MISCONSTRUE the function of landscape in literature. At first, it appears to be a photograph in words, an escape into objectivity which captures the "reality" of a location. Yet any literature is by definition artificial and therefore can never be purely realistic. Therefore landscape in literature cannot only be a description of a location but also a "dazzling artifact" upon which a writer can project his or her ideology.[6] While the reader perceives the landscape merely as a backdrop, the writer can manipulate the presentation of the landscape to focus on aspects which lend support to his or her world view. Its power as a means of promoting ideas lies in its subtle, indirect relationship to the main story.

Landscape as metaphor is used particularly by the women writers of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik in *Landscapes of Desire: Metaphors in Modern Women's Fiction* discuss this trend in women's literature. They argue that landscape as metaphor is a common device in the literature of both late nineteenth-century women and their twentieth-century descendents. They contend that there are a variety of reasons for the prevalence of metaphor itself in women's writings. Female writers, because they have traditionally been a subgroup excluded from the canon of Western literature, tend to employ subversive devices, one of which is metaphor. Metaphor, owing to its figurative nature, can allow a writer unconsciously to articulate potentially subversive ideas and concepts, ideas which the writer finds personally disquieting or realizes the audience may not accept if stated in a literal way. Moreover, metaphor can accommodate contradictions and ambivalences

5. Elizabeth Grubgeld, "Emily Lawless's *Grania: The Story of an Island* (1892)," *Éire-Ireland* 22.3 (1987): 115.
6. James Turner, *The Politics of Landscape: Rural Scenery and Society in English Poetry 1630-1660* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), 5.

in meaning due to its elusive nature, unlike the writing in a dominant discourse which seeks to articulate one specific sense. Perhaps the underlying reason for the prevalence and use of metaphor by writers in a marginal subgroup is that by its very linguistic nature metaphor is a radical destabilizing force. Metaphor's "chimerical nature," Horner and Zlosnik argue, "unsettles threshold of meaning and can be used to challenge the fixity of the dominant discourse."[7] Metaphor, primarily through its inherently elusive nature, enables writers to disrupt the stability and fixity of meaning in the dominant discourse and thereby subvert language to their own ends.

Horner and Zlosnik explain women's proclivity to favor landscape as metaphor as the natural tendency of a group "positioned on the margin of the dominant discourse . . . [to] express itself in a preoccupation with the boundaries, space, and occupation."[8] They have identified the dynamic relationship between the domains of room, house, land, and sea as the primary structuring of landscape in women's literature. The use of these zones goes beyond mere plot and setting. Houses and rooms metaphorically represent the constraints of culture, while the land and sea represent what lies beyond society. Female characters within houses are contained within the limits of their culture, and defined by their social roles. Female characters in contact with the land and sea can access the possibilities outside the social construct of the self, where wildness and freedom await. Water in particular, with its associations of fluidity, represents the possibilities of transformation. However, the connection of women with the land and sea does not suggest that women themselves are essentially wild and irrational, a conclusion dangerously close to "the essentialist position which sees woman as the embodiment of nature, instinct, and intuition."[9] Landscape as metaphor does not equate women with nature, but instead represents the refusal of cultural constructions of gender.

On the surface, this analysis of landscape as metaphor seems to assert that the constraints of culture are intrinsically detrimental and that freedom from cultural constraints is fundamentally beneficial. But Horner and Zlosnik warn against such a simplistic reading, as metaphor's ambiguous nature lends itself to no such easy division. For while the limitless space of land and sea holds no constraints, at the same time it offers no beginning and no end. A character who wishes to escape a cultural definition of self by embracing the freedom of nature "runs the risk of jettisoning the boundaries of her own being."[10] A future devoid of limits can be as dangerous as an existence full of them. Metaphor is able to accommodate the dual nature of boundaries.

7. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, *Landscapes of Desire: Metaphors in Modern Women's Fiction* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 5.
8. Ibid., 6.
9. Ibid., 7.
10. Ibid., 59.

LANDSCAPE IN *GRANIA* IS STRUCTURED in just such a set of binary opposites. Landscape therefore becomes more than the setting; it is the structure upon which the "plot" hangs. These zones and the characters' relationships to them are established in Part I, the introduction of the book which covers roughly the first one hundred pages. The opening scene introduces one half of the metaphorical equation, the sea, which represents freedom from social constraints. This opening scene takes place on a wide expanse of Galway Bay near the Aran Islands, the setting of the novel. Here the sea is an overwhelming presence. Its limitlessness symbolizes freedom. Its connotations of vastness and openness are particularly emphasized by the depiction of its horizon. The shifting tones of the gray sea and sky obscure the "dimly blotted horizon, an horizon which, whether at any point to call sea or sky, land or water, it was all but impossible to decide."[11] The disappearance of the limits of the natural world reinforces the symbolic disappearance of cultural restraints.

In the opening, Lawless also describes the sea as "never an absolutely passive object"(*G* 1/7), prone to "sudden capricious changes of wind, or an unlooked for squall"(*G* 1/21). This underscores the possibility of change inherent in the sea's fluidity, and the potential power of the sea's sudden storms, both of which emphasize the sea's destabilizing force. Lawless specifically associates these transformational and turbulent properties with femininity, calling the sea "a wild nurse, mother, and grandmother of storms, calm enough just then, but with the potentiality of, Heaven only knows how many, unborn tempests for ever and ever brooding within her restless old breast"(*G* 1/25). This association of the turbulent sea with women does not suggest that women themselves are essentially wild and irrational, but rather that they contain within themselves the potential for insurrection and upheaval.

While the sea's vastness represents freedom from cultural constraints, and the sea's mercurial nature suggests the further possibility of transformation, particularly in relation to women, there is another layer of symbolism inherent in the use of the sea. Jay Appleton, in *The Experience of Landscape*, argues his "habitat theory" of landscape, which analyzes the aesthetic perception of nature and the environment in relation to the biological instinct for survival. Appleton argues that aesthetic pleasure is derived from landscape's proximity to hazards; a refuge or symbol of refuge pleases because it suggests safety from danger, and a prospect or symbol of a prospect pleases because it allows a person the space to observe and inspect a hazard. A prospect-dominant symbol, such as a large surface or horizon of water, allows a greater visual view and suggests that it "command[s] a further field of vision"[12] of mental and

11. Emily Lawless, *Grania: The Story of an Island* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1892), I, 1-2; hereafter cited parenthetically thus (*G* 1/1-2).
12. Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape* (London: John Wiley and Sons, 1975), 90.

spiritual dimensions. In this context, characters in *Grania* who can gain access to a prospect-dominant space have the potential to enlarge and control both their physical and symbolic field of vision, thereby gaining access to life beyond the ordinary.

It is on this boundless, changing sea that the protagonist, Grania O'Malley, is introduced. Grania is a small, lively twelve-year-old girl and "a born rebel" (*G* 1/21). Her name alludes to the historical Grace O'Malley, or Grainne Mhaol, a fierce sea pirate who lived in Ireland during the sixteenth century.[13] She is on the sea as a passenger with several people, including her playmate, Murdough, and her father. All other characters also have access to this wild, fluid sea. However, the vehicle through which contact takes place, a boat, complicates the sea's intricate metaphorical symbolism which Lawless is building. A boat does not allow for free interplay between people and the environment. Instead, it maintains each element, the fluid and the fixed, in its respective place. A boat also has connotations of authority, as it is the tool sailors use to master the mercurial sea and its potential insurgency. The boat as a metaphor serves to recognize both the sea's inherent instability and the need to control it.

Murdough Blake, one of the novel's three central characters, is also in the hooker. He steers the boat. When he momentarily lapses on his watch, Grania's father chastises him: "'Go to her helm this minute, ma bouchaleen, or it will be the worse for you'"(*G* 1/21), warning Murdough to be on guard constantly against the vast, turbulent sea. Murdough's control of the sea is matched by his control over his native language, Irish. The two complement each other; language, the embodiment of a culture's underlying assumptions and beliefs, also limits marginal subgroups through its power to define. Murdough is very comfortable with words; when he is with Grania:

> an incessant chattering went on, or, to be accurate, an incessant monologue; for Murdough Blake already possessed one of the more distinctive gifts of his countrymen, and his tongue had a power of building up castles in the air—castles in which he himself, of course, was chief actor, owner, lord, general person of importance. (*G* 1/22-23)

While this description of Murdough might be mere stage Irishry, Lawless's intent is to paint Murdough as a skillful user of language with the ability to perform "rhetorical feats"(*G* 1/24). Hence, the greatest affront to Murdough is to "cut short his own explanation"(*G* 1/24) and take away his power. Lawless ties together Murdough's control of the boat with his command of language as each is a tool for containing the potential boundlessness which threatens to engulf him.

Grania's position on the boat is initially ambiguous. She is there, yet she has no control. Her presence is partially due to her prepubescent state, where

13. Therese Caherty, ed., *More Missing Pieces: Her Story of Irish Women* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1985), 42.

she can exist as an androgynous being free from cultural definitions of the self. She also is someone who has an ambiguous relationship to both power and freedom. This dislocation builds in the next scene, when Lawless introduces the land, the other, complementary half of the metaphorical zones. Grania is dropped off on the shore of the island of Inishmaan where we are introduced to the third main character, her sister Honor. Honor is the exact opposite of Grania: sickly, meek, mild, "a saint—a tender, self-doubting . . . soul"(*G* 1/52). Honor first greets Grania as she steps off the boat and leads her away from the shore and the sea to their cabin. This act metaphorically represents how Honor steers Grania away from the wildness and fluidity possible in an area free from the cultural definition of the self. Meanwhile Grania, as she is led away, cannot help but stop every few feet, "turning her head mutinously back to watch the hooker"(*G* 1/53) as it sailed away over the sea.

Honor leads Grania far away from the shore to their solidly constructed cabin. It is one of the finest domiciles on Inishmaan, owing to the family's position as the wealthiest on the island. Due to Honor's failing health, the cabin is primarily her domain. The cabin metaphorically represents the cultural constraints placed on the two sisters. Lawless emphasizes the entrapping qualities of the cabin, describing how "anyone entering it was caught [in the wind] as by a pair of irresistible hands, twirled for a moment hither and thither, and then thrust violently forward"(*G* 1/60). Lawless describes Grania as yearning "to escape and run off"(*G* 1/75) from the cabin yet at the same time loving the comfortable little building with its "warm, turf-scented, chocolate-tinted" inside as it is the only "spot on the earth that was theirs, [and] which made the difference between warmth, self-respect, comfort, and a desolate, windy world without"(*G* 1/74). This ambivalence on Grania's part is a characteristic of woman's fiction as described by Horner and Zlosnik. While houses limit and constrain, at the same time they protect and sustain their inhabitants.

Another building introduced in Part I is the small ancient chapel on the island. It is deserted, derelict, and enveloped in drifts of sand, symbolizing the sterility of the location. It presents a strange fascination for Honor, yet for Grania it affords no attraction, offering neither the freedom of the sea, nor the protection of the cabin, being "roofless, windowless, its door displaced, its gable ends awry"(*G* 1/55). Honor's love for the chapel, a social structure which imposes limits and regulations, symbolizes her acceptance of cultural norms just as her prayers emphasize her ready acceptance of linguistic rituals. Grania, however, rejects both the location and its language. The chapel repels Grania and when Honor attempts to make her pray, she does so grudgingly, while "her eyes wandered away again in the direction of the hooker"(*G* 1/57).

There is, however, one building on Inishmaan to which Grania is attracted. It is a small villa, built over fifty years ago by the owner of the island, which

symbolizes the alien political structure which controls the island. Grania is fascinated by the dilapidated building, not only because her playmate Murdough is often to be found there, but because she is intrigued with this structure "so utterly unlike any other within the range of her experience"(*G* 1/86). Yet while Grania frequents the grounds of the house, she cannot enter. Only Murdough has access to the key as his family is the caretaker of the Anglo-Irish villa for the landowner. She is drawn to the only official building on the island even as she is denied access to the power structure it embodies.

THUS, PART I SETS UP the social structure in which Grania will attempt to find her place for the remainder of the novel. The topography represents zones which either are free from cultural restraints or enforce them. The sea metaphorically represents the possibility of freedom from the cultural boundaries of the self. The cabins and other buildings metaphorically represent the linguistic and social constraints of Inishmaan society. Each character can be seen in relation to these zones and to language as well. Murdough is a master, both of the sea and of language, and his place is the boat and the villa; Honor belongs to the cabin and the chapel, and favors the use of language in the rituals of prayer. Grania is the only character equally at home on the sea and on the land, in a cabin and in the open, speaking and silent. Grania is repulsed by the chapel and its religious constraints, ambivalent towards the cabin, and fascinated by the Anglo-Irish villa. Grania admires both the mastery of Murdough and the passivity of Honor, and, as Lawless constantly emphasizes, Grania is the midpoint between the two: "Honor had her prayers and her cross, and . . . she really wanted nothing else, whereas she, Grania, wanted many things, while as for Murdough Blake, that hero's wants were simply insatiable"(*G* 1/90). In the introduction Grania exists in an amorphous state, but in the remainder of the novel she must locate her exact position. The opening merely establishes the framework within which she must attempt to find her station.

THE REMAINDER OF THE NOVEL takes place six years later in a changed world. Grania is no longer a child but a healthy, handsome, and headstrong eighteen-year-old woman. Previously, she had been able to float amorphously through the social structure. Now, however, she is a young woman, and her society exerts more pressure to conform to its standards. While Grania has grown to be healthy and unusually strong, Honor has become increasingly feeble and is now dying of consumption, an invalid trapped in her own cabin. Her slow suffocation between those four walls symbolizes how her passive acceptance of society's norms has gradually smothered her. While Honor conforms to her culture's standards, Grania is regarded by many on the island as a social outcast, "out of touch and tone with her neighbors"(*G* 1/108). Despite her alien

status, it would be difficult to find "a more typical young man"(*G* 1/108) than her fiance, Murdough. Murdough has grown more handsome and more conventional over the years. His verbosity has also increased; he tends to spring forth now with "extravagant rhodomontades"(*G* 1/108) and is continually "explaining, expounding, elaborating, pouring forth a rich flood of illustrations . . . a torrent to which there was apparently no limit"(*G* 1/139). Indeed, he is not even content to be master of only one language, Irish, but wishes to know "all the languages that ever were upon the face of the earth since the days of Noah"(*G* 1/131).

While Murdough is articulate, Grania finds little use for language. The narrator comments that "for words, unlike Murdough, she had no talent. Her thoughts . . . would not clothe themselves in them. They stood aside, dumb and helpless. Her senses, on the other hand, were exceptionally wide awake"(*G* 1/111). This stress on spirit over words does not imply that Grania is illogical and instinctual but rather that words can not express what she thinks. The young woman "hardly herself knew *what* she wanted—but certainly it was not words"(*G* 1/139-40). Indeed, Murdough's words and stories "made her feel vaguely cross and uncomfortable"(*G* 1/138), and while "she admired his interminable flow of words . . . at the same time she held a vague grudge against them. They seemed always to be coming between them. They were rivals after a fashion, and she was not one to put up patiently with rivals, even invisible ones"(*G* 1/140).

Grania's uneasiness towards Murdough's loquaciousness results from her unconscious awareness that his speech is not merely words but intangible social and linguistic constraints imposed upon her. Grania cannot control language; in fact, it controls and contains her. Her discomfort with words is a recognition of her subservient position in relation to language. This is why the words which mean one thing to Murdough constitute something quite different to Grania. A communication gap exists as "a vast untrammeled sea between them, and neither could cross from one to the other"(*G* 1/191). Lawless's reuse of this familiar image of the sea accentuates the metaphoric representation that this area outside society's methods of communication is free and transforming.

THESE ISSUES OF FREEDOM, limits, language, and social pressures all build to one central point in the novel. Unlike a traditional realist text with its climactic ending, here much of the weight is centered in the middle of the text. This focal scene is not a climax, where a major conflict is resolved, but an epiphany, where the character suddenly gains insight into a situation. Additionally, the scene is not mere romantic triviality. It is not a courtship scene but rather the culminating moment in the development of the metaphor of the landscape and

its association with language. Understanding the scene requires understanding the meaning of landscape in the work.

This critical scene takes place on a boat in the middle of the ocean, the area metaphorically free from linguistic and cultural restraints. Lawless extensively describes and heavily details the scene, continually refocusing on the image of the sea till it builds to an overpowering presence. Grania and Murdough have been fishing together all day, and as their time together draws to a close, Grania is overcome by "a vague desire to speak to him . . . while at the same time something else seemed to stop her, to stand in the way, to forbid her from speaking to him"(*G* 2/93). Her desire to communicate is strong, but she unconsciously realizes that speech is an inadequate medium. In a spontaneous moment, she breaches the social convention which forbids open demonstrativeness between couples, and places a hand on his shoulder, simultaneously mentioning the bewitching phosphorescent quality of the water. This leads to a kiss, the first ever between the two, and Grania feels that at this extraordinary moment "the old walls" separating them "had been broken down"(*G* 2/101).

The isolation of the two on the sea symbolizes their entrance into a realm outside the confines of society, and the moment of silence shows that true communication between the two can only be achieved without words. The scene constitutes a rejection of language and the mastery it embodies and an acceptance of the possibilities that lie outside the social realm. This remarkable, transformational moment on the sea fulfills the "vague dream" Grania has had since she was a little girl "of floating away somewhere or other on a boat, only he and she together"(*G* 1/90).

However, this moment can only be a temporary release from the linguistic and social constraints. Murdough quickly regains his loquaciousness, and although the afterglow of the kiss lingers with Grania for the remainder of the time on the water, she:

> came back fully to life and to ordinary reality again when they left the sands, and the sea, and the green, uncanny phosphorescence behind them, and were mounting soberly, one after the other up the narrow, shingle-covered track which led to the cabin. (*G* 2/101)

The freedom achieved cannot be sustained; the two revert back to their previous state of existence, symbolically heading up a narrow pathway to the cabin. However, this moment and the possibility it represents haunts Grania for the remainder of the novel.

IT IS IN THE CONTEXT of this scene, the symbolism of the landscape, and the collusion between linguistic, political, and cultural authority that the closing must be examined. In the final scene the pressures which have been mounting on Grania culminate and she is forced to make her choice.

In the conclusion, Honor, now on her deathbed, requires a priest from an-

other island to administer last rites. Unfortunately, a complication has arisen; a dense fog has descended over the Aran Islands. This is no ordinary fog which could quickly disperse, but a thick, heavy, almost supernatural fog, rendering "all communication from one [island] to the other well-nigh impossible"(*G* 2/215). Grania, despite the situation, insists on obtaining a priest, and seeks out Murdough to go with her.

She runs to find Murdough at the Anglo-Irish villa. As she journeys there, it is clear she is not only on a quest to secure the priest, but also to find her lover and be reunited with him. She is driven by "the remembrance of that evening in the boat—the one evening of evenings in her life—[which] stood out like a vision"(*G* 2/221). They will not be journeying to Inishmore, but fully liberating themselves from social and linguistic constraints.

However, when Grania approaches the villa, the embodiment of political power, she immediately loses her confidence. The proud, confident woman is suddenly conscious:

> of being there [as] a supplicant, a beggar—of being at a disadvantage . . . probably it was something in their mental attitude which suggested it. She had never in her life known the feeling of being a supplicant, for in her time there had never been any gentry on Inishmaan. . . . all the same, she did know it instinctively, and it arose without bidding now. This fine young man standing at ease upon the top of the steps—at his own hall door, as it were—the girl—herself—with her petticoat over her head, appealing from below. (*G* 2/226)

At this moment, Lawless merges the image of Murdough and the villa, unequivocally uniting the two systems of authority. Grania's unconscious awareness of her subservient position is one of the "mystic boundaries"[14] which constrains women.

Murdough immediately launches into a diatribe, listing in logical order the reasons why he cannot fetch the priest. However, it is clear that what is deterring Murdough is not a logical reason, but an irrational fear of the thick fog.

> There was something about this particular task which was peculiarly daunting and disquieting to his mind, the very thought of which sent cold shivers of discomfort through and through him. Had it been a question of taking out a boat in the middle of a storm, no matter how violent, his manhood would probably have risen to the occasion and he would have gone. . . . [It was] something in the look, in the very touch and thought of this dank, close, unnatural whiteness that deterred, and as it were sickened, him in anticipation. . . . [He feared being] adrift and helpless in a boat; lost and smothered up by the horrible white blanket of a fog; a prey to Heaven alone knew who or what! (*G* 2/233-34)

What Murdough fears is not death but the unknown and the loss of mastery. He is willing to face the familiar but not the unexplored. He is willing to do battle with the sea but not to journey passively through it. The enveloping fog

14. Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1963), 105.

will not allow control and mastery of the sea through the boat; instead, the fog requires intuition and faith. Murdough, while capable of experiencing moments of release, is unable to embrace complete abandonment. He fears the freedom and possibility which await outside the boundaries of culture and language.

Although his fear is irrational, Murdough uses words, the embodiment of logic, to try to convince Grania that her plan is unreasonable. At first she likewise responds by using words to try to convince him to go with her over the sea to Inishmore. His ultimate answer is to label her a "mad woman out and out"(*G* 2/240). This diction shows how words and the power of definition can be used to repress socially unacceptable ideas, for clearly, "Grania's 'madness' is [only] to try and be strong and independent in the face of a desolate environment and a repressive culture."[15] However, Grania dissolves this power by accepting the label, stating "then it is the mad woman I am, sure and certain . . . for it *is* going I am, sure and certain"(*G* 2/240).

At this point their argument comes to an impasse; words have failed them. Grania turns to leave, but impulsively grabs Murdough and hugs him in a last desperate attempt to regain the moment in the boat when the wall between them was breached and they were able to communicate without words. However, this attempt is different from the experience on the boat, where they were on the sea and outside of society. Here they are by the villa in the presence of other people, and their presence restrains Murdough. In fact, he takes Grania's action, especially the fact that she is not "intensely conscious of the presence of those two other men gathered around the cracked punch-bowl not far off"(*G* 2/245), as further proof that she truly is mad. This observation emphasizes that the definition of sanity is not based on a pathological condition but on social ideas of propriety. It is important to note Lawless's use of the word "cracked" to describe the punch-bowl. Even in Lawless's time, the word could imply "a person [who is] unsound in mind, slightly insane, crazy."[16] Through the use of the word Lawless inverts the diagnosis of insanity and insinuates that indeed it is the culture that is warped.

Despite momentarily wavering, Murdough fails to join Grania on her quest. Grania has just witnessed the only other option available to her in her society.[17] She can pursue her relationship with Murdough, but only if she is willing to accept that it will be controlled by cultural norms. She will be subordinate to him and they will never recapture the transcendent moment on the sea when they were able to break the linguistic and social barriers which restrain them.

15. Cahalan, 35.
16. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).
17. Another subplot offers Grania a different option. However, because of lack of space, only the main two have been presented.

Therefore Grania's only alternative is to travel without Murdough across the water to Inishmore. Hers is not merely a journey to obtain the priest but a rejection of mastery and a move to an area fully beyond the realm of language. As she travels, the dense cover of fog does not allow her to steer the boat. Instead of controlling the boat, she must guide it through intuition. In fact, Grania soon finds herself rowing with her eyes closed, as her faith is a better source of guidance than her eyes. However, the fog is unnavigable. She drowns on her journey, swallowed up in the water and surrounded by the "extraordinary"(*G* 2/296) silence.

Her death is problematic because its ambiguity offers no clear sense of closure. If read in a realist manner, it would be seen as "pure tragedy,"[18] either a suicide or a foolhardy accident. If read metaphorically, her death is a heroic journey. She crosses a boundary in a repudiation of the social and cultural construct of the self thereby rejecting mastery and embracing freedom. However, Lawless qualifies this bold victory. At the moment Grania dies, she hallucinates that Murdough has come to save her. At the very moment she escapes, she is snared in her old trap. Her delusion shows that the possibility of fully escaping society and culture is merely a fantasy. No one can completely break free from his or her culture. Additionally, Grania's hallucination can be seen in light of Horner and Zlosnik's remark that "the fact that madness, vision, and delusion occur in conjunction with the sea . . . suggests that freedom from the boundaries of discourse and culture—which the sea metaphorically represents . . . is a source of terror."[19] Grania's death and its various interpretations challenge the more conventional writing of Lawless's day which strove to articulate one specific meaning.

Grania's final journey, therefore, represents a quest for the unlimited, a way of "making for the open." Grania wishes to escape the cultural, political, and linguistic constraints imposed on her by embracing the metaphorical freedom of the sea. Lawless particularly emphasizes how language itself is complicit in the oppression of women. She has developed an intricate metaphorical structure to show the complex forces which have been collectively asserting an intense pressure on Grania. Buildings represent forms of authority: specifically, cabins represent cultural restrictions imposed on women; the villa represents political and cultural systems of authority working in collusion to deny women access to power. Grania, however, chooses to reject these systems of mastery and oppression and makes the inevitable choice for the metaphorical freedom of the sea.

18. Wolff, x.
19. Horner and Zlosnik, 11.

EMILY LAWLESS'S PORTRAYAL of landscape is not an evocative example of realism but an aesthetic contrivance upon which to structure an argument. *Grania: The Study of an Island* anticipates modernist practices not only in its remarkable absence of plot and its use of epiphany, but in its employment of landscape as a sophisticated metaphor to examine the linguistic and cultural construct of the self. The landscape through which the characters journey is not merely a realistic setting but a complex metaphor in which characters, by embracing the sea and all its potential freedom and wildness, can discard the cultural boundaries of the self. Critics should therefore not view Lawless as an endnote to the nineteenth century[20] but as a forerunner of the modernism and feminism of the twentieth.

20. Grubgeld, 128; Gwynn, 16; Martin, 1021; Hogan, 365; Weekes, 182.