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Faculty of Arts and Philosophy**

**Deirdre, a Tragic Heroine in William Butler Yeats' *Deirdre* and in  
J. M. Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows***

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### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Deirdre, a Tragic Heroine in William Butler Yeats' Deirdre and in J. M. Synge's Deirdre of the Sorrows

V práci nazvané Deirdre, a Tragic Heroine in William Butler Yeats' Deirdre and in J. M. Synge's Deirdre of the Sorrows se autorka zaměří na Deirdre, tragickou hrdinku irské mytologie. V první části se studentka bude zabývat touto postavou irské mytologie obecně a též čtenáře seznámí s důležitostí dramatické tvorby v Irsku na přelomu století. V hlavní části práce se autorka bude věnovat zobrazení Deirdre ve výše zmíněných hrách a pokusí se vystopovat a analyzovat podobné a rozdílné prvky, s kterými texty pracují. Na konci práce autorka své závěry přehledně shrne.

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## **Abstract**

The main purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of the plays *Deirdre of the Sorrows* by John Millington Synge and *Deirdre* by William Butler Yeats which date back to the period of Irish Literary Revival and portray a tragic heroine of Irish mythology, Deirdre. In the initial part of the paper the Irish Literary Revival is contextualized and its main goals are introduced. The original myth and the specificities of the plays are further described. The second part considers analysis of the plays with special attention being paid to the main character of Deirdre. Certain aspects of both plays are then compared.

**Key words:** *Deirdre*; *Deirdre of the Sorrows*; John Millington Synge; William Butler Yeats; Irish Literary Revival; Irish mythology

## **Abstrakt**

Hlavním cílem této práce je poskytnout analýzu her *Deirdre bolestná* od Johna Millingtona Synge a *Deirdre* od Williama Butlera Yeatse, které pochází z období Irského národního obrození a zobrazují Deirdre, tragickou hrdinku Irské mytologie. V úvodní části práce je Irské literární obrození zasazeno do historického kontextu a jeho primární cíle jsou představeny. Původní legenda a specifika her jsou dále popsána. Druhá část zahrnuje analýzu her se zaměřením na hlavní hrdinku. Některé aspekty obou her jsou následně porovnány.

**Klíčová slova:** *Deirdre*; *Deirdre bolestná*; John Millington Synge; William Butler Yeats; Irské národní obrození; Irská mytologie

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## 1. Introduction

The main subject of this bachelor paper is to analyse two plays, John Millington Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows* and William Butler Yeats' *Deirdre*. Both the authors were significant dramatists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Ireland. They were tightly linked to the Irish nationalistic movement in literature known as the Irish Literary Renaissance which, above all, considerably influenced the development of Irish national theatre and its themes. The movement was characterized by a great interest in the ancient Irish myths and legends and in their restoration. The plays represent such an interest since they both treat the topic of Deirdre, a tragic heroine of Irish mythology. The analysis examines the specificities of the main heroine and analyses her character development in the plays.

The paper consists of three parts. The first part provides a theoretical background to the analysis. Firstly, it explains the term Irish Literary Renaissance and places it into the historical context. Several reasons for its emergence are mentioned. Secondly, the development of the movement is highlighted. Important literary organizations, including the Gaelic League and the Irish Literary Theatre and its main representatives, are introduced. The main themes of the Irish drama, particularly in the Abbey, national Ireland's theatre, are presented. The roots of the Celtic themes in drama are further looked at. Finally, the last sub-chapter of the theoretical part examines the myth of Deirdre in particular, its origins, and briefly the plot. Its importance for Irish playwrights is highlighted. Other authors that considered the topic of Deirdre are mentioned. The plays by J.M. Synge *Deirdre of the Sorrows* and W.B. Yeats *Deirdre* are then introduced. Some specific aspects of the plays are mentioned along with the source of inspiration for both the tragedies. The general views on the plays held by various critics are also presented. The second part of the paper analyses the play *Deirdre of the Sorrows* and the third part focuses on *Deirdre*. The study of Synge's play concentrates on the main heroine and attempts to provide her personality analysis. It depicts Deirdre's behaviour, her mental development throughout the play, and her relationship to the other characters. The selected elements or characters that influence the heroine are closely looked at as well. In the second part of the analytical section Yeats' *Deirdre*, similarly with the previous chapter, is examined. The analysis of Yeats'



Deirdre further portrays a comparison of both plays; focusing mainly on the treatment of the heroine and exploring similarities and differences within the plays and within Deirdre herself. At the end of the bachelor paper, the discoveries are summarized and the thesis is concluded.

## **2. Irish National Movement in Literature, Deirdre and the Irish Theatre**

This initial part of the paper provides a theoretical background to the analysis of the plays *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1910) by J.M. Synge and *Deirdre* (1906) by W.B. Yeats. Firstly, the plays need to be put into historical and literary context of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Ireland.

### **2.1. Irish Literary Revival**

The term Irish Literary Revival also referred to as the Irish Literary Renaissance is “a phenomenon coterminous with the Celtic Twilight” (Sternlicht 13). The term Celtic Twilight was firstly introduced by W. B. Yeats, a poet and playwright of 20<sup>th</sup> century Ireland and a major spokesperson for the Irish Literary Revival. Sternlicht dates Celtic Twilight from 1885 to the death of Yeats in 1939 (14). The author further explains that the term is used to describe the literary and artistic mood in Ireland in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth, which moved Irish writing from nineteenth-century romanticism into early twentieth-century modernism (Sternlicht 13-14). The Irish Literary Revival thus undoubtedly emerged as a response to the course of events of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland.

There are many reasons for the revival in Irish literature as well as for the growth of the nationalistic spirit in Ireland. To provide a list of all aspects and to analyse them is beyond the scope of this work. Authors G. Delanty and P. O’Mahony in their *Rethinking Irish History* emphasize that the development of inclination towards nationalism<sup>1</sup> was a long-run process. It was shaped by an immediate context of the politics of progress and distribution, enlightened and dogmatic political institutions, volatile political cultures and the rapid transformation of social structures (51). O’Connor further specifies two major problems: The general oppression of Irish Catholics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and The Great Famine of 1845-48 that underlined the

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<sup>1</sup> Nationalism<sup>1</sup> is an “ideology based on the premise that the individual’s loyalty and devotion to the nation- state surpass other individual or group interests.” (britannica.com, 2012)

upcoming crisis of Ireland (21-22). For the purposes of this paper, it is quite sufficient to highlight the growth of Irish national identity<sup>2</sup> at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century along with the rising emancipation of Irish Catholics that, above all, contributed to the development of the Irish revival. Sternlicht points out that “[w]ith Catholic emancipation the Irish people began to look back on their medieval cultural inheritance, the literature and the art of the early Christian era, and to reconstruct the past in fine and applied art” (12). These attempts can be considered the beginnings of the Irish Literary Renaissance. The intellectuals started to explore the ancient Irish culture as they intended to renew its pride. For instance, the so-called father of the Irish Literary Revival, an Irish historical novelist and literary historian Standish James O’Grady wrote in a pamphlet which preceded the publication of his history: “I desire to make this heroic period once again a portion of the imagination of the country and its chief characters as familiar to the minds of the people as they once were.” (in O’Connor 25).

Nevertheless, not only did the curiosity about the ancient culture arouse but the interest in the native tongue increased as well. The strong desire to keep the Irish language spoken in Ireland can be observed within *The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland*, a paper by Douglas Hyde, a Gaelic scholar, writer, and to be the first president of the Republic of Ireland, in which he states:

But you ask why should we wish to make Ireland more Celtic than it is – why should we de-anglicise it at all? I answer because the Irish race is at present in a most anomalous position, imitating England and yet apparently hating it. How can it produce anything good in literature, art or institutions as long as it is actuated by motives so contradictory? (in O’Connor 165)

Thus, for the purposes of preserving Irish language, a Gaelic League was founded on 31 July 1893 and became highly successful. The Gaelic League “promulgated the teaching of the Irish language; by inaugurating Irish festivals of singing, dancing, piping, fiddling, and poetry recitals” (Sternlicht 12). Delanty and O’Mahony add that “its main orientation was to stress the virtues of a separatism that would allow the construction of a distinctive identity that would mobilise society towards nationally appropriate goals” (79). Hence, the linguistic goals were not the only ones for the League since it attempted to define ‘Irishness’ as well. Nonetheless, the main source which was to

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<sup>2</sup> National identity is the cultural outcome of a discourse of the nation. It provides a sense of collective belonging to a group of people and a reference system for distinguishing one group of people from another. (Delanty, O’Mahony 2)

become the most influential for the Irish public was not yet discovered with the foundation of the Gaelic League.

To forge Irish national consciousness the writers used literature, primarily poetry or fiction. However, as G. Ch. Spivak mentions, there were authors, such as W.B. Yeats, who gradually realized that there was no real reading public in Ireland. The experiments in translating books into Gaelic, writing original works in Gaelic, and spreading the learning of Gaelic language made by D. Hyde's Gaelic League seemed not effective enough. Even Irish journalism was considered destructive and shallow for Yeats. However, if a distinctively Irish drama could be created, it might reach many more people (70). Hence, the Irish Literary Theatre, a beginning of modern Irish drama that "evolved from the nationalistic movement" (Sternlicht 29), was founded in 1897 by W.B. Yeats, an Irish playwright Edward Martyn, and a playwright and writer Lady Isabella Augusta Gregory. The Irish Literary Theatre organization became the Irish National Theatre Society in 1903 and its theatre, known as the Abbey due to its location on Lower Abbey Street, opened in 1904. Its main goal was to produce plays by Irish playwrights on Irish Themes. Sternlicht stresses that "[t]he Irish National Theatre Society at the Abbey went on to become and remain one of Europe's most important national repertory theatres" (20).

As the Irish Literary Revival was at its peak with the foundation of the Irish Literary Theatre, it is crucial at this point to examine the themes that were produced at the Abbey. As it was outlined in this chapter, the interest in the Celtic element in literature and the ancient heroic past was growing. It is essential to further explore this interest and to create a link between the Abbey Theatre and the ancient themes that served as a source for the dramatic production.

## **2.2. Celtic themes as a key inspiration for dramatic production**

Emphasized in the previous chapter, the main aim of the Irish Literary Theatre was to produce plays on Irish Themes. Those themes were to be Irish of pre-Christian era: "Yeats called upon the ancient heroic past to provide thematic subjects for the new Irish drama" (Sternlicht 29) and, as R. Taylor states, "began exploiting folk material and

heroic legend (2) for the purpose of the Abbey. He certainly saw something inspiring and original in them. In his *Essays II.*, Yeats comments on the Irish legends and tales:

we have, alike them [Greeks], a history that is rich in fantastic stories more than any other modern history, and legends, that surpasses, as I suppose, all legends except from those of Greece, in the romantic beauty (Yeats 1995 a., 119, my translation<sup>3</sup>)

His comparison with Greek legends indicates that he considered Irish folktales to be of a high quality. Yeats' main purpose, as he claims, was to open the source of Irish tales to ordinary Irishmen (Yeats 1995 a., 120), clearly, through the medium of theatre.

Sternlicht mentions frequent themes that were displayed in the peasant drama, thus in the plays to which Irish folklore<sup>4</sup> gave inspiration:

These themes, close to the hearts and ever in the minds of ordinary people also included the painful problems of exile and emigration as they impacted family, community, and even nation [or] the marriage wars and the struggle of the young to overcome the impediments of arranged marriages when they desire to pursue their own destinies." (30, my italics).

In order to apply the generalized themes to a specific example, let us consider the plays *Deirdre of the Sorrows* and *Deirdre* in which the leitmotifs such as exile or planned marriage occur as well. The former is the seven-year exile of Deirdre and the Sons of Usna that they experienced and the latter is undoubtedly the arranged marriage with the High King that the heroine wishes to avoid. The plays, however, will be further analysed in greater detail in the second part of this paper.

At this point, it is important to introduce the roots of the folk themes for Irish drama. An editor, journalist, and an expert on Celtic Languages and Literatures Jeffrey Gantz in his *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* fully captures Celtic past, language, and translates the myths that were depicted in manuscripts. He claims that what makes the early Irish tales such a valuable repository of information about the culture of the Celtic people is the conservatism of the isolated geographic position of the island. The island remained free of Roman colonization and therefore Irish society did not change until the

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<sup>3</sup> "my máme, jako oni, dějiny bohatší fantastickými příhodami než kterékoli moderní dějiny, a legendy, které předstihují, jak se domnívám, všechny legendy kromě řeckých, romantickou krásou" (Yeats 1995 a., 119)

<sup>4</sup> Folklore is defined as: "the sum total of traditionally derived and orally or imitatively transmitted literature, material culture, and custom of subcultures within predominantly literate and technologically advanced societies" (Britannica.com)

advent of Christianity in the fifth century (5). The myths survived and were written down in the manuscripts. The earliest documents are dated back to the twelfth century, around the year of 1160. There were two most important manuscripts. However, the second one is essential for this paper since it includes a complete version of *The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu* which is the latest surviving recension of the myth of Deirdre. At this point the original myth will be introduced along with its importance for Irish drama. The inspiration for the plays by J.M. Synge and W.B. Yeats will then be discussed.

### 2.3. Deirdre from myth to drama

*The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu*, also known as the story of Deirdriu<sup>5</sup> is one of the sagas of the Ulster Cycle<sup>6</sup>. Much of the tale is presented in verse. As Gantz clarifies, it follows the familiar pattern of old king-goddess-young king: Conchubur-Deirdriu-Noísu (256). Deirdriu escapes with Noísu to exile instead of marrying an old king Conchubur. They return after the years of exile in Albu to Emuin Machae, under Conchubur's promise of peace. The lovers are betrayed and Noísu is killed. Deirdriu, unable to bear the sorrow, commits suicide. The plotline is roughly similar to the plays by Synge and Yeats. However, there are a few dissimilarities between the plot of the tale and its dramatic treatments.

Gantz suggests that it was more a story of treachery and honour than of the romance between Deirdriu and Noísu as it might be seen in the plays, or in the subsequent versions of the tale. The story primarily ought to depict the decline of the Ulster Cycle which was indicated by the clash between Fergus and Conchubur. Fergus' guarantee of Noísiu's safety is violated (256) thus Fergus and Conchubur become enemies. Moreover, some circumstances were modified as well, including Deirdriu's death. Only the later versions intertwined the lovers' grave by portraying Deirdriu's death as a suicide she committed immediately after Noísu was killed by stabbing herself. Originally, Deirdriu lives in sorrow with Conchubur for a year and is killed by a great boulder: "She let her head be driven against it, and the boulder made fragments of

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<sup>5</sup> The spelling of names or titles may differ since Gantz used the Old Irish spelling system. (Gantz 32)

<sup>6</sup> The historical sagas of the Ulster Cycle are those primarily set in Ulaid (Ulster). Apart from Ulaid, there were four other provinces that depicted the Ireland of the ancient tales (Gantz 6-7).

her head, and she died” (Gantz 267), which is a far less romanticized death than those the readers know from *Deirdre of the Sorrows* and *Deirdre*. Despite those differences, Gantz claims that *The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu* became, through intermediary translations and retellings, the inspiration for Yeats’ and Synge’s plays (257).

There are several reasons why the story of Deirdriu was of such great importance for the Irish dramatists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. O’Connor marks the Deirdre theme as a key concept for the writers of the Irish Literary Renaissance (324). He also claims that *The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu* is one of the oldest tales in western Europe and the story of Tristan and Iseult<sup>7</sup> derives from it (324). Lady Gregory’s *Cuchulainn of Muirthemne*, a collection of re-told Irish sagas translated into Anglo-Irish peasant dialect which became, as O’Connor states, “a seminal book for the writers of the literary renaissance” (217), included the tale of Deirdre as well. M. C. King suggests that at the time Yeats and Synge had chosen to treat the topic of Deirdre, the tale “was already well established in the mythology of Irish nationalist aspirations as a typological figure whose tragic fate represented that of Ireland.” (161). The Irish public therefore saw the oppression of their nation in Deirdre’s story. She became a “heroic national history” (M.C. King 178). Thus, Deirdre can be seen, in a metaphorical sense, as a symbol of Ireland and its political aspiration. Her determination, power, and strength to resist the pressure of the King that claims her can be figuratively compared with the determination of the National movement in Ireland. Therefore, the topic became fairly challenging for Irish dramatists and writers. It is crucial to emphasize especially the plays by J.M. Synge and W.B. Yeats. The plays differ from each other and the main aspects and specificities of them thus need to be explored, along with the sources of the plays that vary as well.

Firstly, Synge’s Deirdre shall be considered. Since it was his very last piece of work, the critics label *Deirdre of the Sorrows* the dramatist’s swansong. It was published only posthumously in 1910 at the Abbey with the help of W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory who prepared it for production and publication. As *The Deirdres* of W.B. Yeats or AE<sup>8</sup> were already performed in 1902 and 1906 at the Abbey, Synge was naturally attracted by the possibility of treating the subject used by the other authors differently. M.C. King provides an insight to the letter Synge wrote to F.J. Gregg on

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<sup>7</sup> “principal characters of a famous medieval love-romance, based on a Celtic legend” (Britannica.com).

<sup>8</sup> George Russell’s pen name

September 12<sup>th</sup> 1907, which was shortly after his first draft of Deirdre: “I am half inclined to try a play on ‘Deirdre’ – it would be amusing to compare it with Yeats’ and Russell’s” (in M.C. King 179-180). Other authors argue that Synge was not responsible for his choice at all as it has been suggested by his master – W. B. Yeats himself. D.H. Greene mentions that “he [Yeats] induced Synge [...] to attempt a peasant Deirdre.” (1314). M. Burgeois also implies that it was Yeats who set the topic for him. (214). However, it is clear that *Deirdre of the Sorrows* gave Synge considerable trouble. Some sources, such as D.H. Greene, indicate that he reworked the play about twenty times (1320). Therefore, he was never fully satisfied with it.

U. O’Connor asserts that Lady Gregory’s *Cuchulainn of Muirthemne* was the main inspiration for the plots of both Synge’s and Yeats’ plays (217). Although some authors, such as O’Connor, mention that the sources of both *Deirdre* and *Deirdre of the Sorrows* were similar, it is not quite a sufficient explanation. D. H. Greene disputes this argument and claims that Synge’s inspiration for *Deirdre of the Sorrows* was not the Lady Gregory’s version of Deirdre, although he had become familiar with it (1315). Synge’s source was supposed to be the work of an 18<sup>th</sup> century poet, Audrey MacCurten, whose work was unpublished until 1898. D.H. Greene proves this idea by mentioning that the fifty-seven page hand written translation of an eighteenth century manuscript published in 1898 under the title *The Fate of the Children of Uisneach* was found among Synge’s papers (1314), which indicates that it was most likely the real inspiration for the dramatist. It is this fact, above all, that made his Deirdre rather specific and different from the other plays<sup>9</sup>.

To illustrate some of the aspects in which the play stood out, let us have a look at D. Kiberd’s idea that Synge’s “version was closer to the hard, unromanticised Gaelic materials than either Yeats’s or Russell’s.” (in M.C. King 180). The sense of a less-romantic appeal of the play probably originates in the peculiar use of language. According to M. Burgeoise, Synge used specific Irish *patois* as a speech for the kings and queens which made the play closer to the real spirit of the legend. He adds that the dialogues had such an unexceptionable peasant dialect that it would be above easy to transcribe them into ancient Irish. This was hardly possible with the other dramatic treatments of the legend (216).

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<sup>9</sup> Namely AE’s and Yeats’ versions



Deirdre of the Sorrows is deservedly labelled as the best attempt of Deirdre's dramatization. Even W. B. Yeats emphasised, in his *Discoveries*, the high quality of the play:

The last act of *Deirdre*, in which his [Synge's] art is the finest, was written on his deathbed. [...] He did not wish to die, yet in the last speeches of Deirdre's in the middle of the act he came to terms with death and made his farewell with a gracious gesture. He gave Deirdre the sense that he thought was the uneasiest, the most desirable, the most appropriate, and perhaps he saw, in those pleasing seven years that were escaping her, the fulfilment of his own life. (Yeats 1995 b., 78, my translation<sup>10</sup>)

As Yeats mentions, it seems that *Deirdre of the Sorrows* became, to some extent, quite personal for Synge which may be one of the explanations for such positive critiques of the play. Some commentators, namely M. Burgeois, even claim that the play had almost autobiographical features. "Like his Deirdre, Synge had begun to realize the sweet tragedy of love<sup>11</sup>; like his Deirdre he was doomed to die in the heyday of his power." (217).

Finally, Yeats' Deirdre back in 1906, according to R. Taylor, the author of the analysis of Yeats' drama, became popular on the Abbey stage as well. The positive aspect of *Deirdre* was the readily accessible nature of it since it displayed a very natural emotion. The play presented an image of ideal heroic story, being highly personal and focusing mainly on Deirdre and her feelings (24).

Yet, as R. Taylor mentions, the play was of limited success because of the restrictions imposed by its dramatic conception and treatment (24). The play, as the readers discover deeply in the second part of the paper, opens in the middle of things. Another aspect which R. Taylor highlights is the certain tendency to monotony as the drama, via its ideals and ideas, becomes static. The static monotony makes the play quite heavy going in study as well as on stage (27). Certain patterns are repeated throughout the play and the drama thus loses its dynamicity. R. Taylor marks *Deirdre* as Yeats' experimental attempt to create a new form of drama, later to be recognized as a prototype of the plays for dancers. Nevertheless, Yeats did not pursue this experiment

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<sup>10</sup> Poslední jednání *Deirdry*, v níž jeho umění je nejušlechtlejší, bylo napsáno na jeho smrtelné posteli. [...] nechtělo se mu umírat, a v posledních řečech Deirdřiných a uprostřed jednání smířil se se smrtí a rozloučil se s životem půvabným gestem. Dal Deirdře ten cit, který se mu zdál nejžádoucnější, nejnepohodnější, nejvhodnější, a viděl možná v těch utěšených sedmi letech, která jí unikala, vyplnění svého vlastního života. (Yeats 1995 b), 78)

<sup>11</sup> J.M. Synge was engaged to M. Allgood the time he died

farther as the play itself did not satisfy him whatsoever, and he decided to focus on other possible conceptions of drama (25-28). Although Yeats' *Deirdre* is not considered to be his masterpiece, it certainly marks Yeats' development as a dramatist. Besides, as G. M. Wickstrom correctly argues, *Deirdre* was written at the early stage of Yeats' career (466), which always needs to be remembered if any critique is to be made. At that time, Yeats was experimenting with various genres and he was primarily a poet. Hence, *Deirdre* is also written in verse.

Last but not least, Yeats' source of inspiration, as D.H. Green claims, was probably based on a well-known 15<sup>th</sup> century version of the story like the Deirdres of Lady Gregory, an Irish writer and storyteller Stephens, and AE (1315).

### 3. Synge's Deirdre

In the next two chapters both plays will be analysed with special attention being paid to the main character of Deirdre. The first of the plays to be examined in this paper is *Deirdre of the Sorrows* by Synge. The analysis will look at the character of Deirdre from the chronological point of view, i.e. from the beginning of the play to the end, and will try to explore reasons for her decisions and behaviour throughout the play. Selected symbols and settings will be also considered. The following chapter will focus on Deirdre herself.

#### 3.1. Treatment of Deirdre in *Deirdre of the Sorrows*

Synge puts Deirdre in the centre of the plot. Contrastively, D.H. Greene describes that “the Deirdre of the original legend is too lacking in self-assertion to be the central character of a tragedy.” (1316). Unlike Deirdre from the legend, Synge's Deirdre is a rather strong person. As it will be seen, it is Deirdre in the play that is changing the mood and the flow of dialogues and who, in a certain way, distinguishes the destiny of the characters. Deirdre's personality throughout the play gradually changes from the rather naïve and wild girl living on Slieve Fuadh to a strong Queen-like woman who is able to make great decisions in the end. It is Deirdre's conversion and the crucial moments of her decisions that will be depicted in the following section.

The play opens on Slieve Fuadh, an isolated place, where Deirdre was fostered by the High King of Ulster, Conchubor, until she would reach maturity to become his comrade. From the beginning, Deirdre is aware of the prophecy that she will be the ruin of the Sons of Usna and will experience great sorrow. However, she does not avoid the forecast when she rejects Conchubor and refuses to be his queen in Emain Macha. As M.C. King correctly suggests, by fulfilling her own wishes and dreams, she indirectly refuses to respect the king and she, in fact, defies the society by prioritizing her own needs (179). She was determined not to follow the old king because it was not her *wish*. While confronting Conchubor, who comes to Slieve Fuadh to take her to Ulster, the readers can observe her growing defiance. The rebelliousness of a disobedient child is

mixed with agitated moments of pleading and aghast which frame Deirdre's immaturity and a little power in changing the mind of the High King. Deirdre is desperate with the situation and seeks for the easiest escape. Her childishness and lack of ability to deal with the situation makes her to search for help from the others; in a following example from her nurse, Lavarcham:

DEIRDRE – *with agitation*. – It wasn't I did it. Will you take me from this place, Lavarcham, and keep me safe in the hills?

LAVARCHAM. He'd have us tracked in the half of a day, and then you'd be his queen in spite of you and I and mine would be destroyed for ever.

DEIRDRE – *terrified with the reality that is before her*. – Are there none can go against Conchubor?

LAVARCHAM. Maeve of Connaught only, and those that are her like.

DEIRDRE. Would Fergus go against him?

LAVARCHAM. He would, maybe, and his temper roused.

DEIRDRE – *in a lower voice with sudden excitement*. – Would Naisi and his brothers? (Synge 28-29)

Clearly, she has learned that she could not manage to face Conchubor alone and therefore chooses Naisi to facilitate her situation. It is obvious that from the beginning Naisi, the Son of Usna, is just another option for Deirdre to be free and able to live her dream.

Shortly after the above illustrated scene, the question mark over her unstable future disappears. She had made up her mind and chose Naisi to play the principal role in her life. It is this particular moment of considering him for the first time when she realises her role in the story and starts to act determined and strong. The change from a little girl to a woman arouses when she puts on "the rich dresses and jewels [that] have been sent from Emain" (Synge 30) by which she accepts the status of Queen; and decides to seek for Naisi and his brothers. The audience now meet a new Deirdre who is very influential and resolute.

Another aspect that can be observed within the first act is connected with Deirdre's speeches. They are becoming a kind of isolated monologue. Sometimes, she does not do anything but dramatically plays her role regardless of the people around. She makes comments that she feels need to be made to ensure that she is heard and understood well. Thus, she is dramatizing herself. Her self-dramatizing transformation, as M.C. King explains, "is motivated by her angry determination not to be treated as a mere piece of the king's property." (184). M.C. King's statement is proved in the

reference to Deirdre's own words: "I will not be a child or plaything [...]. I will turn the men of Ireland like a wind blowing on the heath." (Synge 31). Deirdre's dramatic appeal continues and is even emphasized while she compares herself with Emer and Maeve, mythological heroines:

DEIRDRE. I will dress like Emer in Dundegalga, or Maeve in her house in Connaught.

[...]

OLD WOMAN – *in a frightened whisper*. – She's thrown off the rags she had about her, and there she is in her skin; she's putting her hair in shiny twists. Is she raving, Lavarcham, or has she a good right turning to a queen like Maeve?

LAVARCHAM – *putting up hanging very anxiously*. – It's more than raving's in her mind, or I'm the more astray; and yet she's as good a right as another, maybe, having her own pleasure, though she'd spoil the world. (Synge 31).

Whether she has the right to act this way or not is arguable as she, according to the prophecy, carries responsibility for a fate of many people. Lavarcham is threatened by her determination because she correctly guesses that a tragedy will follow. On the other hand, she admits that as any other person Deirdre also has the right to be joyful. Deirdre herself, later in the act, does not accept the blame that lies with her:

LAVARCHAM. Are you raving Deirdre? Are you choosing this night to destroy the world?

DEIRDRE – *very deliberately*. – It's Conchubor has chosen this night calling me to Emain. (Synge 42)

Briefly said, she does not plan to live an unfulfilled life just because she would establish peace. She preferably wants to do whatever is best for her.

To accomplish the study of Deirdre in the first act, let it be highlighted that she goes through a process of metamorphosis. Her change resides namely in her maturing, subsequent determination, and self-dramatization. Furthermore, femininity has also become a part of Deirdre's personality. One of the last moments of the act is the lover's private talk during which the abovementioned femininity is evident. Deirdre persuades and exhorts Naisi to take her away from Conchubor. She ignores her comrade's concerns about the prophecy and compliments him, offering "a sweet life you and I could have, Naisi." (Synge 39). Deirdre, aware of her attractiveness, uses nothing but feminine weapons. Suddenly, when he agrees to go with Deirdre, she strategically changes the note of the dialogue and the guilt over Naisi's decision overwhelms her: "Won't I be in great dread to bring you to destruction, Naisi, and you so happy and

young?" (Synge 41). Hence, Naisi might have been pressured into the ritual marriage and consequently into the escape by Deirdre who smartly manipulated with him during the conversation. At this stage, Deirdre's active part in bringing the tragedy upon her and the Sons of Usna seems to be crucial. This and other aspects of her character will be revealed within a deep insight to the second act.

Deirdre had lived for seven years in the Alban's exile with Naisi and his brothers. The act begins when Lavarcham appears to warn the lovers about Fergus, Conchubor's loyal retainer, who brings the messages of peace. The main theme that occurs in Alban is the decision whether to go to Emain Macha, or stay in Alban, in other words, the choice between death and life. Deirdre is now illustrated as a strong, persuasive woman ready to make such decisions.

Deirdre very well foreboded that the day when their fragile peace is negotiated would come and as if she wanted to incline to the prophecy, she is reconciled before things are even decided. She also pronounces frustration over the life in Alban so the return seems like the only option. Greene's argument that the question of return and the reasons for it were crucial for Synge is evident. He claims that unlike the legend in which Deirdre passively returns home to certain death, the play works with a powerful motivation to leave Alban which is the fear of getting old and passing of beauty. (D.H. Greene 1316). Consequently, D.H. Greene's idea can be displayed when Deirdre mentions possible reasons for the departure:

DEIRDRE. I've dread going or staying, Lavarcham. It's lonesome this place, having happiness like ours, till I'm asking each day will this day match yesterday, and will tomorrow take a good place beside the same day in the year that's gone, and wondering all times is it a game worth playing, living on until you're dried and old, and our joy is gone forever. (Synge 48).

It is evident from her speech that she is tired of the repetitive cycle she has to go through every day in exile. Moreover, she is scared of getting old and does not want to wait for that moment. Even though Lavarcham, who is wise, tries to convince her that "there is little hurt getting old" (Synge 48), it seems that she does not find any joy in the idea of ageing whatsoever.

Another portrayal of Deirdre's persuasive and manipulative behaviour arises when the decision is about to be made. She convinces Naisi to leave to Emain. Naisi does not want to go, yet after a short dialogue, he agrees:

DEIRDRE. – *in a very low voice.* – With the tide in a little while we will be journeying again, or it is our own blood maybe will be running away.

[...]

NAISI. I've said we'd stay in Alban always.

DEIRDRE. There's no place to stay always. . . .

[...]

NAISI – *his voice broken with distraction.* - [...] Come away into the safety of the woods.

DEIRDRE. – *shaking her head slowly.* – There are as many ways to wither love as there are stars in a night of Samhain; but there is no way to keep life, or love with it, a short space only. . . . It's for that we're setting out for Emain Macha when the tide turns on the sand.

NAISI – *giving in.* – You're right, maybe. It should be a poor thing to see great lovers and the sleepy and old. (Synge 58-60)

Deirdre is split-minded at this point. She partially does not want Naisi to decide for Emain because she forebodes something tragic might happen yet she goes on persuading him that it is better to go. Thus, it is Naisi who makes the choice albeit under strong pressure from Deirdre.

Now there is a certain parallel between Deirdre in the first and the second act of the play. In both cases it is Deirdre who establishes what will happen in the future. However, her aims differ. In the first act, she escapes with Naisi instead of accompanying Conchubor. The reason quite easily comprehensible, as it was previously discussed, is her need to be pleased and to have a lover of her like – good-looking and young. Nonetheless, her decision to quit living and to face death is questionable. Apart from being rather tired of the monotonous life in Alban and the fear of growing old, she may, indeed, subconsciously follow her fate. Synge created an appeal of myth in the play using the power of the ever-present prophecy which is after all inevitable. The forecast brings the tragedy and Deirdre might be a tool to fulfil it. M.C. King similarly describes that “[t]he characters are actors, or pawns, in a story or game.” (180). Therefore, not only one explanation for Deirdre's decisions is possible. Deirdre's centeredness thus might be questioned with regards to the power of the prophecy.

In the third act, the tragic fate is fulfilled. The relationship of the lovers is further questioned and the last pursuit of Deirdre's determination is realized. Deirdre, fully aware of her social status, claims her rights in Emain. She is stunned with the conditions of the place Conchubor has put them waiting. Deirdre guesses that something is wrong and the moment the couple discovers the grave dug behind the curtain her worries are rightful. Deirdre starts to act hysterically. Even though she might have foresaw what would happen she is thrilled by the tangible image of the grave. Deirdre again seeks for help and pleads Naisi to hide her in the rocks. If the readers be reminded

of the first act when Deirdre asks Lavarcham to take her to the woods to keep her safe from Conchubor's claims, a parallel can be easily found. Deirdre has got used to the fact that the people who love her will do as she says. This time however, she does not realize that Naisi must stay with his brothers. Deirdre cannot understand that Naisi, always acting according to her needs, is responsible for his brothers, therefore has to stay with them. M.C. King's analysis of this situation is following: "Naisi's failure to share her anguished insight is the highest price [...] for her tragic recognition of the real nature of the gap between individual need and social responsibilities." (192). Deirdre finally experiences the bitter reality of being responsible for someone.

The collision between the couple proves to be fatal the moment Naisi is going to save his brothers. Deirdre clinging to Naisi, afraid of the desperate situation, is trying to persuade his lover to stay with her. Once again, there is a scene when Deirdre tries to make Naisi do what she wants and for the first time she is not successful.

DEIRDRE. Do not leave me, Naisi. Do not leave me broken and alone.  
NAISI. I cannot leave my brothers when it is I who have defied the king.  
DEIRDRE. I will go with you.  
NAISI. You cannot come. Do not hold me from the fight.  
*[He throws her aside almost roughly.]* (Synge 80)

This scene displays Naisi's growing anger towards his mistress. Naisi is hopeless; his brothers are dying and he cannot prioritize Deirdre anymore because he feels her partial guilt over what is happening.

However, it is not the only problem that Naisi no longer fulfils Deirdre's needs. The irony remains in their tragic love. According to M.C. King, Deirdre and Naisi are losing their love on the edge of the grave. The main goal to preserve the young love therefore failed and the fear of getting old and weary was needless (192). Naisi's feelings for Deirdre are not positive in the end. It is evident from his last speech, that Naisi, to some extent, reveals that it was Deirdre who brought the tragedy on him. The tension is observed when he indirectly curses her:

DEIRDRE. Have you no shame loitering and talking, and a cruel death facing Ainnle and Ardan in the woods?  
NAISI. – *frantic*. – They'll not get a death that's cruel, and they with men alone. *It's women that have loved are cruel only; and if I went on living from this day I'd be putting a curse on the lot of them I'd meet walking in the east or west, putting a curse on the sun that gave them beauty, and on the madder and the stone-crop put red upon their cloaks.*



DEIRDRE – *bitterly*. – I’m well pleased there’s no one in this place to make a story that Naisi was a laughing-stock the night he died.  
NAISI. There’d not be many’d make a story, *for that mockery is in your eyes this night will spot the face of Emain with a plague of pitted graves*. (Synge 81, my italics)

Their confrontation, however, is not carried out because Naisi, immediately after this epiphany, leaves the scene and dies alongside his brothers. The final dialogue between Deirdre and Naisi therefore questions the qualities of their relationship.

From this moment, Deirdre faces Conchubor alone. Her self-dramatization is at its peak. She creates a monologue of laments half-awakened and disturbed from her sorrow by Conchubor’s presence who constantly confronts her. An important issue observed in the climax of the play is Deirdre’s power to control the situation through her monologues and her ability to partially ignore the outer action. The appeal of her social awareness is present as well.

Firstly, let us have a look at the latter. Deirdre talks wildly to Conchubor and her speech is changing in turns as she speaks to herself: “It is I, Deirdre, will be crouching in a dark place; I, Deirdre that was young with Naisi and brought sorrow to his grave in Emain.” (Synge 85). M.C. King explains that Conchubor treats Deirdre as an object and behaves disrespectfully towards her great sorrow, thus depriving her of social interaction and an identity (193). Deirdre though, was always very much aware of her status. The phrase “I, Deirdre” is repeated several times in her speech as a demonstration of her social consciousness. Albeit her social role is never acknowledged by the others, she is emphasising it. She creates a legend that will remain after her death:

It was not by a low birth I made kings uneasy and they sitting in the halls of Emain. It was not a low thing to be chosen by Conchubor, who was wise, and Naisi had no match for bravery. It is not a small thing to be rid of grey hairs and the loosening of the teeth. (*With a sort of triumph*.) It was the choice of lives we had in the clear woods, and in the grave, we’re safe, surely. . . . (Synge 91)

The speech constructs Deirdre’s story that is worthy of being told forever and at the same time it implies the greatness of Deirdre herself, especially of her high social position of which she was deprived by Conchubor.

Deirdre’s heroic end resides in her freedom to decide how and when she dies. She overcomes Conchubor’s ignorance via her controlled acting and proud

determination. In her deep sorrow she reconciles with death and is ready to commit suicide. Maxwell reminds the readers of the fact that Deirdre's death remains the only thing which was not foretold (56). It needs to be remembered since it was her free will to die, which gives her a true tragic appeal in the play.

Deirdre played a crucial role in *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. She went through a process of transformation as she had turned into a woman and chose her lifeline. She also proved to be an effective and persuasive organizer aware of her social role. Although the relationship of Deirdre and Naisi got complicated and tense as the lovers were approaching death, Deirdre was fiercely determined not to obey Conchubor. Above all, Deirdre was framed by secondary factors such as settings or other characters that are, to some extent, symbolic. These secondary aspects will be looked at in the following two chapters.

### **3.2. Exile in Alban and its impact on the main characters**

Alban, where Deirdre and Naisi lived in exile, is considered to play a crucial role in the plot development as it had an enormous impact on both Deirdre as an individual and her relationship with Naisi. The main problem of Alban is the nature of Deirdre's and Naisi's existence there which is apparently deprived of social interaction. As it shall be seen, this problem will be one of the reasons for Deirdre's seemingly absurd and self-destructive decision to go to Emain.

Firstly, let us look at the environment in Alban. However ideal and quiet a place Alban may seem, M.C. King indicates that under the surface this woodland existence was a form of living death which deprived all the characters of any social dimension in reality (185). The couple has become entirely isolated throughout the long years in Alban. Deirdre provides an insight into their way of life there:

[...] watching the heifers walking to the haggard with long shadows on the grass [or] waking with the smell of June in the tops of the grasses, and listening to the birds in the branches that are the highest. (Synge 47,58).

This alleged balance with nature is, in fact, a sign that their life is a vicious circle full of rather meaningless activities. Their lifestyle there neither corresponds with Deirdre's

acknowledgement of her social status nor with the nobility of the Sons of Usna who, according to Fergus, became “hunters only” (Synge 57) by living in exile.

The lack of socialising and action also prompts homesickness which is one of the possible reasons for returning. The question of homesickness is of an almost patriotic character. It can be observed in one of the dialogues between Fergus and Naisi:

FERGUS. [...] when I was a young man we'd have give a lifetime to be in Ireland a score of weeks; and to this day the old men have nothing so heavy as knowing it's in a short while they'll lose the high skies are over Ireland, [...]. Let you come this day, *for there's no place but Ireland where the Gael can have peace always.*

NAISI: It's true, surely. Yet we're better this place while Conchubor's in Emain Macha. (Synge 53-54, my italics)

Naisi, though gruffly, agrees with Fergus. His nodding is basically a proof that Alban, however safe and calm, is and remains an exile only and cannot substitute the underappreciated life of which the lovers are worthy. Albeit the return is risky, it employs an action, change, and above all, future expectations.

Another problem is the love between Deirdre and Naisi. D. Kiberd correctly recognises that the artificial nature of their life in Alban has a negative impact on the love and passion of the main characters (in M.C. King 187). Indeed, Alban questions the power of Deirdre's and Naisi's love. It might not be as strong as it seems because the first crisis is only to come thus “their love is never tested out.” (M.C. King 187).

Last but not least, the isolation of Alban recalls Deirdre's frustrating existence upon Slieve Fuadh. Looking back to the first act, she lived there isolated in the nature with no sense of social interaction as well. Moreover, the description of Slieve Fuadh is more than similar to Alban:

LAVARCHAM. She [Deirdre] has the birds to school her, and the pools in the rivers where she goes bathing in the sun. (Synge 20)

Those activities are irrelevant for a queen to be engaged in. The Queen of Ulster “collecting nuts and twigs for the fires at the dawn of day” (Synge 22) is not common to be seen. Therefore, Deirdre's decision might be connected with the environment she finds herself in. Although Deirdre may have no wish to be Conchubor's queen, she never claimed she wanted to be a wild girl either and it is hardly improbable that she was blissfully happy in Alban. The stereotype may more or less motivate her to leave

since she was full of expectations for new life and a better future that could not be found in Alban.

### 3.3. Owen as a selected symbolic in *Deidre of the Sorrows*

If there is something else influencing Deirdre and being influenced by her it is the character of Owen, Conchubor's spy. He is portrayed as an absurd figure yet taking Deirdre into account his attributes in the play are almost *symbolic*.

Owen appears in Alban the moment Deirdre is speaking with Lavarcham about the unfortunate arrival of Fergus, and discusses the possibilities of her and Naisi's departure to Emain Macha. Owen emerges in a rather inopportune time and brings a grotesque element into the tense situation. W.B. Yeats described Owen as a "fool and a talker" (in Greene 1317). Although Owen might be meaningless character-wise yet he, through his empty tittle-tattle, attempts to change the atmosphere of the play for some time. Particularly important is then Deirdre's confrontation with Owen during which he mentions, as the first character after Deirdre, the unpleasant reality of getting old. Although proud Deirdre seldom acknowledges his speech, he is teasing her and de facto confirms her own worries:

Stay here and *rot* with Naisi or go to Conchubor in Emain. Conchubor's a wrinkled fool with a swelling belly on him, and eyes falling downward from his shining crown; Naisi should be *stale* and *weary*. (Synge 51, my italics).

However mad he might be, Owen is suggesting what the heroine is ought to recognise later, therefore making a valuable point about Deirdre and her Alban existence. Using the reference to Conchubor, he implies that Naisi will not be young and handsome forever, neither Deirdre herself, as Owen continues: "I tell you it's a poor thing to see a queen's nose reaching down to scrape her chin." (Synge 52). Moreover, since he is not really connected to any of the characters he may easily represent a voice from the outside world from which the lovers were so isolated, as well as an omniscient observer outside the scope of the story.

The latter suggestion is to some extent discredited due to his distraction and unhealthy obsession with Deirdre. Greene was concerned with this as he described him

as “a kind of Shakespearean fool whose raving would constitute a kind of commentary on the action” (Greene 1317), yet does not underestimate his importance. That is to say, his character seems to find difficulty in seeing Deirdre because he is obsessed with her. He interlaces mad talk with compliments: “Yet there are many roads, Deirdre, and I tell you I’d liefer be bleaching in a bog-hole than living on without a touch of kindness from your eyes and voice.” (Synge 51). It can be seen that he may represent the “ordinary humanity and thus symbolize Deirdre’s devastating influence on all who came within even distant range of her beauty.” (Greene 1317).

As previously illustrated, Deirdre more or less controls all the characters. Seemingly, she is capable of controlling even as unimportant a character as Owen appears to be. Nevertheless, this analysis proves that however underestimated Owen is, he performs a dramatic role. It is his irrelevance, stereotypic display of his character as a raving fool and lack of relationship with the other characters that puts him into the position of almost a *thing* that creates a symbol of Deirdre’s impact on the others, not to say a symbol of the outer commentator of the action.

## 4. Yeats' Deirdre

Both Yeats and Synge treated the topic of Deirdre in each one of their plays. Albeit the theme is identical, the plays differ from each other. Yeats' Deirdre was far from the person who played a major role in Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. Nevertheless, there are as many different aspects as similar, almost identical ones. It is the purpose of this chapter to track both aspects mentioned.

The analysis will look at Deirdre in the first place and, similarly with the previous chapter, will follow Deirdre's behaviour, psychological development, and position in the plot. Secondary factors such as other characters will be included as well.

### 4.1. Treatment of Deirdre in *Deirdre*

Yeats' Deirdre also plays a central character in the play. Similarly to Deirdre in *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, she changes her behaviour during the play as the tense situations intensify. Deirdre attempts to profoundly influence the other characters and gradually takes control of the stage.

Yeats' play opens where Synge's final act begins, i.e. in a Guest-house in Emain to which Deirdre and Naisi just arrived from a seven-year exile. Lack of action can be observed at the start since Deirdre's previous life is being outlined by The Musicians and Deirdre remains oppressed, fully dependant on Naisi's decisions. She starts to control the action when she decides to do everything possible to save the situation. As R. Taylor emphasises, the story is very personal – "Deirdre dominates the action of the play which presents the drama of her inner being and [...] image of ideal heroic action." (Taylor 24). However heroic and strong she will become later, similarly to Synge's Deirdre, she is scared of what may happen and hopelessly seeks for help from the others, namely Naisi:

DEIRDRE. [To Naisi] The horses are still saddled, follow me,  
And hurry to our ships, and get us gone.  
I have heard  
Monstrous, terrible, mysterious things,  
Magical horrors and the spells of wizards. (Yeats 2001, 19)

She beseeches Naisi to rescue them but he is incapable of doing so because he believes in reconciling with the Ulster's King, Conchubar. This situation may be observed within *Deirdre of the Sorrows* when Naisi refuses to escape due to the loyalty towards his brothers. Therefore, the position of both heroines is similar and they soon realize that they must solve the situation themselves. The determined behaviour is in both plays, however, preceded by several hysterical attempts, rather unsuccessful ones. In *Deirdre of the Sorrows* for instance, Deirdre vainly pleads Conchubar to give her one more year to live in Slieve Fuadh and begs Lavarcham to save her. In *Deirdre*, the heroine wants to make herself look ugly so she does not attract the king, thus prevents him from claiming her. A moment later she is pleading Naisi not to leave her on her own because she is scared of losing him.

It is observable however, that via this endeavour Yeats' Deirdre, like Deirdre in *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, is gradually taking control over the characters and the play itself. Yeats' Deirdre appears to be increasingly active and dynamic:

FERGUS. I Know King Conchubar's mind as it were my own;  
 I'll learn the truth from him.  
 [He is about to follow NAISI, but DEIRDRE stops him]  
 DEIRDRE. No, no, old man,  
 You thought the best, and the worst came of it;  
 We listened to the counsel of the wise,  
 And so turned fools. But ride and bring your friends.  
 Go, and go quickly. Conchubar has not seen me;  
 It may be that his passion is asleep,  
 And that we may escape. (Yeats 2001, 25-26)

She possesses the role of an organizer. By telling the others what to do she becomes highly *progressive*.

At this point, it is appropriate to look back at *Deirdre of the Sorrows* and to remind the readers of Synge's Deirdre at about the same moment, i.e. when the heroine confronts the reality of their small chances of survival. The readers might remember the scene of the lover's final conflict before Naisi's violent death. Deirdre keeps persuading Naisi to do something and is refused several times, she is bewildered, and after a while she sinks into apathy. She did not find the strength yet to keep the tense situation in hand. Albeit the same role, the position of Synge's Deirdre may therefore be considered more complicated and stalemated. The contrast between Synge's Deirdre and Yeats'

Deirdre in the above described situation will be displayed within a deeper look to the character of Deirdre and Naisi's relationships in *Deirdre*.

Deidre in *Deidre* is at an advantage since there is no quarrel or disagreement between her and her lover, no inconsistent decrease of their intimacy. On the contrary, their passion arouses with the death approaching. G. Wickstrom in his analysis also notices of "the dramatic and lyric climax, after the King's messenger has made it clear that they are doomed [after which] the rising passions of the lovers" (Wickstrom 467) is observed. For instance, when Naisi refuses to exchange Deirdre to Conchubar for his life:

NAISI. Would I had lost life  
Among those Scottish kings that sought it of me,  
Because you were my wife, or that the worst  
Had taken you before this bargaining!  
O eagle! If you were to do this thing,  
And buy my life of Conchubar with your body,  
Love's law being broken, I would stand alone  
Upon the eternal summits, and call out,  
And you could never com there being banished. (Yeats 2001, 38-39)

The passion and care for Deirdre is highlighted by using nicknames (e.g. "eagle"), showing how loyal Naisi stays to his mistress. Their noble willingness to sacrifice their own life to save the other creates a strong appeal of heroic mood in the play. Their love is natural, passionate, and above all physical. The physical affection and erotic desire for bodily sensation reveals in this scene:

DEIRDRE. Bend and kiss me now,  
For it may be the last before our death.  
[...]  
And I know nothing but this body, nothing  
But that old vehement, bewildering kiss. (Yeats 2001, 31)

These extracts show that Deidre in *Deirdre* experienced rising love between her and Naisi; and thus stands in contrast with Deirdre in *Deirdre of the Sorrows* whose love faced severe crisis at the end of her life. It cannot be said that Synge's Deirdre was more passive than Yeats' since they both hold active roles in different stages of the plays. However, in this particular moment, as it was seen earlier in the first chapter, the action of Synge's Deirdre was to some extent paralyzed by the inconsistent farewell with Naisi. Yeats' Deirdre, on the other hand, was motivated to action through her passion.



Another aspect in *Deirdre* is a strong sentiment of another legend. There is a chessboard in the guest-house where the lovers are waiting. This symbolic item with which the couple is confronted reminds them the story of Lugaidh Redstripe and his Queen who had waited for their deaths by playing on that very chessboard. At this point, Naisi's and mainly Deirdre's identification and comparison with these mythological characters will be analysed.

The chessboard works as a model for the lovers who, after the King's messenger has told them that Naisi is not welcomed in Emain, automatically start to play the game. G. Wickstrom was analysing the relationship of the story of Deirdre and Lugaidh Redstripe. The outcomes are obvious. According to him, there is certain parallelism between the pair of lovers (Wickstrom 469). However, it seems that Yeats' Deirdre cannot continue to play the game calmly, imitating the model Queen without resistance. With pride and strength that is typical of her, Deirdre suddenly stops the game protesting:

DEIRDRE. I cannot go on playing like that woman  
That had but the cold blood of the sea in her veins. (Yeats 2001, 30)

This disapproval indicates that she cannot fully identify with the Queen because, as she claims, Deirdre is a completely different person acting in her own way. The Queen is an inanimate memory, a symbol of death and passivity, in contrast with Deirdre who is lively and wild, willing to *fight* for her love. W.B. Yeats probably created this parallel on purpose, as he mentions:

I am content with the players and myself, if I am moved for a while not by the contrasted sorrow of Deirdre and Naoise, but because the world have called up before me the image of the sea-born woman so distinctly that Deirdre seems by contrast to those unshaken eyelids that had but the sea's cold blood what I had wished her to seem, a wild bird in a cage." (in Wickstrom 469)

Deirdre, being "a wild bird in a cage", creates a legend of her own via her acting. She establishes what will follow in her story and the dramatic atmosphere increases, in other words, "her *lyric* becomes her *drama*" (Wickstrom 470).

The appearance of myth is likely to be observed in *Deirdre of the Sorrows* as well when Synge's Deirdre compares herself to Emer and Maeve. She makes this comparison to create an impression of a tough and determined queen that she

unquestionably becomes. Unlike Deirdre in *Deirdre*, she identifies herself with those queens and wants to be strong and independent like them. Hence, their behaviour is rather similar. It is the willpower to remain active. Deidre in *Deirdre of the Sorrows* would most likely refuse to be passive within the game of chess too. Although in a completely different context, they both remember other legendary characters in situations when they have to make decisions, be active, and to take control of the situation. To be specific, Synge's Deirdre has decided to escape with Naisi and Yeats' Deirdre has chosen to spend the last minutes of her life being herself and fight till the end. Therefore, the presence of myth in connection with the heroines in both plays is noticeable and takes an important part in the psychological development of the characters.

Turning back to *Deirdre*, as G. Wickstrom continues, after the spell of the game's artifice is broken by Deirdre, she is drawn into the surge of actuality (470) the moment when Conchubar comes on the stage and confronts the lovers. Deirdre is now willing to restore peace between the King and Naisi until all her hopes for a happy end are lost. The conflict becomes increasingly tense since there is a glimpse of hope for Conchubar and Naisi to be on good terms with each other:

CONCHUBAR. I being old and lenient –  
   I would not hurt a hair upon his head.  
 DEIRDRE. What do you say? Have you forgiven him?  
 [...]
 CONCHUBAR. Although her marriage-day had all but come,  
   You carried her away; but I'll show mercy.  
 [...]
 I will show mercy. (Yeats 2001, 35-36)

Unfortunately, Conchubar's mercy consists in Deirdre and Naisi's separation. Deirdre, deeply touched by the terms Conchubar has introduced, is begging the King to let them live together. This humiliation indicates how determined she was. Finally, as the tension arouses, she decides to sacrifice herself. As Wickstrom correctly suggests, "she tries various options that might lead to safety." (470). She shows bravery, willingness to fight, and above all considerable ingenuity in delicate situations.

A parallel to Deirdre's performance introduced above can be found within Synge's Deirdre as well. She has also proved to be very resolute in trying to re-establish peace between the two rivals, Naisi and Conchubar. She prompts Naisi to speak

friendly: “Now, Naisi, answer gently, and we’ll be friends to-night” (Synge 79) and flatters Conchubor: “[to Naisi] Then you’ll call Conchubor your friend and king, the man who reared me up upon Slieve Fuadh.” (Synge 79). Although both the women are lacking in time due to the sudden King’s treachery that breaks into their conversation and leaves it lost in the course of situation, they both are persuasive, active, and central. On the top of it, their aim was undoubtedly the same. The connections and similarities are numerous in this stage as it shall be seen in the next illustration.

During the final conversation with Conchubar, Yeats’ Deirdre makes a confession that it was her who made Naisi to take her away (probably from Slieve Fuadh, although it is not directly mentioned in the conversation): “For I had pressed my lips upon his lips [...] [a]nd how could he resist? I had my beauty.” (Yeats 2001, 39). Thus, to use certain women weapons or to trick a man in order to achieve something was not entirely alien to her. The striking similarity with Deirdre in *Deirdre of the Sorrows* is again evident. Synge’s Deirdre was using alike methods throughout different stages of the play in order to reach her objectives. Referring back to the first act of *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, Deirdre’s blandishment partially persuaded Naisi to take her away from the King.

Moreover, it is not the only case of Yeats’ Deirdre’s wile. The one that will be looked at is present on the stage, unlike the previous one that was just mentioned by Deirdre. It is the wile that will trick Conchubar and is initiated long before the final moment. Respectively, when she requires the knife from the Musician:

DERDRE. You have a knife there, thrust into your girdle.  
           I’d have you give it me.  
 MUSICIAN. No, but I dare not.  
 DEIRDRE. No, but you must.  
 MUSICIAN. If harm should come to you,  
           They’d know I gave it  
 DEIRDRE [*Snatching knife*]  
           There is no mark on this  
           To make it different from any other  
           Out of a common forge. (Yeats 2001, 32)

Deirdre is exerting pressure on the Musician who obeys. It is another example of her power to form the plot development and to organize the others to get what she wants. The Musician herself later also acknowledges that Deirdre has “a woman’s wile that can do much, even with men in pride of victory.” (Yeats 2001, 33).

After Naisi's death, we can witness the transformation through which Deirdre is going. It is her moment. She turns into a cold, goddess-like queen. R. Taylor talks about "supernatural intervention" when he analyses the shift "after Naisi's end from pleading, passionate woman to cold detachment and mastery of the situation." (Taylor 25). Instead of self-pitying and long dramatic monologues which were so typical of Synge's Deirdre, she is "controlling her passion and refusing to give in to expediency." (Taylor 25). Not that she would want to do so but she must play her last role to succeed in achieving the desired and honourable death. She cannot make mistakes. Her triumphal end demonstrates her pride, loyal love to Naisi, and determination with which she was opposing Conchubor:

DEIRDRE. Now strike the wire and sing to it a while,  
Knowing that all is happy, and that you know  
Within what bride-bed I shall lie this night,  
And by what man, and lie close up to him.  
For the bed's narrow, and there outsleep the cock-crow.  
[*She goes behind the curtain*] (Yeats 2001, 45)

The last speech of hers reveals that she voluntarily chose her death over a false life she would probably have with Conchubar. Deirdre created her own end and was responsible for shaping the story via her decisions and acts and that made the drama extremely personal.

Yeats' Deirdre after all, like Synge's Deirdre, went through a process of transformation as she became stronger and more active. The lover's relationship has proved to be very passionate and reached its climax at the end of their lives. The analysis of the legend of Lugaidh Redstripe, the symbolic chessboard, and its impact on Deirdre and Naisi indicated presence of another myth in the play. In the end Deirdre controlled the situation as she determined her death. As well as in Synge's *Deirdre*, there are some other factors that influenced the plot and are bound to the main heroine. Those symbolic aspects will be analysed in the following chapter.

#### 4.2. The Musicians as a selected symbolic in *Deirdre*

A crucial element in the play is the Chorus, i.e. the three characters of Musicians. They deserve attention as they were bounded to Deirdre and were to be the key characters that would float Deirdre's story after her death. If the purpose and symbol of these characters is to be revealed the Musicians have to be looked at from the beginning of the play.

As the play opens, the Chorus introduce the story of Deirdre. Thus, the audience gets the background information that is not presented in the play otherwise, since the story begins the moment Deirdre arrives to Emain Macha from exile. However, the readers cannot but notice that the Chorus' purpose is not just to set and frame the plot, albeit it is their key role. Omniscience and ever-presence of the Musicians becomes apparent. It seems they know everything what is to happen, revealing the development of action and the fate of the main characters. R. Taylor also notices that "The Chorus of Women provided an absolute moral standard by which to judge the action. [...] At one and the same time they are identifiable as limited human beings and also suggest the uncanny presence of supernatural knowledge." (Taylor 26). That is, the Musicians, described as women of the roads and wanderers, above all possess a role of a higher form of being because of their knowledge about Deirdre's fate. At the beginning, for instance, they are suspicious of Conchubar's good intentions:

FIRST MUSICIAN. An old man's love  
Who casts no second line, is hard to cure;  
His jealousy is like his love. (Yeats 2001, 5)

However, their doubts are not heard because they are underestimated by both Fergus and Naisi. Their talks are, according to Naisi, just gossip of the roads that cannot be weighted with king's word (Yeats 2001, 20).

At this point, the connection with Deirdre is to be introduced. Deidre is the only one who believes their words and thus creates a certain relationship with them. Deirdre speaks out her worries and turns to them for advice that would help her to recognize what Conchubar intends to do. The Musicians formerly help her to understand the chain of events:

FIRST MUSICIAN. When I lost one I loved distractedly,  
 I blamed my crafty rival and not him,  
 And fancied, till my passion had run out,  
 That could I carry him away with me,  
 And tell him all my love, I'd keep him yet.  
 DEIRDRE. Ah! Now I catch your meaning, that this king  
 Will murder Naisi, and keep me alive. (Yeats 2001, 16-17)

By giving Deirdre her experience, the Musician indicates Conchubar's plan which will prove to be true later. It is essential to point out that they never tell her directly but they outline the possible development. By displaying their own story they add higher value to their statements as it demonstrates their wisdom and experience.

Not only did Deirdre fully trust them and did not doubt their omniscience but she also was the character that grasped their purpose in the narrative and took advantage of it. They were to symbolize an absolute wisdom and a true reality and Deirdre realized that they might mediate her experience. As it has been discussed in the previous chapters, in both plays there is a strong appeal of myth, self-dramatization, and mythologizing, or more precisely, the heroine's attempt to produce a story of her tragedy. G. M. Wickstrom correctly highlights that it is the Musicians who will "seek to create habitable worlds of *tragic memory*, superior to this compromised world where love, beauty, and heroic virtue are certain to be compromised and finally to perish." (471). It seems that it is considerably important for Deirdre that her story will be "praised":

DEIRDRE. Women, if I die,  
 If Naisi die this night, how will you praise?  
 What words seek out? for that will stand to you;  
 For being but dead we shall have many friends.  
 All through your wanderings, the doors of kings  
 Shall be thrown wider open, the poor man's hearth  
 Heaped with new turf, because you are wearing this  
 [Gives MUSICIAN a bracelet]  
 To show that you have Deirdre's story right. (Yeats 2001, 34)

The bracelet then represents a symbol of Deirdre's physical existence that ensures that the story will not remain an abstract and narrow conception. Wickstrom describes the Chorus as "servant-Musicians" (471) at this stage. The author continues that they will spread Deirdre's experience for the future so she and Naisi can live forever (Wickstrom 471), being alive in the legend.

Another symbolic attribute of the Musicians is their lyrical appeal. Through their singing and ever-presence, they create a strong lyrical atmosphere. They are with the couple in their most intimate moments in the play. For example, when the lovers start to play the chess the Musicians sing a song that indirectly awakes passion in Deirdre who subsequently cannot go on playing:

MUSICIANS. [...]  
Heart on heart, or mouth on mouth  
All that mingling of our breath,  
When love longing is but drought  
For the things come after death? (Yeats 2001, 30)

It is during the last verse Deirdre kneels at Naisi's feet and speaks about her negative attitude towards the game of chess. This verifies that the Musicians are strongly connected to Deirdre and are influencing her. Although the characters were relatively outside the scope of the story, they were irrevocably bounded to the heroine.

This moment was already discussed earlier in the work; however, let us be reminded of it since it illustrates another connection between Deirdre and the Musicians. The moment occurs when the heroine demands a knife with which she could commit suicide. Deirdre again set the action herself and persuaded seemingly forceful and uninfluenced characters that were playing rather symbolic than active roles, which demonstrates Deirdre's power of control.

Although the characters of Musicians do not occur in *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, there are connections with other characters. In the analysis of symbols in *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, the character of Owen was introduced. Albeit a completely different figure, he, similarly to the Chorus, possessed an omniscient position. He had no real relationship with the characters and irrelevantly appeared in the plot out of nowhere yet made some interesting points. Owen, however, was not given enough space since he appeared just once for a moment in the play and did not manage to get rid of the label of a fool talking nonsense. Nevertheless, although being outside the narrative Owen influenced Deirdre and was controlled (through his mad love) by her, which are the attributes that might likely be seen in this chapter within the Musicians too.

Their wisdom, thereupon, might be compared to that of Lavarcham in *Deirdre of the Sorrows* that stood next to Deirdre till the end, similarly like the Musicians. Since the character of Lavarcham is missing in *Deirdre*, the Musicians substituted this role

when they, despite their impersonalized position, built up a parent-daughter relationship with Deirdre. They represented the same knowledge which was embodied by Lavarcham who, in *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, symbolized the old wisdom and advice so distant from the naïve blossoming youth of Deirdre and Naisi that was soon to die.



## 5. Conclusion

The main aim of this bachelor paper was to closely analyse Deirdre, a tragic heroine of Irish mythology in the two plays by William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge, *Deirdre* and *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. The plays deal with the ancient Irish tale of Deirdre and depict her tragic life and death. The theme of Deirdre was, in the period of the Irish Literary Revival at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one of the key themes for Irish dramatists.

Firstly, the plays were set into the historical context of the nationalistic movement in Ireland at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The ancient legends and its restoration along with the renewal of the ancient Irish tongue were the main targets of the representatives of the Irish Literary Revival. Thus, the so-called Abbey Theatre, opened in 1904, started to produce plays on Irish themes. The plays were further introduced and it was discovered that not only do the plays differ in its conception and degree of success on the stage but in their source of inspiration as well.

Secondly, the analysis of Deirdre in *Deirdre of the Sorrows* was performed. Deirdre's psychological development and transformation was depicted. At the beginning, Deirdre was portrayed as a naïve and fragile girl worrying about her own destiny. Her first confrontation with the King of Ulster, Conchubor, who wanted to make her his Queen, was not successful. She sought for help from the others and the readers could observe certain escapist tendencies. The analysis managed to prove, that Deirdre very quickly changed her approach as she discovered the possibility of being rescued by the young Naisi. Although the departure with Naisi could bring the tragedy upon the whole Ireland, as it was foretold, Deirdre was determined to selfishly achieve her own happiness. She accepted her position of a Queen who can make her own choices and started to act according to it. The analysis therefore revealed that at the end of the first act, she went through a process of metamorphosis from a naïve girl into a strong woman, aware of her social role.

Another aspect observed within Deirdre in *Deirdre of the Sorrows* was her ability to persuade other characters, especially Naisi. Her conversation with Naisi in the first act displayed that Deirdre manipulated with the young men in order to persuade him to marry her and take her away from Conchubor. Another example of such

persuasive behaviour was her decision to go to Emain Macha which, after a short conversation with Naisi, became his decision as well.

Their choice to go back to Emain Macha in spite of risking their lives after the peaceful seven-year exile was further questioned. There were several factors that influenced Deirdre's decision-making. The most important motivation of the lovers was labelled as a fear of getting old and losing the love in case they would continue on living in Alban. Moreover, with a deeper insight to the Alban life, it was found out that Deirdre and Naisi were suffering from homesickness, were probably tired of the monotonous life being surrounded with nature, and were demotivated by the lack of social interaction. The analysis further revealed that neither Deirdre nor Naisi were extremely pleased by the alleged balance with nature in Alban. Another aspect highlighted was the relationship of Naisi and Deirdre which was never tested out as they did not experience any tense situation in the exile.

The love between Deirdre and Naisi declined as the couple was approaching death. There was a clash between Deirdre and Naisi which occurred a few seconds before Naisi's murder, thus, in the escalated moment. Naisi refused to fulfil Deirdre's needs and implicitly accused her of the death of his brothers and their tragic end. The power of their love was therefore questioned at the very end of their lives. Deirdre was broken after Naisi's death. Despite her sorrows and dramatic grief she performed on the stage, she finally attempted to control her acting and to confront Conchubor. Her suicide at the end of the play proves that she fully controlled her life and determined her destiny.

Finally, the grotesque character of Owen was looked at with regards to the main heroine. It was found out that he, being a seemingly unimportant character, proved to be quite influential. He represented the character from the outside world of which the lovers were deprived. Owen also confirmed Deirdre's worries about the bitter reality of getting old and weary. Moreover, he embodied a symbol of Deirdre's devastating impact on the other characters since he was madly obsessed with her.

The last part of the analysis examines *Deirdre* by W.B. Yeats. Similarly to the previous chapter, the study of the second play focused on Deirdre's development and depicted her growing centeredness in the play. Deirdre possessed subordinate role at the beginning. She was dependent on her lover Naisi and frightened of what will follow.

However, she soon found out that it is her who needs to take control over the situation and to determine the course of events herself. She became very dynamic and active.

Since the secondary purpose of this chapter was to underline differences and similarities between the heroines in the plays, the relationship between Deirdre and Naisi was firstly compared. The relationship of the lovers in *Deirdre of the Sorrows* worsened as the lovers were approaching death. On the contrary, Deirdre and Naisi in *Deirdre* maintained very romantic relationship which even strengthened and awoke a strong passion as the tense moments were more frequent and their chances of survival lowered. Thus, Deirdre in *Deirdre* seemed to have a better position as she had a great support in her lover.

Another aspect examined was the presence of another legend of Lugaidh Redstripe, which was displayed through the chessboard. Deirdre, however, refused to imitate the model legend and the Queen who played chess and calmly waited for her death. This moment is further compared with Deirdre in *Deirdre of the Sorrows* who identified herself with mythological heroines Emer and Maeve. At this stage, both the heroines proved to pursue common aims. Yeats' Deirdre did not want to be passive like the Queen from the legend and Synge's Deirdre identified herself with Emer and Maeve to display her determination and power. In both cases, there is a presence of other mythological heroines.

Deirdre in *Deirdre* proved to be very persuasive as well. In order to reach her objectives, Yeats' Deirdre, like the heroine from *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, used a woman's wile. She was able to persuade one of the Musicians to give her a knife with which she would kill herself and therefore would be saved from Conchubar's intentions. After Naisi's death, Deirdre changed into a determined Queen. Instead of long sorrowful monologues that were observed within Synge's Deirdre, she coldly tricked Conchubar and committed suicide with the knife she had claimed from the Musician. Like Synge's heroine, she determined her end and therefore proved to be an independent woman.

Finally, the character of Musicians was looked at. As it was demonstrated, their main role was to mediate Deirdre's story. They also showed certain supernatural abilities as they omnisciently foreboded that Deirdre and Naisi will be betrayed by Conchubar. They were indirectly helping Deirdre to reveal her fate and created quite a

close relationship with her. It was Deirdre then who took advantage of them, understood their purpose, and wanted them to spread her story after her death. Moreover, the Musicians created a lyrical atmosphere in the play when they stimulated the passion of the lovers. The Musicians were further compared to Owen and Lavarcham in *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. Similarly like Owen, they possessed a role of omniscient characters. Like Lavarcham, they represented the old wisdom in the drama.

## Resumé

Tato práce se zabývá analýzou tragické hrdinky irské mytologie Deirdre v divadelních hrách *Deirdre bolestná* (*Deirdre of the Sorrows*) od Johna Millingtona Synge a *Deirdre* od Williama Butlera Yeatse. Oba autoři jsou označováni jako jedni z nejvýznamnějších dramatiků konce devatenáctého a začátku dvacátého století v Irsku.

Období v Anglii utlačovaném Irsku se na přelomu století vyznačovalo rostoucím nacionalismem. Irská inteligence tehdy usilovala o vznik irské lidové literatury, o obrodu jazyka Gaelského a obnovení slávy staroirských legend a mýtů. Výše zmíněné tendence jsou označovány jako počátky kulturně-literárního směru v Irsku, zvaném Irské národní obrození, Irská literární renesance, nebo, jak toto období nazval sám jeho hlavní představitel William Butler Yeats, Keltský soumrak. V době Irského národního obrození vznikala četná nacionalisticko-literární hnutí, která podporovala obnovu Irské kultury a literatury. Stěžejní byla například Gaelská liga, založená v roce 1893, jejímž cílem byla především obnova a zachování Irského jazyka.

Zásadní, zejména pak pro irské drama, bylo založení Společnosti irského národního divadla a následné otevření divadla Abbey Theatre v Dublinu v roce 1904. Hlavním cílem tohoto divadla byla produkce her irských autorů na výhradně irská témata. Právě irský folklór a keltské legendy se staly základním kamenem pro divadlo Abbey Theatre.

Hry *Deirdre bolestná* (1910) a *Deirdre* (1906) jsou klasickým příkladem lidového dramatu čerpající inspiraci z irské mytologie. Ačkoliv se děj dramatu od původní legendy mírně liší, hlavní koncept zůstává stejný. Příběh, jehož první písemné zpracování bylo dochováno v rukopisu z dvanáctého století, známý jako *Vyhnanství synů Usnových* (*The Exile of the Sons of Usna*) nebo také jako pověst o Deirdře, je jednou z nejstarších pověstí v západní Evropě vůbec. Tragický příběh vypráví o krásné Deirdře, která si místo sňatku s králem Conchuborem vybere život ve vyhnanství po boku mladého pohledného prince Naisiho. Po letech vyhnanství jsou však Iští přivedeni zpět do rodné země, kde je Naisi zabit a Deirdre nucena žít po boku nenáviděného krále. Po roce útrap a žalu nakonec umírá. Pověst o Deirdře se v Irsku stala oblíbeným příběhem a prubířským kamenem dramatiků Irského národního obrození. Tragická hrdinka Deirdre byla vnímána jako symbol národní historie a její krutý osud

reprezentoval, v očích mnoha Irů, tragický osud samotného Irska, jmenovitě nenaplněné nacionalistické ideály a úsilí o politickou samostatnost.

První hrou, která je v této práci analyzována, je *Deirdre bolestná* od J.M. Synge. Tato tříaktová hra zachycuje Deirdřin život od raného mládí, které strávila v izolaci v horách, kde byla vychovávána a připravována na život budoucí královny a manželky krále Conchubora. Drama pokračuje Deirdřiným rozhodnutím uprchnout s Naisim a jeho bratry do exilu a končí zobrazením tragického osudu milenců po návratu do vlasti, Naisiho násilnou smrt a Deirdřinu sebevraždu. Analýza se soustřeďuje na psychologický a morální vývoj hlavní hrdinky a její chování. Sleduje Deirdřiny vztahy s ostatními postavami, zvláště s jejím milencem Naisim, rozebírá její klíčová rozhodnutí a snaží se vystopovat důvody jejího počínání.

Deirdre je na začátku hry představena jako naivní a nedospělá dívka mající své sny a ideály. Žije takřka ve zcela sociálně izolovaném prostředí, obklopena přírodou. Po příchodu krále Conchubora, který se rozhodl odvést ji do svého království, se hrdinka náhle ocitá v neřešitelné situaci. S králem odejít nechce, ale odporovat jeho autoritě účinně nedokáže. Deirdre brzy zjistí, že sama zmůže jen velmi málo, a proto hledá možná východiska. Jedním z nich je mladý princ Naisi. Jakmile si hrdinka uvědomí tuto možnost a v podstatě si sama určí svého zachránce, začne aktivně jednat. Je odhodlaná vyhledat Naisiho a přesvědčit ho k romantickému útěku ze země, a to i přesto, že její rozhodnutí bude, jak praví proroctví, znamenat smrt nejen Synů Usnových. Tato proměna je podtržena v momentě, kdy si oblékne honosné šaty a začne se dramaticky přirovnávat k mytologickým královnám Emer a Maeve. Přijímá tím nejen svoji zodpovědnost za osudy druhých, ale i status královny, která má právo na své vlastní štěstí. Přeměna z křehké dívky v osudovou a odhodlanou ženu je zakončena přesvědčivým rozhovorem s Naisim, kterého pomocí ženských zbraní a lichotek přesvědčí, aby ji pojal za manželku a utekl s ní. Mladý muž, který se do Deirdre takřka okamžitě zamiluje, brzy odsouhlasí a splní vše, co hrdinka žádá.

Druhý akt se odehrává v Albanu, exilu, kde Deirdre, Naisi a jeho bratři žili zdánlivě šťastných sedm let. Hlavní podstatou tohoto jednání je opakované pokládání otázky zdali zůstat nebo odejít do Emain Macha, tedy zpět do vlasti, na přátelské pozvání krále Conchubora. Hlavní roli opět sehraje Deirdre, která rozhodne, jakým směrem se děj bude dále ubírat a nakonec opět přesvědčí Naisiho. Deirdřin hlavní

argument pro odchod z Albanu je strach a neschopnost smířit se se skutečností, že ona i její milý zestárnou, tedy ztratí jak svoji krásu, tak lásku jeden k druhému. Proto se alternativa smrti v mladém věku Deirdre zdá být tou utěšenější variantou. Nicméně, v této fázi je Deirdre navíc ovlivněna vnějšími faktory, a to především povahou života v exilu. Alban byl v této práci rozebírán v samostatné kapitole a jeho analýza vytyčila seznam činitelů, které měly vliv na Deirdřino rozhodnutí odejít i přes zjevnou hrozbu zrady ze strany krále. Primárně to byl, podobně jako v místě, kde Deirdre vyrůstala, nedostatek sociální interakce. Odloučení v přírodě a stereotypní aktivity s takovou existencí spojené přisoudily životu v exilu jistou monotónnost, která zároveň přispěla k Deirdřině frustraci. Vzájemná láska Deirdre a Naisiho nebyla v Albanu rozvíjena, a tudíž ani neposílena žádnými krizovými situacemi. Dá se říci, že stagnovala. Posledním aspektem zkoumaným v druhém jednání *Deirdry bolestné* byl groteskní a poměrně nedoceněný charakter Owena, napůl poblázněného špeha krále Conchubora, který svými komentáři nepřímou působil na hlavní hrdinku, jež neustále opakoval její vlastní obavy, tedy skutečnost, že zestárne.

Ve třetím, posledním aktu, se proroctví smrti milenců naplní. Hlavním předmětem analýzy v tomto jednání byl degradující vztah Naisiho a Deirdry. Deirdre, která krátce po příchodu do Emainu zjistí, že na ně čeká čerstvě vykopaný hrob, začne úpěnlivě prosit Naisiho, aby ji okamžitě odvedl do bezpečí. Naisi je však nyní zodpovědný za své bratry, kteří se ocitli v přímém ohrožení Conchuborových vojáků. Naisi chce přirozeně spěchat na pomoc bratrům, avšak sobecká Deirdre má svoje vlastní potřeby. Právě Deirdřino nepochopení Naisiho morálních povinností je hlavním důvodem k rozhořčenému konci vztahu dvou milenců. I přes Naisiho násilnou smrt je však hrdinka schopna posbírat poslední síly a odhodlaně čelit králi, který si na ni ustavičně klade nároky. Deirdřině sebevraždě, symbolizující její vítězství nad králem a schopnost vymezit si svůj osud, předchází dojemná scéna hrdinčina naříkání a sebelítosti nad zničeným životem a tragickou smrtí milovaného.

*Deirdre* od Williama Butlera Yeatse je druhou hrou, kterou se tato práce zabývala. Podobně, jako tomu bylo u *Deirdre bolestné*, je analýza úzce zaměřena na hlavní hrdinku. Navíc však vybrané aspekty porovnává se Syngeovou hrou a analyzuje podobné a rozdílné prvky, a to právě v souvislosti s hlavní postavou obou dramát. Jednoaktová hra psána ve verši se od konceptu Syngeovy Deirdre značně liší. Jednání je

uvedeno příchodem milenců do Emain, tedy začíná posledním aktem *Deirdre bolestné*. Detailně zachycuje Deirdřiny poslední momenty.

Podobně jako v *Deirdre bolestné* hrdinka prochází procesem proměny. Na začátku aktu není příliš aktivní, spíše hledá pomoc u Naisiho. Poté se snaží situaci řešit, ale zmůže se jen na několik nepříčetných a nepromyšlených kroků. Například se chce zohyzdit – ostříhat si vlasy, začernit obličej a zjizvit si tvář šípkovými trny, aby v ní snad král ztratil zálibení. Během tohoto snažení však pozvolna přebírá iniciativu a organizaci nad celou situací a brzy je zřejmé, že ji přijímá jako výzvu. Deirdre v Yeatsově hře je v této chvíli zvýhodněna nad Syngeovou Deirdre. Její odhodlanost je totiž motivována vášnivým a hlavně opětovaným citem, který chová k Naisimu. S rostoucím napětím a se zvyšující se pravděpodobností smrti obou hrdinů se totiž i jejich láska upevňuje. V jednom momentu lze hovořit nejen o romantické lásce, ale i o silné sexuální přitažlivosti, tedy o lásce fyzické. Na druhé straně Syngeova Deirdre je v podobné situaci skutečnou tragickou hrdinkou, jelikož její láska s Naisim je oslabena. Místo vášnivých momentů ji Naisi ve svých posledních řečech nepřímo obviní ze svého nešťastného osudu a proklíná její krásu.

Důležitý aspekt této hry je také přítomnost jiné legendy, která je do hry *Deirdre* přenesena pomocí symbolické šachovnice uprostřed místnosti. Tato šachovnice se totiž váže k příběhu o Lugaidh Redstripe a jeho královně, kteří si krátili čekání na smrt hrou v šachy. Tato práce se zabývá vztahem mezi legendou a Deirdre, respektive jejím vztahem ke královně, která chladně hrála šachy, čekajíc na smrt. Deirdre se brzo začne od tohoto přístupu distancovat. Královna, která symbolizuje chlad, smrt a pasivitu je tedy naprostý opak Deirdre, která je průbojná a plná života.

Přítomnost jiných mytologických postav se objevuje i v *Deirdre bolestné*. Hrdinka se zde přirovnává ke královnám Emer a Maeve, aby zdůraznila svoji sílu a odhodlanost. I přesto, že Yeatsova Deirdre se s mytologickou královnou neztotožňuje, obě hrdinky použily legendární postavy jako prostředek k zobrazení své vlastní energičnosti a nebojácnosti.

Dalším důležitým prvkem v *Deirdre*, který byl také porovnáván s *Deirdre bolestnou*, je hrdinčina schopnost ovlivňovat ostatní postavy pomocí ženské lsti. V tomto případě se jedná především o donucení jedné z Muzikantek, aby jí vydala svůj nůž, kterým by se Deirdre později mohla zabít. Tím přelstila Conchubara a stejně jako



Syngeova Deirdre si sama statečně vybrala svůj konec. Analýzou tedy bylo zjištěno, že ženská lest a schopnost přesvědčit okolí ve svůj prospěch se v různých podobách objevuje v obou hrách a chování hlavních hrdinek je tímto charakteristické.

Zmíněné postavy Muzikantek jsou pak detailně rozebírány v samostatné kapitole. Tyto ženy hrají v *Deirdre* roli vševědoucích vypravěček, které uvedou a zakončí děj. Tvoří pomyslnou konstrukci celého děje a jeho ohraničení. Jsou však analyzovány zejména z důvodu, že si s hlavní hrdinkou v průběhu hry vybudují blízký vztah podobný tomu, jaký měla Syngeova Deirdre se svoji chůvou Lavarcham, tedy vztah matky a dcery. Muzikantky jí radí a nepřímo naznačují, že král milence zradí a zabije Naisiho a zároveň se s Deirdre podílí o své vlastní zkušenosti. Symbolizují tak moudrost, kterou ve hře Syngeově symbolizovala právě Lavarcham. Jejich vševědoucnost a pozice vně dějového rámce pak nabízí srovnání s postavou Owena v *Deirdre bolestné*. Mimo jiné tyto ženy také slouží jako nástroj k šíření Deirdřina příběhu, což je to, co od nich Deirdre nejvíce očekává. Je zřejmé, že pro ni bylo velmi důležité, aby se o jejím osudu po smrti vyprávělo. Tato potřeba mytologizace sebe sama je opět pozorovatelná i v *Deirdre bolestné*, a to nejvíce v jejích posledních řečech.

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