DEIRDRE AND THE DESTRUCTION OF EMAIN MACHA: JUNGIAN ARCHETYPES AND IRISH DRAMA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a Jungian investigation of the dramatic treatment of the Deirdre legend at the birth of the Irish Renaissance. At the turn of the century, George Russell (A.E.), William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge appreciated the potential cultural value of Irish archetypes inherent in the story of Deirdre and the destruction of Emain Macha. Though each of these dramatists interpreted the archetypal image of Deirdre in different ways, their three plays emerge as socio-cultural commentaries on contemporary Irish society. An archetypal investigation of these Deirdre versions elucidates each dramatists concern with the future of Irish culture, and their belief in the power of a pagan symbol to act as a beacon to guide the country in its quest for cultural unity.

This paper begins with a detailed explanation of the oldest surviving Deirdre text entitled "Longes Mac N-Uislenn" from The Book of Leinster. Also discussed is "Oidheadh Chloinne Uisnigh" from the Glenmasan manuscript, for this text is pivotal in the legend's development. The next section is an exposition of Jung's theory of archetypes and how they apply to the Deirdre legend in general.

Chapters three, four and five are commentaries on how Russell, Yeats and Synge used the archetypes inherent in the Deirdre legend to further their own personal agendas. I will argue that these dramatists did more than simply reintroduce Deirdre to Dublin audiences; rather they used her archetypal image to write cautionary tales. Their plays

demonstrate how contemporary sectarian and political agitation could only lead to a modern, if metaphoric, "destruction of Emain Macha."

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My thesis is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Margaret Daly, who passed away shortly before its completion. She was, and continues to be, my muse.

PREFACE

Deirdre first appeared on the stage early in this century, but her written history goes back to The Book of Leinster, an eleventh century Irish text. Deirdre made her way into a myriad of prose and poetic forms until she finally found dramatic voice in 1902 with Deirdre: A Legend in Three Acts, written by George Russell, better known as A.E. The story of Deirdre and the sons of Usnach is archetypal in its composition - it is the story of a beautiful woman, a handsome young lover, and a jealous king.

The Deirdre story can be abbreviated as follows. At Deirdre's birth, the druid Cathbad prophesied that she would cause the exile of the sons of Usnach and the destruction of Emain Macha, seat of the kingship of Ireland. King Conchubar decides, however, that Deirdre will be his future wife. She is raised in seclusion with Levarcham, her nurse, as her only companion. One day, Deirdre spies Naoise, one of the sons of Usnach. They fall in love and elope to Alba, together with Naoise's brothers, Ainnle and Ardan. Fergus, an emissary of the king and trusted friend of Naoise, informs the lovers that the king has forgiven them. When they return to Emain Macha, Conchubar kills Naoise and his brothers. Deirdre's grief drives her to suicide and, in his anger, Fergus destroys Emain Macha. The prophecy is fulfilled.

This paper will be an archetypal investigation of the Deirdre legend in Irish drama using her dramatic adaptations by George Russell (A.E.), William Butler Yeats, and John Millington Synge. These three men have been chosen because of their importance to Irish

literature at the birth of the Irish Literary Renaissance. Among their many other contributions, it was these men who first introduced theatre-goers to Deirdre.

At the turn of the century, cultural revival swept across Ireland. Groups such as the Gaelic League and the National Literary Society were formed to promote the growing interest in all things Irish. At this time, Lady Gregory, W.B. Yeats and Edward Martyn founded the Irish Literary Theatre in order to produce plays that would demonstrate that Ireland was the home of all "ancient idealism" (Gregory 9), separate from the stereotypes of Ireland propounded by the English. This ancient idealism could be found in the heroes of Ireland's pre-Christian stories and in the myriad archetypes they represented: Cuchullain is the brave hero, for example; or Conchubar, the evil king.

According to C.G. Jung, an archetype is a primordial image which resides in the collective unconscious. In Jungian theory, archetypes are common among all people and places. As such, they are by their very nature, universal (Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious 3-4, hereafter ACU). They can, however, only be expressed through images and symbols, and it is here archetypes take on cultural significance. The question Jungian literary criticism attempts to answer is this: What purpose does the symbolic work of art fulfil in the psychic life of a community (Snider 2)? In the Irish agenda, the Deirdre legend fulfilled two goals: on a cultural level, it supplied an icon to unite the nation. This was particularly attractive for the Anglo-Irish writers who appreciated the value of a non-sectarian enabling myth. The second function of Deirdre was that she inadvertently provided the nation with a literary image of the political reality of Ireland, of Erin trying to free herself from John Bull.

An archetypal investigation of Deirdre's adaptation on stage in the early twentieth century contains at least three layers of meaning. Firstly, it confirms the presence of archetypal imagery. Secondly, it demonstrates the political and cultural usefulness of archetypes as they are adapted to the circumstances of Ireland in the early phase of the independence struggle. Lastly, it captures the personal idiosyncrasies and the aesthetic preoccupations of the three dramatists.

Russell's hope was that an emulation of pre-Christian heroes could issue in the age of Ireland's new "Avatar." Yeats employed Deirdre as a non-sectarian cultural icon, as an aid in his dream of an Irish "Unity of Culture," spear-headed by Anglo-Irish writers like himself. Lastly, Synge envisioned Deirdre as a "noble savage," representative of contemporary Irish peasants fighting to maintain their cultural heritage in the face of encroaching urbanism. Each of these dramatists took the Irish archetypes inherent in the original Deirdre texts, and reinvented them to speak to the Irish people about their cultural future.

CHAPTER ONE

The Original Deirdre

The basic plot of the Deirdre story is derived from two sources. The first is "Longes Mac N-Uislenn" from the twelfth-century Book of Leinster. Though evidence shows that the story had existed orally for hundreds of years previous, this book contains the oldest surviving record. "Longes Mac N-Uislenn" is a short text, but it outlines the principle characters and plot of the Deirdre legend. The second source for the story comes from an episode entitled "Oidheadh Chloinne Uisnigh" contained in the fifteenth-century Glenmasan manuscript. "Oidheadh Chloinne Uisnigh" offers little in the way of plot development; however, the characters of Deirdre and Fergus are expanded and it includes a greater degree of emotional depth. In this chapter, we will investigate these two texts as these stories taken together provide the archetypes for the subsequent development of Deirdre.

For nearly a thousand years, the Deirdre legend has been circulating and has been reprised and redacted in many forms. The 1800s saw her story translated many times, and these translations from the original texts were used by George Russell and W.B. Yeats: Russell used Standish O'Grady's translation; Yeats used Lady Gregory's version. Synge, however, went back to the original text itself as he was fluent in Gaelic.[1] As we shall see, the sources each author used influenced the play he wrote and help to account for the differences in the conception of Deirdre in each work. Russell's Deirdre, for example, is

[1] In 1898, the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language published The Fate of the Children of Uisneach, a version of "Oidheadh Chloinne Uisnigh," translated by Synge (Skelton 132).

very much a Victorian heroine, while Synge's Deirdre retains many of her original barbarous qualities. Through an investigation of the original archetypes we can see how each author adapted them for their own personal agenda.

The earliest form of the legend was a combination of prose, poetry and rhetoric. This version is rough, with stark simplicity of action and detail (Fackler 3). It is untitled, but a colophon reads "That [is] the exile of the Sons of Usnech and the exile of Fergus and the violent death of the Sons of Uisnech and of Derdriu" (Hull 3).[2] Deirdre seems an afterthought, which is curious. Though early titles and colophons emphasize the tragedy of the death of the sons of Usnach, Naoise and his brothers, Ainnle and Ardan, receive scant attention in the texts themselves. They are only mourned by Deirdre in her final lament. Deirdre grew in stature, however, and between 1834 and 1937, no less than thirty-nine renditions of her story were written. In order to understand the myriad versions, it is necessary to go back to the original and study its development.

The earliest version exists in three manuscripts. The first, known as Lebor Laignech, The Book of Leinster, was begun in 1160 and probably completed during the next decade, according to Vernam Hull who critically reconstructed the text based on the three manuscripts (3). The second version is Leabhar Buidhne Leacain, The Yellow Book of Lecan. Compiled at the end of the fourteenth century, it is entitled "Loinges Mac N-

[2] The spelling of Deirdre, Naoise, Conchubar and Usnach have changed many times throughout the millennium. This is due partly to the author's preference and partly to the time in which the version was written. The change of language from Old to Middle Irish, grammatical intent (in Old Irish, for example, nominative and genitive forms of the noun are spelled differently), and the anglicizing of Irish words, all affect the spelling. For continuity, the modern spelling of these names will be used, except in the case of specific titles or quotations.

Uisleand," or "The Exile of the Sons of Uisleand." The third version, written around 1517, again has no title, but the colophon reads, "That [is] the exile of the Sons of Uisliu and the cause of the exile of Fergus and the violent death of Derdriu."

Though the earliest version dates from the twelfth century, most critics agree this text is not the original, that there was an archetype or prototext upon which the existing manuscript is based. There is evidence which supports this conclusion. Firstly, there are various allusions to the sons of Usnach and Deirdre in Irish texts which predate The Book of Leinster. There are, for example, two Middle Irish texts which are lists of traditional tales, arranged thematically, which purport to register the complete repertoire of the "ollam filidechta," or story-teller (Mac Cana Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland 30). Established usage has designated them as A and B. The earliest of these manuscripts lists dates from the twelfth century. And the story of the sons of Usnach is listed among the "aitheda" or elopement tales. Thus, by the twelfth century, the story of Deirdre and Naoise was important enough to make it in to the saga lists (33).

Another allusion to Deirdre and Naoise appears in a poem attributed to Mongan mac Fiachna who died in A.D. 625. In this poem, there is a passage referring to the sons of Usnach. However, because of the late forms of the surviving copy of this poem, Vernam Hull questions its viability in helping date the prototext (32, n. 23). Yet one certain allusion prior to the tenth century does exist. Flannacan mac Cellaich Ua Carmen, King of Bergia, mentions in verse the slaying of the "Ui Uislend," (Children of Usnach) on a Monday. Mac Cellaich died in A.D. 896. The presence of this allusion provides strong evidence that the story of their fate was current in his time (32).

Linguistic evidence also supports the theory that there is a lost prototext upon which the Deirdre story is based. The earliest version of the story in The Book of Leinster contains certain linguistic inaccuracies. Old Irish gives way to Middle Irish about the middle of the tenth century, yet the text contains Old and Middle Irish forms side by side. One can assume, then, that a Middle Irish scribe was redacting an Old Irish text (Hull 10-11). The manuscript also contains an interpolated poem. Cathbad's verse prophecy early in the tale contradicts what actually occurs later in the story. The discrepancy lies in the names of characters that will be slain for the murder of Usnach. The prophecy is the interpolation.[3] Vernam Hull finds that, based on linguistic evidence, the compositional date of the text cannot be placed after A.D. 1000 (29-31).

In summary, then, sometime before A.D. 1000, the Deirdre archetype was committed to writing. Shortly after A.D. 1000, it was modernized in part by a redactor who also introduced a new poem, and from his partial modernization, the three extant copies are ultimately descended (Hull 32).

LONGES MAC N-UISLENN

We turn to the actual text itself. As has been stated, "Longes Mac N-Uislenn," (hereafter LMnU) is composed of poetry and prose and is a perfect example of what Proinsais Mac Cana calls an Irish "peculiar concreteness of expression" ("Early Irish

[3] Maire Herbert sees the lack of correspondence between the prophecy and later events as the intrusion of a redactor who was unconcerned about minor details ("Universe" 60). This is a rather lame explanation for the discrepancy.

Ideology" 61). What would later become a source for many artists takes up a mere nine pages in translation. The Irish language began to be written down around the middle of the sixth century (59). Prior to this, the stories and mythology of the Irish race were entrusted to the story-tellers. As Jeffrey Gantz, who also has translated tales from early Irish literature, has pointed out, the story-tellers did not memorise entire tales. They learned the outlines of the tales and filled in the details later (19). Thus, their method of learning allowed for creative interpretation. The story-teller could emphasize or omit as occasion demanded. Perhaps LMnU, then, is simply the framework, a mnemonic device, and the particulars were added during the telling. This supports the argument because there is so little naturalistic detail and character development. As a basic framework, the story-teller added the particulars during the telling.

Still, as sparse as the story is, it nevertheless reveals several interesting facts about pre-Christian Ireland. And if it is true, as Georges Dumezil states, that the function of myth in preliterate society was "to express dramatically the ideology under which a society lives" (3), then LMnU presents an interesting picture of pagan Ireland. We see, for example, the importance of the male code of honour, the lack of power women exercised, and the not unlimited authority of the king. Because there is so little detail, the ideology under which Emain Macha lived is best examined through the actions of the main characters in the drama, Conchubar and the heroine herself.[4]

[4] It seems odd that the sons of Usnach are the focus in the titles of the early manuscripts, since Conchubar and Deirdre are really the main characters. Another version from the Glenmasan manuscript (to be discussed later) focuses on Fergus. But it is not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the titles catch up with the plot.

Conchubar

There are three possible ways to approach Conchubar in LMnU: (1) that he is representative of sacral kingship; (2) that he a manifestation of male-dominated society; or (3) that he is the archetypal Terrible Father figure. One thing can be taken as absolute: in LMnU, he is the villain. The story begins with a prophecy by Cathbad that Deirdre will be the cause of the exile and death of warriors of Ulster. Rather than have her slain as is suggested by the warriors, Conchubar decides to have her raised in seclusion. The Ulstermen "did not dare to set him right with respect to it" (Hull 62), for he is the king. Deirdre, however, elopes with Naoise and his brothers. They are tricked into returning to Ireland, and in the ensuing battle between Conchubar's warriors and Fergus's men, three hundred Ulstermen are killed, and three thousand men go into exile. The attempt to thwart the prophecy merely facilitates its realization.

It is difficult to type cast Conchubar. He is not an easy character, and can be considered in a number of different ways. Firstly, Proinsais Mac Cana sees him as an example of sacral kingship, where the king is not a mere figurehead, but the practical force of tribal integrity. If the king is just, the land flourishes and there is peace and harmony; if he is unjust, the land is barren and rife with discord ("Women in Irish Mythology" 7-8). There is difficulty reading Conchubar as a manifestation of the sacral king. For the king to be legitimate, there must exist the sacred marriage with the goddess who represents both abstract sovereignty and the physical substance of the kingdom. Mac Cana sees Deirdre as

an adaptation in human terms of the archetypal goddess figure who, by her own right, selects her partner for his royal office (9-10). It is she who legitimises the king's place. But Conchubar's control of the throne predates Deirdre's birth. He is king in his own right, and as such, possession of Deirdre is irrelevant. And ironically, it is by taking Deirdre that he precipitates the downfall of Ulster. While he does not actually lose his crown, by the end of the story, his kingdom is in tatters.

If the choice of spouse is the prerogative of the goddess, then perhaps, as Maire Herbert has pointed out, Deirdre's choice of Naoise could be an act of the goddess who selects her own mate. The conflict between Conchubar and Naoise, then, is a struggle for sovereignty (16-17). Senchan Sil Ir, an eighth century tract, contains a genealogical table which puts the sons of Usnach on par with Conchubar. In it, Conchubar's father is Cathbad; Naoise's father is Uisliu. Both Cathbad and Uisliu are sons of Congal Claringnech (who is listed as king of Ulster in the regnal list), and Conchubar receives his right to rule through him (Tymoczko 154-155).

For various reasons, an interpretation based on a king/goddess reading seems to ignore vital pieces of the story. Conchubar is not dependent on Deirdre for possession of the crown. Deirdre's choice of Naoise in no way affects the transfer of royal power. Furthermore, this reading requires the female embodiment of the realm to be coeval with the realm's existence (Mac Cana "Women" 7), but Conchubar rules before Deirdre's birth, during Deirdre's life, and after Deirdre's death. Clearly, in the early stories, Deirdre is a marginal figure who does not impact greatly on the power or position of Conchubar. Deirdre and Conchubar, then, are not symbols of the king/goddess relationship.

The second possible explanation of Conchubar's personality is that he is representative of society itself. The structure of LMnU is based on two sets of opposites. The first is the polarity of youth and age: Naoise, the young lover, is pitted against the ageing King Conchubar. The second opposition is a contrast between male and female, or alternately between culture and nature. As Marie-Louise Sjoestedt has pointed out, in Celtic mythology there are "social forces of male character opposed by natural forces of female character" (112-113). Kings and warriors control society. The male code of honour determines societal actions. Nature is the female realm. Natural features such as rivers and springs, and forces of fertility, are incarnated as female deities (Herbert 17). But these male and female forces are not hostile to each other; rather, they are complementary. Nature is amenable to socialization; the goddess mates with the king.

In LmnU, however, Conchubar does not recognize this system of complementarity; rather, he seeks to subvert the natural order. Deirdre's first action is to cry out from the womb, thereby disrupting the feast which the warriors of Ulster are attending. Even before her birth, Deirdre, as representative of the female realm brings disorder to society, the male realm. Conchubar disregards the prophecies uttered by Cathbad, and ignores the pleas of his warriors to have Deirdre killed. He unilaterally chooses to raise her in seclusion for himself. Conchubar's decision to bring Deirdre under social domination essentially subverts nature to the order of society (Herbert 16-18).

In attempting to subvert nature to society, Conchubar commits his greatest sin, but not his only sin. He first acts selfishly by refusing to kill the unborn child, then he acts vindictively by luring the lovers back to Emain Macha and having the brothers slain. Maire

Herbert sees his sin as one of pride, an assertion of self over the good of the kingdom (16). It had been prophesied, after all, that she would "destroy much" (Hull 61), that she would cause the death and exile of many. But in his overweening pride, Conchubar believed he could thwart the prophecy.

A victim of hubris he might be, but there is a third level to Conchubar's personality. Bettina Knapp believes Conchubar acts not as a king but like a child. In Jungian terms, his anima is undeveloped. He believes he can find happiness with Deirdre and discounts the prophecy for his own selfish goals. The humiliation he faces following her elopement festers, until in the end he becomes the Terrible Father figure, the devouring male (24). Unfortunately, he devours not only Deirdre but all of Emain Macha.

Whether Conchubar suffers from pride in trying to subvert nature to his will, or whether he is a humiliated, vengeful king, the result is the same: he ensured the destruction of the kingdom by claiming Deirdre as his own. We now turn to the woman whose existence brought down a nation.

Deirdre

Deirdre is by far the most interesting character in the story. No two critics agree about the precise nature of Deirdre's role. She is, at one and the same time, the hero and the villain. She precipitates her own destruction, yet is vulnerable to the male code of honour. Like Eve she transgresses against male authority and tempts man (Herbert 61), but her punishment is death, not exile. She is an adaptation of the archetypal goddess figure (Mac

Cana "Women" 9), but is a mortal. Some contend it is impossible to determine whether she is goddess or mortal, but that there is evidence of the supernatural about her - her life is preordained by a druid, and the sacred number three surrounds her (Green 119).

Deirdre encompasses all of these things, goddess and mortal, hero and villain, even in the earliest, sparse version of LMnU. As Proinsais Mac Cana points out, women characters on the whole play a more active and independent role in Irish literature than in most literature of the medieval period ("Women" 10). One need only compare the Deirdre story with others listed as "aitheda" or elopement tales, for example the stories of Dairmait and Grania and of Tristan and Iseult. In these ancient tales, it is the woman who initiates action and compels the man to do her will (Rees 291). Fearing that she will be married to the ageing Finn, Grania drugs all the men in her father's court except Dairmait, and implores him to elope. Similarly, Iseult is betrothed to an older King Mark, but uses a love potion to ensure that Tristan falls in love with her.

The common pattern of these stories involves a woman in a patriarchal society, a woman who attempts to take control of her own life by rejecting her arranged betrothal and choosing her own mate. Interestingly enough, the chosen partner does not fall madly in love with the heroine. The woman must rely on the geis[5] and love-potions to secure the elopement. For Naoise and Dairmait, it is a matter of honour after they have been placed under the geis. Tristan has no choice as he falls victim to a love-potion. Despite their similarities, Deirdre stands alone in terms of determining her own fate. Iseult and Grania

[5] "Geis" is an obligation to do, or not do something, which is commanded by another person. Breaking the geis would bring disastrous consequences and loss of honour (Reinhard 3).

simply pass away. Deirdre kills herself in a last ditch effort to thwart the king and control her own life.

As has been stated, there is some controversy concerning Deirdre's role. While it is true that she is the medium by which the sons of Usnach are destroyed, she is also much more. The Deirdre legend may be a tale about the destruction of male society, but the story is surrounded by the birth and death of a woman. And as Maria Tymoczko points out, the number of Celtic stories which deal with the destruction of a society based on a man's involvement with a woman suggests that Deirdre belongs to an established typology (159). Indeed, the very presence of a woman in early Irish literature often ensures death or destruction (Ni Bhrolchain 16). Tristan dies in France; Dairmait is killed by a pig; Naoise and his brothers die and Emain Macha burns to the ground.

But there is more to say about Deirdre than that she is the harbinger of doom. Bettina Knapp sees Deirdre as an incarnation of a collective soul who seeks independence of spirit, body and actions (19). Raised apart from society, she in turn rejects the social and political organizations which have created and sent her into virtual exile. Elin Ap Hywel believes this society, defined and mediated by men, provides the touchstone for the consequent development of Deirdre (32). Sent away to be raised exclusively for his later pleasure, Deirdre is denied normal social interaction by Conchubar.

Buttimer believes that Deirdre's isolation is one of the saga's enduring dimensions (33), as it shapes her singular personality. She is permitted to see only her foster parents and Levarcham, her nurse. Isolated, she longs for company. Raised without the usual social norms, she is stimulated by the picture of a calf being skinned in the snow. And then Naoise

appears. She approaches and responds to him using undignified language, indicative of a maiden raised on a farm. She cannot, in fact, respond to him in any other way, as the farm forms the parameters of her world. Raised among the animals, Deirdre uses animal imagery as a basis for her method of communication

Animal Imagery

In "Animal Imagery in Loinges Mac nUislenn," Maria Tymoczko recognizes the nature imagery used in similes and metaphors as being taken from a stock of repertory elements (146). First and foremost is the "three colour motif." Deirdre invokes this motif to describe the type of man she wants, "hair like the raven, and a cheek like blood, and a body like snow" (Hull 63). The three colours evoke in Deirdre a desire for a man. But the image also operates on the level of language, for her desire is awakened by a "loeg," translated as "calf." In Old Irish, however, the word "loeg" was also an affectionate term meaning "darling" or "beloved." She longs for a beloved. But Tymoczko takes the use of the word "loeg" one step further. The object which sparks her desire is not simply a calf, but a dead calf, that is, possibly, a dead "beloved." She suggests, then, that Deirdre is worthy of Cathbad's tragic prophecy, that she is attracted toward the chaos and destruction she is fated to cause (147-8). On the level of plot, just as the calf was slaughtered, so will Deirdre's "loeg" or beloved be slaughtered.

To add to the gore, and support the interpretation provided by some critics who view Deirdre as a barbaric heroine, not only is the calf dead, but a raven is drinking its blood.

There is a wealth of associations here. As Ann Ross states, "the raven invariably appears in a prophetic role, whether its appearance is natural or otherwise" (327). In Irish mythology, the raven is the bird form of the triune goddess of war: the Morrigan, Nemain, and Badb, collectively referred to as the Morrigan. She is sometimes three goddesses, sometimes one. When she appears as the raven, she is the goddess of war, foreshadowing here the war between the sons of Usnach, and later Fergus and his men, with the Ulstermen. But the Morrigan is also a goddess of great sexual powers (R. Clark 223). The image from this episode, then, can be interpreted as the goddess of sexual desire drinking the blood of her "beloved". The raven imagery heightens the fatalism and destruction encoded in the treatment of the three colour motif, while raising the spectre of war (Tymoczko 148).

The second use of animal imagery occurs in what Tymoczko terms the "binding episode" (149). Here, Deirdre and Naoise meet, and she implores him to run away with her. He rejects the idea based on Cathbad's prophecy, but she "grasped both his ears," (Hull 63) and invokes the geis. He is bound by honour to do as she wishes. In this episode, the cattle imagery of the earlier example is continued, as Deirdre and Naoise refer to each other as a heifer and a bull. Tymoczko raises the question of tone here. Is the imagery crude and barbaric, or are they simply using the language of a cattle-based economy? Surely, in eleventh century Ireland this imagery would have had much more meaning than it has for a modern, urban civilization.

The cattle imagery, however, may function on another level. While it may demonstrate how crude Deirdre has become living on a farm, it also illustrates the role women played in pre-Christian Ireland. As Anne Dooley notes, women are "transactable

items, are part of a system of male-dominated exchange, and are, in this system of exchange, on par with the livestock" (156). It is not surprising, but is in fact thematically necessary for Deirdre to use what modern readers might consider crude language. She is a true "enfant sauvage," and is only able to respond on a natural, unlearned level.

The third sequence of animal images occurs after the murder of the sons of Usnach when Deirdre is being taken to an assembly at Emain Macha. Conchubar has decided to give her to Eogan mac Durthacht, Naoise's murderer, and says to her "...it is a sheep's eye between two rams that you make between me and Eogan" (Hull 69). Again, animal imagery is used. Rather than face the dishonour of seeing "her two companions on earth on the same occasion" (Hull 69), Deirdre chooses death. Tymoczko believes that Deirdre has grown into her womanhood, complete with a freedom of choice, that she has become an archetypal figure striving to transcend enforced limitations in order to become a free human being, and that by determining her own fate, she is finally asserting her own will (152-3).[6] She has grown. Deirdre is not a static character. Though the earliest version is certainly "short" by modern epic standards and somewhat lacking in descriptive detail, Deirdre emerges as a lonely girl. Doomed by prophecy to cause the downfall of Emain Macha, she grows in stature so that by the end, she rejects the passive role of an unwilling participant assigned by the prophecy, and assumes an active role in determining the outcome of her life. However

[6] Tymoczko contends that Deirdre chose death because she is dishonoured after the violation of her own vow not to see her two mates simultaneously (152). This is supported by Vernam Hull who, in the notes of his translation, states that this dishonouring was probably in the lost archetype as it later became a well-attested literary motif (159, n. 313).

ironically, in killing herself she makes a clear choice and asserts a powerful human volition over the inhuman prophecy.

In the end, LMnU provides the reader with the barest details of the legend. The fifteenth century text, "Oidheadh Chloinne Uisnigh," however, fills in some missing details and Deirdre emerges as a more fully developed woman. Taken together, these two texts tell the Deirdre story, and find their way into the plays of Russell, Yeats and Synge a thousand years later.

OIDHEADH CHLOINNE UISNIGH

Vernam Hull's translation of LMnU is based primarily on The Book of Leinster (1160), with supplementary information supplied by The Yellow Book of Lecan (end of 14th century), and the manuscript Egerton 1782 (dated 1419). There is yet another medieval version called the "Glenmasan Manuscript." On the inner side of the first leaf, it reads, "the year of our Redemption, one thousand two hundred thirty and eight." The date of the manuscript cannot be placed further back than the fifteenth century, however.[7] So it could be assumed that the existing copy may have been transcribed from an older manuscript dating to 1238 (Mackinnon 4)[8]. This version of the story entitled "Oidheadh Chloinne Uisnigh" (hereafter OCU), or "The violent death of the children of Uisneach," is contained

[7] The language, for example, is early Modern Irish, probably dating from the fourteenth or fifteenth century (Breatnach 99).

[8] Mackinnon translated the Glenmasan manuscript for the Celtic Review, 1904-1905. I use this translation.

in only three of the twenty-seven leaves of the manuscript, but it is important in the development of the legend and as a source for later writers.

As the oldest surviving manuscript, LMnU sets down the legend, introduces us to the characters, explains why Emain Macha burns to the ground, and how Fergus appears on the side of Queen Maeve in "The Tain," one of the main stories from The Book of Leinster. LMnU could almost be considered a prologue to the story of "The Cattle Raid of Cooley," for it explains how Fergus and his Ulster warriors ended up on Connaught's side. And if this is so, then the Glenmasan manuscript is an extensive introduction for it provides us with more detail about what happened after the lovers died.

Unfortunately, crucial elements of the Deirdre story are omitted from the OCU version. It does not contain the prophecy, the birth and nurture of Deirdre, her elopement with Naoise or any mention of their time in Scotland. Rather, the manuscript opens at a feast given by Conchubar where he considers how to get the exiled lovers back. By omitting these events, the author of OCU undermines the very essence of the legend. Because of the prophecy, Deirdre is sent to seclusion. There she either imagines or dreams of Naoise. He appears and they elope, ultimately being tricked to return to Emain Macha. These events are missing from the Glenmasan manuscript. We do not see Deirdre's sexual awakening, brought on by the dead calf in the snow and all of its implications. We do not see an old man thwarted in his attempts to possess a forbidden woman, doomed to bring about the downfall of the nation.

What we do have is the story of their return, but these few brief pages surpass LMnU in terms of literary appeal, and they do introduce a new element to the legend. The

sparseness of LMnU has been replaced by a more elaborate style. And while the secondary characters do not grow with OCU (with the exception of Fergus), Deirdre's role and character are vastly expanded. In LMnU she responds to a raven's blood and invokes the geis against Naoise. In OCU, Deirdre relies on her beauty to affect her lover. She is more feminine, more aware of her situation, and recognizes Conchubar's duplicity. Because of her understanding, she repeatedly warns the brothers not to return to Emain Macha. LMnU does not mention whether or not Deirdre had an opinion; but in OCU she has dreams and visions as forewarnings against a return to Conchubar. She sees a vision of "three drops of honey," and "three sips of blood" (109), which she interprets as Conchubar's treacherous message of peace and the death of the brothers. Later she has a dream in which she sees each of the brothers without his head (115). In fact, she warns the sons of Usnach no less than eight times not to trust Fergus. Her role is much more active as she repeatedly fights against Naoise's blind belief in the male code of honour. She tries to prevent the tragedy, but in the end, it is a fruitless endeavour. The sons of Usnach naively place their trust in Fergus, who stupidly believes Conchubar's word.

The fault does not rest with Fergus alone for the tragedy, of course. If one were to try to assign blame each character would have to assume some responsibility: Cathbad for the prophecy; Conchubar for isolating Deirdre and ordering the death of the brothers; Deirdre for invoking the geis; Naoise, Ainnle and Ardan for believing in Fergus and Conchubar; and Maine Lamhgharbh (in OCU; Eoghan mac Durthact in LMnU) for the actual murder. But Fergus's character is highly developed in OCU and is made fully culpable for his stupidity. James Carney believes that LMnU sought to whitewash the

character of Fergus, that in fact genealogical and other evidence portrays him in a negative light (quoted from Breatnach 104).

At the very least, Fergus is a fool. Conchubar asks Fergus, "What would you do... if you were sent for the sons of Uisnech, and that they were destroyed notwithstanding your safeguard and honour, which I do not propose to do?" (Mackinnon 17). Conchubar is flat out stating his intentions, but Fergus doesn't seem to notice. His lack of personal judgement makes him unreliable and susceptible to Conchubar's plans. He is able to be manipulated, and in this respect, he actively participates in the tragedy. Caoimhin Breatnach suggests that Deirdre's role in OCU is to warn the sons of Usnach against accepting Fergus's assurances of safety (102). This seems highly likely as most of Deirdre's dialogue is made up of entreaties not to accept Fergus.

The importance of OCU is two-fold. Firstly, it sheds new light on the character of Fergus. He is duped by Conchubar, but is too short-sighted to see the obvious. Secondly, OCU introduces the idea that Deirdre was opposed to a return to Emain Macha. The story thus becomes more complex. Naoise does not simply decide to return home, as in LMnU. Rather, against the express wishes of his wife, ignoring her fear and sense of foreboding, he unilaterally decides to trust Fergus and Conchubar. Declan Kiberd contends that this development makes OCU more of a love story than a war story, and Deirdre is more representative of a tragic heroine (183). It is not simply that Naoise and his brothers are destroyed, but that by discounting his wife's pleas for caution, he brings about her death as well as his own.

A final point to be made concerns the question of honour. In ancient Ireland the code of honour was not simply a male issue. Women like men had a system of honour. For men, it had to do with keeping their word, fealty to the king, or strength in battle. But as Philip O'Leary notes, for women honour was sexually based. They took pride in their beauty or aristocratic pedigree. They were proud of their chastity or fidelity or child-bearing ability. And whereas men died on the battlefield rather than sacrifice their honour, women would die of shame if their honour were destroyed. The primary source of disgrace was sexual (34-41). This helps explain Deirdre's fate, both in LMnU and OCU. Deirdre does not die of grief at Naoise's death. In fact, she lives for an entire year with Conchubar. She does not even kill herself privately when she is told she is going to be given to Eoghan. She waits one more day, then throws herself out of the chariot. O'Leary contends that it was the shame of public disgrace that she could not live through (41).[9] It seems ironic that the heroine who swoons into her lover's grave in many modern versions is the same woman who manages to live for a year with the man who ordered her husband's death. The philosophy underlying the ethics of the heroine must have changed.

Taken as a unit, LMnU and OCU form the parameters of the Deirdre legend. We are introduced to the characters who in later years would pervade much of the literature of the Irish Renaissance: Deirdre, Conchubar, Fergus, and the sons of Usnach. The next chapter

[9] This theory contradicts Vernam Hull's belief that is was her vow not to seen by two lovers together which precipitated her suicide. O'Leary's explanation seems more plausible.

will investigate these characters as archetypes, for it was through their existence as archetypes that they would come to be adopted as cultural icons.

CHAPTER TWO

Jungian Archetypes in the Deirdre Legend

This chapter will be a Jungian investigation into the Deirdre legend as it appeared in the original text "Longes Mac N-Uislenn." Clearly, this inquiry is crucial to my Jungian analysis of the Deirdre legend in Russell's Deirdre: A Legend in Three Acts, Yeats's Deirdre, and Synge's Deirdre of the Sorrows in chapters three, four and five. I will argue that each of these works depends on Jungian archetypes, so it is important to establish what these are at the outset.

Throughout his many works, Carl Jung investigated the human psyche based on the dreams, pathologies and fantasies of his patients. He came to the conclusion that, as well as the personal conscious and unconscious, there is another level he called the collective unconscious which consists of archetypal or primordial images that are common to all people from all ages. In short, his theories are transcendent and transnational. In Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious, Jung lists the main archetypes as the shadow, the anima/animus, the Great Mother, the trickster and the wise old man. But there are others. Indeed, Jung contends there is an infinite number of archetypes.

These are barebones archetypes, lacking in particularity until they find literary expression. Then they take on cultural as well as psychological significance. The archetypes revealed in the Deirdre legend shed light not only on Jungian theory, but on the culture of Ireland. Deirdre, the character, for example, becomes an archetypal image of Erin fighting for her freedom in early twentieth century Irish consciousness. Understanding Deirdre as

archetype and cultural icon from the original text helps explain her attractiveness as image for Russell, Yeats and Synge.

A Jungian investigation, while revealing Deirdre's cultural significance, is important for another reason. LMnU is a thousand-year-old text, dealing with a society and traditions that are foreign to modern readers. In theory, archetypes, however, are timeless and universal. When an archetype is identified, it makes inevitable certain kinds of behaviour. Thus, by recognizing how they are manifested in the human psyche, we can come to a better appreciation of the text itself. Understanding how archetypes function will explain, for example, why Conchubar chose not to kill a girl whose existence will cause the destruction of his kingdom. But before we can apply a Jungian analysis to the Deirdre legend, we will take a closer look at Jung's concept of the archetypes of the collective unconscious.

Jung's Archetypes and Their Later Revisions

According to Jung, an archetype or primordial image lies in the collective unconscious of mankind. It is a "figure - be it demon, a human being or a process - that constantly recurs in the course of history... It is a mythological figure" ("Relation" 817). In Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious, Jung lists various major archetypal figures as the shadow, the anima/animus, the great mother, the trickster and the wise old man. This list is merely what Jung determined to be the major archetypes. In theory, there is an infinite number. Furthermore, archetypes refer not only to characters but also to processes. Thus,

Jung listed typical situations or transformations which can be considered archetypal (38-40). These include the process of individuation, rebirth of the hero, or the quest.

Archetypes, according to Jung, reside in the realm of the collective unconscious. And as Jung said, "... probably none of my empirical concepts has met with so much misunderstanding as the idea of the collective unconscious" (ACU 42). The truth of this statement lies in the fact that the collective unconscious is unknowable precisely because it is not conscious. There is no way to prove empirically the existence of the collective unconscious.[10] Yet Jung contends that the existence of archetypes, the recurring images that appear everywhere, is evidence that the collective unconscious is definitely part of everyone's psyche (42-3).

The human mind, then, is threefold. There is the conscious, which consists of what we know. There is the personal unconscious which owes its existence to personal experience (42), and there is the collective unconscious, an impersonal, universal realm which is identical in everyone and consists of inherited archetypes, what mythological research calls motifs (42-3).

These archetypes reside in the unconscious; they are, therefore, unknowable. They can only be ascertained by their manifestation in the conscious, and therein lies the difficulty. In order to be understood, something must be knowable. Jung believes that symbols are an "attempt to elucidate... something that belongs entirely to the domain of the unknown" (Two Essays on Analytical Psychology 287). It is an attempt to represent the

[10] Jung, however, categorically states, "The concept of the collective unconscious is neither a speculative nor a philosophical but an empirical matter"(ACU 44). He produces as proof of archetypes recurrent images in dreams and active imaginations or fantasies (48f.).

archetype, but the result is always imperfect. The symbol is a conscious manifestation of an unconscious, hypothetical pattern of behaviour. The archetype changes as it becomes conscious, as we attempt to define or symbolize it (ACU 5). Eric Gould believes Jung's main problem is his lack of interpretation theory. Jung refuses to merge archetypal ideas with any conscious concept. We cannot know, comprehend, or vocalize any of the archetypes. We can only come close with imperfect symbols (23). But if these symbols are to have any value at all, they must have the potentiality to be understood.

It seems as if an impasse has been reached. Jung insists that the collective unconscious can be empirically proven to exist, but that its contents, primordial archetypes, can only be imperfectly comprehended through symbols. Perhaps what is needed here is a "spin among the fields" as espoused by Mary Daly. Spinning among the fields is an interdisciplinary approach to criticism which entails choosing what is necessary from one field or theorist, and disregarding what is unimportant or irrelevant. It is a flexible empiricism which veers away from dogmatic absolutism. It allows a text to reveal a multiplicity of meaning, rather than conform to a formula. This approach is particularly attractive to feminist theory as the critics can choose what is best from a variety of disciplines and ignore what is irrelevant (xiii-xiv).

This idea of spinning is supported by Annis Pratt, a feminist critic, who accepts Jung's concept of archetypes, but rejects his association of men with logic and women with emotion. Jung also identified the feminine with things cold, dark or bad. The problem here, which Jung freely admitted, was that he could have little perspective on the feminine personality. Furthermore, Jung's archetypal patterns are based on the male experience (such

as the quest motif), and he assumed these patterns could apply to the female as well. Pratt rejects this assumption, insisting that women's experience, while it may be archetypal, cannot be addressed under a male-dominated formula. According to Pratt, spinning among the fields allows the feminist critic to redefine Jung's archetypes based on a woman's experience (96-100).

While it may be appropriate to reconsider Jung's archetypes in terms of a feminist interpretation given that the Deirdre legend is primarily the story of a woman, there is another reason why a pure Jungian interpretation needs recasting. Many of Jung's theories were encoded as law by various first-generation Jungians. What Jung proposed as provisional formulation became fixed and inflexible by the theorists who directly succeeded him. It is erroneous to take his theories as law. Jung should be considered as a "prescient pioneering figure," as Andrew Samuels refers to him in Jung and the Post-Jungians.[11]

Redefining Jungian archetypes is particularly appropriate in terms of the Deirdre story, for it is not Naoise who is the focal point, but rather Deirdre, her growth into womanhood, and her battle with Conchubar. The Jungian archetypes, while traditionally male-oriented, must be reconsidered in feminine terms, at least as far as Deirdre's experience is concerned. As Pratt notes, "feminine aspirations, existing in dialectical relationship to societal prescriptions against women's development, create textual mixtures of rebellion and repression" (101). Pratt's observation illuminates the Deirdre legend. Conchubar, head of a patriarchal society, seeks to possess Deirdre, a child of nature. By rearing her in solitude for

[11] Quoted from a paper delivered on Nov. 22, 1997, entitled "Will the Post-Jungians Survive?"

himself he interferes with her natural growth, repressing what should be a normal development. She rebels by choosing Naoise, and the scene is set for tragedy to occur.

Before considering the Jungian archetypes in a legend in which a woman is the heroine, it is first necessary to examine the conventional Jungian archetypes. In Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious, Jung explores the nature of the archetypes, and illustrates the major archetypal patterns based on his experience with his patients' dreams, pathologies, fantasies and neuroses. He lists the major archetypes as well as the major psychological process which he terms individuation, a process in which a person becomes "in-dividual" or whole (275). Archetypes reside in the unconscious, and it is through confronting these archetypes, when the conscious confronts the unconscious, that the process of individuation occurs and the self comes into being (Snider 10).

Not all of Jung's archetypes are present in the Deirdre legend. We do not see the trickster or the child for example, either in the original text or in its later dramatic adaptations. The archetypes that are relevant for our discussion are the anima and the shadow in relation to Conchubar, and the archetype of the young woman, what Jung calls the Demeter-Kore archetype.[12] This is the archetype which directly concerns Deirdre. Because this archetype does not fully illustrate Deirdre the character, the exposition of Deirdre will include other possible archetypes, including the images of Eve and Erin. We begin with Conchubar whose character presents two possible archetypal interpretations: the shadow and the anima. It should be clear that the complexity of individual behaviour

[12] The Demeter-Kore archetype is a double figure of mother and maiden. In myths concerning Demeter, the daughter is often unnamed, hence "Kore," meaning "the maiden."

whether in life, legend or drama often involves an expansion or recombination of Jungian archetypes.

The Shadow and the Anima: The Illumination of Conchubar

The first two archetypes we will consider are the shadow and the anima, for it is the existence of these two archetypes which lays the groundwork for the tragedy. Jung believes that the shadow and anima are the archetypes most clearly recognizable from an empirical point of view (Man and His Symbols 5).The shadow resides in our personal unconscious (ACU 20), and is the dark, opposite side of ourselves. It is formed of things we have rejected, and while not necessarily evil, it is comprised of things which a person perceives as evil. If repressed, it exacts a disturbing influence (Cox 143). It can, for example, shoot into the consciousness without warning, causing sudden mood swings, or worse can lead to actions which the conscious mind or society itself does not approve (Progoff 86).

By being made aware of the shadow, we see what we have rejected and are able to criticize that hitherto suppressed portion of our being. The shadow shows us what we could be, but consciously do not want to be. It is best to recognize the shadow, but not to be threatened by it, for by being made aware of the "bad" side, by recognizing what we perceive as evil, we can consciously reject it. As Jung says, "the meeting with oneself is, at first, the meeting with one's own shadow" (ACU 21), but by recognizing the shadow and by accepting it, we should, theoretically, "be immune to any moral or mental infection" (Man and His Symbols 85).

Like all Jung's archetypes, the shadow can present itself either positively or negatively. In a well-integrated psyche, the shadow is controlled by the persona, that part of ourselves we show to the rest of the world. It can make a person more creative (Hall and Nordby 49), or it can help a person reject what is bad or evil, thereby aiding in the decision making process. A person can reject what he recognizes as evil.

The next archetype which Jung addresses is the anima and it is potentially the most overtly sexist of the archetypes. In its simplest definition, the anima is the feminine part of the male psyche; the animus is the corresponding male part of the female psyche. Basically, what is not masculine is feminine (ACU 27). A man with an overdeveloped anima can seem overtly feminine. It makes a man appear petty, nasty or catty (Progoff 91). The anima has a preconceived liking for everything that is vain, helpless, and uncertain (Hall and Nordby 47). Basically, Jung associates everything that is emotional and illogical with women (Pratt 97), and this applies to the anima as well. The anima, however, is most often encountered through projection. Projection is a process whereby that which is unconscious in the subject transfers itself to an object so that it seems to belong to the object (ACU 60). A man first encounters his anima in his mother. She seems wonderful, almost superhuman in his eyes, until her image becomes tarnished by everyday reality, and sinks into the unconscious, ready to be activated at the first opportunity when a woman makes an impression on him (69). But the anima image is more than just a reincarnated mother. Jung insists that the anima is an "eternal image' (The Development of Personality 198) of all ancestral experiences and answers the question why a man finds one particular woman attractive. She represents his image of the feminine.

The anima image is most often represented as syzygies, which are male-female pairs of deities. A masculine element is paired with a feminine element in one being. Jung determines that this being's historical pervasiveness proves that it is a fundamental element within the psyche (ACU 65). Every man has a feminine side built in as it were, and it is activated by the appearance of a woman. But when a man responds too strongly, when he relates too closely with his anima, he becomes, according to Jung, "touchy, jealous, irritable, moody, vain," and spreads discontent around him (70).

Conchubar presents a number of complex possibilities, and rather than reduce his personality to a circumscribed stock character, he will be considered in all his enigmatic potential. The big question surrounding the Deirdre legend is this - Why did Conchubar choose not to kill Deirdre? His chief Druid, Cathbad, foretold dire consequences if she were allowed to live. He prophesied "many slaughters," that she would "destroy much," that she would be the cause of "violent deeds" (Hull 61). As well, in light of the awful prophecy, Conchubar's chief nobles and warriors suggested that she be killed. It seems unreasonable that Conchubar, who was king and had the power to order her killed, chose instead to let her live. By making this choice, he essentially created the tragedy.

It is possible that Deirdre was the recipient of his anima projection. Conchubar's full name is Conchubar Mac Nessa, that is the son of Nessa, his mother. According to Eugene O'Curry, citing The Book of Leinster, Nessa was "a woman of youth and beauty at the time that her son came to be fifteen years of age" (274). The story goes that Fergus, then king of Ulster (and later the dupe in the Deirdre story), proposed marriage to Nessa, but she would only accept if Conchubar could be king for a year. Fergus agreed, but at the end of the year,

the Ulstermen insisted that Conchubar retain the throne. Thus it was agreed: Conchubar would keep the throne; Fergus would keep his wife.

Conchubar's mother was beautiful, so beautiful in fact that Fergus gave up his kingship for her. Did Conchubar, then, somehow unconsciously project the image of his mother onto Deirdre, even though she was a child? Though farfetched, it could, within the Jungian paradigm, explain why Conchubar acted so irrationally. According to Jung, the anima image is first formed by the mother, is soon made unconscious in the boy, but is ready to project itself at the first opportunity, at the moment a woman makes an impression out of the ordinary (ACU 69). Certainly Deirdre's cry from the womb was not normal. Did this, then, somehow unconsciously trigger Conchubar's anima? As the story progresses, he continues to make unreasonable decisions. The lovers escape to Alba, but he lures them back with false promises of safety. Had they stayed away, Ulster would have survived. But Conchubar has identified too closely with his anima. He brings them back, acting as Jung predicts "touchy, jealous, and irritable" and spreads discontent around him (ACU 70). In fact, disaster is the result of his obsession with Deirdre.

Perhaps he has projected his anima image onto her. But there is another possibility. Conchubar's decisions - choosing to let her live, raising her to be his bride - are illogical, and this is an identifying factor in an overdeveloped shadow. Setting aside for the moment the theory of anima as explanation for Conchubar's behaviour, let us consider another Jungian possibility, that Conchubar is consumed by his shadow. The shadow consists of things we do not want to be, and the one thing Conchubar did not want to be was old. In Deirdre he saw the vigour of youth and he chooses to marry this beautiful, though dangerous young

woman. She, of course, rejects him, and Conchubar becomes consumed with the destruction of the hero she chose. Despite his knowledge of the consequences, gained through the prophecies, he becomes obsessed with their deaths. The shadow has taken over and passions are unleashed.

As Whitmont points out, there are social and political implications of a shadow possession (Symbolic Quest 168). In this case, Conchubar's shadow, his thirst for personal vengeance, destroys all of Ulster. For the sake of a woman, he not only kills the sons of Usnach, but also destroys the fellowship of the Ulster warriors. Who is this woman who stirred such passion in Conchubar and Naoise? What is it about her that she became such an enduring archetype in the early phase of Ireland's struggle for independence? A pure Jungian analysis would determine that she is an image of the Kore. But unmodified Jungian analysis does not adequately explain the persistence of the Deirdre legend. Seen as a cultural archetype, Deirdre is Ireland. It is from the combination of Jungian and cultural meanings that the Deirdre legend derives its force and the figure of Deirdre commands attention.

Deirdre: Kore, Eve or Erin

Conchubar is a pathetic figure. Irish mythology is replete with stories of his adventures, but in the end, he is the cause of the destruction of Emain Macha and the defection of many Ulster warriors to Queen Medb and Connaught. Such are the problems of an unintegrated psyche. But what of Deirdre? How is it that this woman, raised apart, could lie at the heart of such destruction? Jung would most likely conclude that she is an image of

the Demeter-Kore archetype. Jung pays scant attention to the psyche of women and assumes that all fall under the category of either mother or child.

The possibilities are, of course, far more numerous, and both feminists and postmodern Jungians have cited far more interesting archetypal figures. Toni Wolff, for example, has expanded the aspects of the "Feminine" to include the Mother, the Hetaira (or daughter), the Amazon (the independent woman), and the Medium (the prophetess or witch).[13] Mary Condren and Polly Young-Eisendrath have written about the "Eve" or "Pandora" nature of women in myth, that women cause the fall of man. The character of Deirdre presents many possibilities as her image has changed through the centuries. Indeed, while Deirdre might first appear as a rather bland character in the original LMnU, an archetypal investigation reveals a far more complex individual.

An analysis of Deirdre from a Jungian perspective must first begin with Jung. His appreciation of the feminine psyche coalesced in the Demeter-Kore archetype, a double figure, mother and maiden. The Kore figure most often appears as a young girl with a peculiar origin. Her helplessness exposes her to all sorts of danger and she is always doomed to die. Fortunately, the maiden corresponds to the anima in a man and she makes use of the projection to gain her own ends (ACU 183-198). The Demeter-Kore unity is the central content of the Eleusinian mysteries, whose essential motif is the reunion of mother and daughter. This "finding again" signifies the annulment of male incursion, signified in classical myth by Kore's abduction by Hades, and the restoration after marriage of the matriarchal unity of mother and daughter (Nuemann 307-8).

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[13] Quoted in Whitmont's The Symbolic Quest 178-9.

The Demeter-Kore archetype occurs regularly throughout the mythology of nations. In Greek legend, for example, Homer tells the story of Demeter and Persephone. Hades abducts Persephone, and Demeter, her mother, wanders the earth in search of her. She adopts the form of an old woman and withdraws from the world until her daughter is returned (Kerenyi 34). In pre-Homeric Cretan myth, Persephone is raped by Pluto; and in Arcadian mythology, Poseidon is the perpetrator. Their story exists in many cultures. Kerenyi suggests that separation of mother and daughter, as one facet of the Demeter-Kore legend, may itself be termed archetypal (145-6).

In the beginning, Deirdre appears as what Jung would describe as the Kore figure. This figure often appears as not altogether human in the usual sense, has a peculiar origin, and undergoes strange experiences (ACU 186). Deirdre is the daughter of Feidlimid mac Daill, literally "son of the blind one," Conchubar's story teller. Though being the daughter of a seer does not make her more than human, it would give her special status. Her origin, however, is peculiar, as she cries out from her mother's womb with a shriek that "crushes him who hears" (60), and is raised in seclusion. She has, in fact, been removed from her mother's care. Though not technically abducted, she is taken away from society and is denied communication with most of mankind. And while she does not live in Hell, she is raised in solitude on a farm. Thus we see the very unusual image of a young girl responding to a dead calf in the snow. When she sees a raven drinking its blood, she responds, "Beloved would be the one man on whom might be yonder three colours - that is, hair like the raven, and a cheek like blood, and a body like snow" (Hull 62-3).

Just as a man's anima is first formed by the mother, so too is a woman's animus (the masculine side of a woman) first formed by her father or brother. This relationship shapes her connection with the realm of meaning, rational order and initiative (Whitmont Symbolic Quest 208). But as Deirdre was raised in seclusion, she is denied normative standards of interaction. She has no frame of reference for proper behaviour in the realm of either social or personal interaction. Thus her desire is stirred by a dead calf in the snow, with a raven drinking its blood. The image of the raven is interesting here. The raven is the most popular symbol of the triune goddess, the Morrigan. She is the goddess of war, and moves among warriors during a battle in the form of a raven to drive them to greater frenzy (Rankin 269). She incites conflict. But the raven also has a prophetic role. When the Morrigan appears as a raven, she is the harbinger of doom. Tymoczko believes that the appearance of the raven here raises the spectre of war (148), for when Deirdre sees the raven drinking the blood from a slaughtered calf, her senses are awakened. Soon she will see Naoise with "hair like the raven," and the tragedy will begin to unfold.

The Kore figure, as a glittering vessel (ACU 199), is a welcome character for the man's anima projection. Unfortunately, Deirdre stimulates the anima in the wrong man and Naoise cannot save her. When the lovers return from Alba, Deirdre once again meets with her nurse, Levarcham, who throughout the story acts as a surrogate mother figure, but the reunion is short lived as death for the lovers is soon to come.

One of the problems with a strict Jungian interpretation is the disposition to think in terms of rigid opposites. Thus, for example, the Jungian equates the masculine with Logos, and the feminine with Eros. The Jungian also limits the female archetypes to either

Demeter-Kore or the Great Mother. A reading of Deirdre as representative of the Demeter-Kore archetype is only one of the possibilities which her character presents. So, we spin. Our heroine may be the innocent Kore, but she is also a seductive and disobedient Eve. Eve has become the archetypal symbol of woman's licentiousness, pride and spiritual weakness. As her partner, Adam has gone down in history as the poor, misguided fool who was led into temptation. All of humanity is doomed because of her (Condren 3-5).

Deirdre, like Eve, is the great temptress. Naoise was sitting on the ramparts of Emain Macha, minding his own business, when Deirdre strolls by and boldly states, "I would take a young bullock like you" (Hull 63). Though tempted, Naoise at first resists her charms until goaded into eloping with her. It is through this transgression, like the eating of the apple, that the world as they know it will collapse. She is the single cause of the ensuing tragedies, both public and private. Maire Herbert points out that Deirdre, like Eve, transgressed against patriarchal authority embodied in the king (21), forcing Naoise out of his home and into the wilderness of Alba. Contrary to a Demeter-Kore reading which suggests an unwilling abduction, Deirdre as Eve is not the victim but the agent of destruction.

The simplest way to see Deirdre is as the Kore figure. She becomes slightly more interesting as Eve, but there is a third way to approach Deirdre which is most relevant in terms of her modern adaptations, and that is seeing Deirdre as an archetype of Ireland itself. As a universal archetype, she is Eve; as an Irish archetype, she is Erin.

Irish folklore, ballads and poetry often depict the country as a woman. She is an expression of a nationalistic ideal - freeing Ireland from John Bull, patriarchal England. In this "aisling" tradition, Ireland is a visionary, beautiful young maiden or she is a poor, old

woman, Mother Ireland (Innes 46). The images of Ireland as a young woman include Cathleen ni Houlihan (from Yeats's play of the same name in which an old woman is transformed into a beautiful, young woman when Michael commits to her), and "Dark Rosaleen," a young woman of intimate love ballads who is both a usurped queen and sad, beautiful lover. The images of Ireland as old woman include Cathleen as she first appears or "The Old Woman of Beare."

The image of Ireland as woman is an inspiration calling men to action. She is in need of protection, someone to be fought over. Innes sees the conflict in the Deirdre story between Naoise and Conchubar as a manifestation of an Oedipal struggle. The father, the patriarch, is rejected so the young man can devote himself to what Innes calls a "highly idealized version of the mother who is also the lover" (48). In nationalist terms, this struggle translates into a young man rejecting authority, patriarchy, England, and choosing the young and beautiful woman, Ireland. Deirdre as an Irish archetype is both fought over and betrayed. She is Erin, calling the sons of Usnach to her standard; the brothers respond to her plea and, like so many young Irishmen throughout the years, will die for her cause.

"In Ireland a sense of cultural dislocation, or insecurity, or reviving national pride, or willed identification of colonizer with colonized, has at different times inspired different perceptions and constructions of Irish literary tradition" (Vance 3). Deirdre, as a thousand-year-old-symbol, represents all of these sensibilities. She could be used in a Christian tradition as an example of the "bad" woman, demonstrating what happens when a woman rebels against authority. She is also a powerful and enduring Irish archetype, Erin standing firm against the iron grip of patriarchal England. Understanding the archetypal potential

embodied in the Deirdre myth shows us how she was used, and sometimes misused, during the Irish Literary Renaissance.

A myriad of themes can be extracted from the myth. Myles Dillon sees it as "the oldest love-story in medieval literature," (12). Raymond Cormier believes it is an account of a warrior society where love has no place at all (306-7). James Carney interprets it as story recounting an impossible struggle against fate (235). Buttimer rejects such reductionist tendencies, insisting the tale contains all these themes, and more. Its many layers assure a multiplicity of meaning (40-1).

As Kolodny points out, "we appropriate meaning from a text based on what we need, and we appropriate different meanings at different times according to our changed circumstances or requirements" (153). In the early years of twentieth-century Ireland, cultural revival co-existed with, and often formed the basis of, political agitation. Deirdre as image supplied an icon which gave meaning to both these movements. For Anglo-Irish Protestants like Russell, Yeats and Synge, she held even greater possibility. She was, at one and the same time, a revered yet non-sectarian image descended from the ancient past, neither Catholic nor Protestant, but pagan. As a manifestation of Ireland's struggle for political independence, she provided a symbolic shorthand for at least temporally transcending sectarian differences.

George Russell, William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge took this image of Deirdre, accepted her nature as archetype, then reworked her character to imbue her with their own meaning and the meaning of their particular time. Russell saw Deirdre, Conchubar and Naoise as characters whose purity and honour could serve as examples worthy of

emulation, a didactic lesson for his Irish audience. Yeats interpreted these characters as archetypes of passion, of love and jealousy, but whose symbols could help usher in his "Unity of Culture," a unity that placed literary artists like himself at the center. Synge's Deirdre is the noble savage, living wild and free, whose existence is threatened by encroaching society manifested in Conchubar. The Russellian, Yeatsian and Syngian adaptations of the Deirdre legend serve several agendas and I will take them up in turn in the following three chapters, beginning with Russell.

CHAPTER THREE

Russell's Deirdre: a Legend in Three Acts

George Russell's Deirdre: A Legend in Three Acts was performed in April of 1902. Though generally well received both by Dublin audiences and the Irish press, critics concede that Deirdre is more lyric sequence than tragic drama. With high poetic language and a plethora of supernatural and mystical allusions, Russell's characters appear, as an actress who performed in the play stated, as "figures rising out of the mist" (quoted in Kain and O'Brien 31). In Russell's opinion, these figures were part of Ireland's ancestral memory (that is, Irish archetypes), and were the embodiment of everlasting forces (31): courage, honour and loyalty. As we shall see in this chapter, these everlasting forces, what Jung would call archetypal emotions, were important tools for Russell. Evading the divisive tenets of Irish Catholicism and Anglo-Irish Protestantism, Russell embraced spiritualism as the proper path for modern Irish society. The everlasting forces embodied in the ancient gods and heroes of Ireland could free the Irish people from their tradition of religious sectarianism and their increasingly strident nationalism.

Russell envisioned Deirdre, Naoise and Conchubar not as unifying political symbols,[14] but as the embodiments of spiritual purity. Pagan Irish Naoise as archetype, for example, could demonstrate to the Dublin audience how they themselves should be proud and honourable, regardless of political or religious persuasion. As the exemplary hero,

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[14] The extreme nationalist paper The Leader objected to Deirdre's lack of political significance (Hogan and Kilroy 13).

Naoise is scrupulous to a fault and free from vice. He is the "parfait" champion, and thus fit to grace the stage in Russell's "good story."

Whatever Russell's political agenda, he was also a product of his time. As a late Victorian, Russell followed Standish O'Grady's theory that the Irish stage was no place for barbarism or excessive sexuality. In Deirdre, the coarse aspects of the original text are downplayed to reveal a more graceful and gentle play. Considering the Victorian temperament of early twentieth-century Dublin theatre-goers, it is not surprising that they determined W.B. Yeats's and George Moore's Diarmuid and Grania too openly sexual. They did, however, embrace Russell's Deirdre, for he was a proponent of the "good story" theory, and offered no challenge to their sexual prudery.

The "Good Story" Theory

When writing a new version of an old tale, authors have two choices: they can remain faithful to the original text; or they can employ poetic license and make things up as they go along. This second option is more reminiscent of an ancient "ollam" or "story-teller," who would use the legend as a framework and add the details in the telling. When the ancient Irish tales were rediscovered in the mid-nineteenth century, there was heated debate in terms of the handling of legend. One school of thought stressed that the authors should maintain the integrity of the original texts, including language, plot and tone. The other school encouraged authorial imagination: a writer could invent episodes or alternately omit them altogether. This second option is the "good story" theory.

Perhaps the most influential of these "good story" theorists was Standish James O'Grady, whose History of Ireland - The Heroic Period so greatly influenced successive generations of Irish writers. He stressed the beauty of the old stories. They were "more massier and more pure, the sentiment deeper and more tender, the audacity and freedom more exhilarating, the reach of imagination more sublime" than any Greek legend (Critical and Philosophical 201). He fostered the notion of an idealized image of the past and admitted there were things he "simply could not write down and print and publish" (All-Ireland Review Aug. 9, 1902, 357). In this respect he was very much a Victorian author. As he described it in The Heroic Period, historical fact should be "seen through an imaginative medium" and the original texts reduced to their "artistic elements" (quoted in Marcus 237). Of course, historic drama of the Irish Renaissance never pretended to be realistic. Myth had priority over history and quite often disguised itself as romantic prehistory. These plays go back to an Ireland before the English, to a country full of noble aspirations but ravaged by perpetual misrule. In tragic myth of the early twentieth century, ancient history was transformed into poetic drama with bigger then life heroes (Orr 129).

It is from this school of thought that George Russell emerges. As he said in his introduction to O'Grady's The Coming of Cuculain, "there was an essential greatness in that neglected bardic literature which O'Grady was the first to reveal in a noble manner" (xii). While O'Grady was the first to reveal it in a noble manner, Russell was the first to reveal it in drama. Deirdre: A Legend in Three Acts was first performed in 1902, and represents the first time Deirdre appeared on the stage. The play is a curious blend of Irish Theosophical theory and Victorian prudery. It is a product of a man who in 1884 began experiencing

visions of cosmic happenings and other worlds (Summerfield 11-12), of a man who believed in the power of Celtic myth to turn the Irish away from Catholic dogmatism (Eglinton 52), and of a man who believed in the "good story" approach to myth. After being introduced to the theories of Madame Blavatsky and her Theosophical doctrines, Russell came to believe that there was a pattern encoded in the archetypes of the ancient texts, and an exploration of these stories would help usher in a new age in Ireland, free of denominational conflict.

Madame Blavatsky, Meet Deirdre

Neither Catholic nor Protestant, Russell was rather a spiritualist who enjoyed meditation and had faith in the unseen. In 1884, he met Yeats who introduced Russell to the teaching of Madame Blavatsky and the lore of the Theosophists. Just prior to his introduction to the Theosophists, Russell began having "waking dreams." In these dreams, he believed another self was trying to enter his consciousness, a self of arcane wisdom and noble spirit. He would later come to think of this psyche as a multiplicity of beings (Song and its Foundations 8-9, 15-17, 25).

Is Russell somehow echoing here the concept of the collective unconscious? Jung states that archetypes of the collective unconscious are primordial ideas with universal images that have existed since remotest times, and that esoteric teaching is a means of translating the contents of the collective unconscious into conscious images (ACU 5). Russell was in fact familiar with Jung, claiming that he was continually excited by Jung's

theories. In an article entitled "Jung," Russell questions whether the images of the collective unconscious (called the Anima Mundi by Russell), are somehow activated by a particular psychic affinity in a person (The Living Torch 293). Each person's psyche is different, comprised of images derived from one's personal history. People will therefore respond differently to different images based on their own experience. Everyone's psychic affinity is therefore different. Whereas one person might respond to Naoise, for example, another might not relate to him at all. For Russell, understanding his own psychic affinity would help explain the images he received in his waking dreams. In Candle of Vision, Russell admits to seeing "pure and shining faces, dazzling processions of figures" (28). Russell hoped that Theosophist teaching would help interpret his visions.

Russell was not initially concerned with Irish pre-history and its heroes. The first published volume of his poetry has no Irish content. But in an article entitled "Legends of Ancient Eire," (Irish Theosophist March/April 1885), we see the beginning of his rapidly growing belief that his country is sacred. He believed there were certain geographic locations in the world which are inherently sacred - India, Central America - and he came to believe that Ireland was on the list (Summerfield 75). Following Blavatsky's model from The Secret Doctrine, the bible of Theosophist theory, Russell began interpreting Irish mythology as an ancient version of Blavatsky's account of creation (Summerfield 63).

According to Blavatsky, the varying accounts of creation from different cultures can trace their roots back to one prototypical formula which she called the Secret Doctrine. This doctrine, which embodied the whole truth about the universe, appears in all scriptures and philosophy, and there have been initiates in all religions who are aware of the doctrine and

incorporate it into their writings (Summerfield 41). Once Russell became more familiar with the ancient texts, he used Blavatsky's formula to develop his own code for interpreting the material.

Combining his knowledge of the texts and mythology gleaned from O'Grady, Russell's theory blends Celtic mythology with esoteric mysticism. The Absolute is manifested in Lir, god of the ocean; Mananan, Dana and Angus (all of whom appear in his play), are the Absolute's primal emanations. The gods of Irish myth, he believed, are the key to the secret doctrine (Summerfield 63).

Russell's interpretation of Celtic mythology based on Theosophist theory manifested itself in both his private and public life. Privately, Theosophist teaching provided him with a means of interpreting his visions. That he was able to approach his visions armed with an understanding of the ancient texts was a bonus. Publicly, he was able to use myth to help transform the consciousness of the nation. That was his intent, at least. Whereas Yeats would hope to use the myths to inspire a non-sectarian nationalism in the people, Russell hoped to improve their spiritual lot. He believed the tyranny of the Church was poisoning the life of the people. He saw and had experienced the battle of Protestant and Catholic. Resenting Christianity as a whole, Russell believed the people should emulate the heroes of the past, Cuchullain and Oisin, their true ancestors (Kain and O'Brien 55-6). According to his friend (and sometime enemy) John Eglinton, Russell truly believed that a resurgence of the old heroic spirit would overthrow the dogmatic tenets of both Protestantism and Catholicism that were currently controlling the minds of the Irish people (52).

But more than that, Russell saw the growth of interest in Celtic mythology as an aid in ushering in a new age. Probably in 1896 (Summerfield 74), Russell experienced a particularly powerful vision, telling him of the coming of an "Avatar," a mystic or messiah who would change the spirit of Ireland (Candle of Vision 98-101). In a letter to Yeats concerning this Avatar, he wrote, "the gods... have been seen... they will awaken the magical instincts everywhere, and the universal heart of the people will turn to the old druidic beliefs" (Denson 17-18). According to Jung, archetypal literature contributes to the psychic health of a community. When there is an imbalance in the collective unconsciousness of a nation, archetypal images appear in folk-tales and formal literature (Snider 3). In Russell's opinion, the psychic health of Ireland was in jeopardy because of the dogmatism of Christianity, but could be cured by embracing the old druidic beliefs and emulating the heroes of the ancient past.

In light of Jung's theory, and recognizing Russell's belief in the coming Avatar and the power of myths, it is not surprising that he turned to Deirdre. In this ancient text, as in all the old stories, he saw chivalry and a love of truth. It was not only an exemplum for his fellow countrymen, but there was enough of a lost symbolic doctrine that could usher in the age of the new Avatar.

Deirdre: the Character, or Lack Thereof

Deirdre appeared on the stage almost by default. The first and second acts of the play were published in The All-Ireland Review in 1901. Russell was approached by the Fay

brothers requesting permission to perform it and asking that he finish it (Kuch 193-4). It was a fortunate meeting. The fate of the Irish Literary Theatre was in peril. Yeats's and Moore's Diarmuid and Grania was a disaster. The Irish press and, indeed, their fellow writers, drowning in a sea of Victorian prudery, objected to its modernization, the portrayal of the Fianna, the ancient band of heroic warriors, and the frank sexuality of the play. No one seemed concerned that the authors were following the school of thought which espoused maintaining the integrity of the original texts (Kuch 192-3). With the appearance of Deirdre: A Legend in Three Acts, Russell might very well have saved the theatre. According to Peter Kavanagh, it was the "spark which really set the dramatic movement alight" (quoted in Kain and O'Brien 30).

An interesting choice of metaphor, for not even the staunchest defender of Deirdre could claim there is any fire in it - no intensity, no passion. The barbarous woman whose sexual desire is awakened by the sight of a slaughtered calf (in LMnU) has become a vacant and whiny naif in Russell's version. Throughout the centuries of redactions, Deirdre had gone from a barbaric and vigorously sexual woman to a romantic and tragic figure. Russell continues this transformation on the stage, but he takes it too far (Kuch 199). By paying too much attention to the notion of a "good story," and believing sexuality had no place in a narrative of Celtic heroes, he destroys the dynamic personality of its heroine.

From her first appearance in "Longes Mac N-Uislenn," there has been controversy concerning Deirdre, both in terms of how the authors chose to present her and how the critics chose to interpret her: archetypal goddess figure (Mac Cana "Women" 9); Eve transgressing against male authority (Herbert 61); an Irish Helen, who by choosing another

man starts a war; Andromeda, sacrificial virgin for a sea monster (Conchubar), who is rescued by Perseus (Naoise), (Reynolds 15); or Erin itself, needing rescuing from big, bad England. The possibilities are stimulating. Russell, however, chose to ignore both Deirdre's potential as political icon, as well as her original barbarous qualities, and instead presents a mystical young woman, ignorant of the prophecy, and decent to a fault.

Russell casts Deirdre as a peculiar blend of innocent ingenue and a modern day Cassandra, the seer whose curse it was that her prophecies would never be believed. When Deirdre first appears, she is waxing poetic about the beautiful day and her bountiful happiness. There is no tension, no longing for what might be. Even when Conchubar appears, her one concern seems to be whether she is "frightful to look upon" (10). As Mercier so sardonically points out, she would "not be out of place in a parish magazine" (223), for this is a Victorian love story.

Deirdre is, in fact, sexless (Kuch 201). Instead of wooing Naoise face to face, or entrancing him with her noble beauty, she very modestly meets him in a dream and gives him directions to her house. Even so, she's not consumed by the image of Naoise, but needs Levarcham's guidance in interpreting her dream and asks repeated questions, "What has disturbed your mind, dear fostermother? What do I have to do with the Red Branch?" (16), "You confuse my mind... with your speech of joy and sorrow" (17), "Will he live here with us?" (17). Deirdre is, like Jung's Kore, an empty, glittering vessel (ACU 199). Completely passive, Deirdre waits for things to happen and for people to tell her what to do. Like the Kore, Deirdre is not altogether human in the usual sense (ACU 186), as Levarcham says, "[she] is one of the immortals" (13). And like the Kore, she is doomed to die, although

neither she nor Naoise believe in the prophecy and they walk off into the sunset to the sound of birds chirping. She is not the Deirdre of legend, doing her own will and coming into her sense of Self; she instead waits for Levarcham and Naoise to work things out. Once they have, she is happily abducted and she and the sons of Usnach leave for Alba.

The Honourable Naoise

While Deirdre was favourably received by the Irish press, The Daily Express (3 April 1902) pointed out that "there is altogether too much Deirdre, too many visions and dismal forebodings." These visions and forebodings almost sum up the dialogue of Acts II and III. These acts appear as one long debate between Deirdre and Naoise concerning their fate. Deirdre speaks vague and mystical pronouncements about their doom, while Naoise stands firm in his faith in the male code of honour of the Red Branch knights. Naoise is an archetypal character, the hero who rescues the damsel, although here she's not really in distress. Handsome and honourable, he is the perfect mate for Deirdre. When he decides to elope, she agrees; when he decides to return, she obeys, mewling, "Never again will I seek to stay thee. But speak to me with love once more" (35).

Naoise is a far more successful character archetype than Deirdre in terms of Russell's desire to provide Irish heroes worthy of emulation. From beginning to end, Naoise acts with the highest honour. When he first meets Deirdre and is reminded of the prophecy concerning her, Naoise disregards it as one "made by Druids in their dotage" (20). He determines to stay where he is and tell Conchubar of his love for Deirdre out of respect for

the king. He escapes to Alba only to avoid war with his compatriots in the Red Branch. After three years in exile he is unhappy because he fears that Conchubar may think him weak. In Naoise's mind, were Conchubar to hold such a belief, then Naoise would lose honour.

The same commitment to the code of honour can be seen in the trust Naoise bestows on Conchubar. When the lovers return, Naoise consistently trusts in Conchubar's honour to do the lovers no harm, for if the king were to act against them, it would indicate lack of kingly honour, something Naoise believes Conchubar would never countenance.

When Naoise must finally admit that Conchubar intends to have the lovers killed, he informs Deirdre that she must "meet it with calm," (47) and refuses to carry Deirdre to safety until he has rid the Red Branch of an untrustworthy king. Naoise might have succeeded in killing Conchubar had not the druids been employed to cast a spell which makes the sons of Usnach believe they are drowning. In the end the betrayal is two-fold: Conchubar reneges on his promise to forgive the lovers; the druids cast the enchantment which causes the death of the sons of Usnach.

Throughout the entire play, whether Naoise is dealing with Conchubar, Deirdre, the king's slaves or members of his own clan, Naoise maintains his honour and integrity. As archetype he is the Hero, treating all men with honour, whether friend or enemy, and it is this system of honour that Russell considers worth copying. The noble principles embodied in such heroes as Naoise and Cuchullain could show the Irish how to maintain honour in the face of adversity, even in the face of death. In treating the king with respect up to the end, Naoise succeeds where Conchubar fails. Russell casts Conchubar as the once honourable

king who cannot maintain his integrity in the face of adversity, as an illustration of what happens when honour is rejected.

Through his treatment of Naoise as an archetypal hero figure, Russell is able to convey the attraction of honourable action. Nevertheless, because the archetypal heroic action is accompanied by devastating consequences for Ireland, Russell is also offering a cautionary lesson to those in his audience who might be involved in radical political activity.

Conchubar

When the lovers return, we are greeted by a slightly hysterical Levarcham whose lies, according to Russell, initiate the final stage of the tragedy. Conchubar is ready to forgive the lovers, but rescinds his decision when he learns that, contrary to what Levarcham has told him, Deirdre has maintained her beauty. In light of Conchubar's actions up to this point, his decision makes no sense. In the first act, we learn that his motivation for hiding Deirdre away is to protect the integrity of the Red Branch knights. The druids want to kill her, but Conchubar decides that "the chivalry of the Red Branch knights would already be gone if [Deirdre] were slain" (11). There is no hint that he wants her for himself; only that he wants to protect the honour of his warrior band.

When Conchubar sends Fergus to bring the lovers and all of clan Usnach home, there is no treachery intended. Rather, he wants all the warriors together so he can create a united kingdom. It was his purpose to "bring the five provinces under the sway of the Red Branch, and there shall be but one kingdom in Eri between the seas" (Deirdre 39). Suddenly,

he is willing to destroy the Red Branch knights and his desire for one kingdom because he has been told that Deirdre is still beautiful. Thematically, Conchubar's tragic decision is groundless.

In the third act he claims that the reason he will kill them is to "see a broken law set straight" (41). As Kuch notes, because Conchubar's transformation from treacherous old king of LMnU to Russell's law-giver is only partially achieved, serious inconsistencies arise. For no apparent reason, he switches from ostensible law-giver into the worst of law-breakers, and this rapid alteration between justice and revenge weakens the plot (200).

Conchubar as archetype is far less successful than Naoise. He is not a Jungian wise old man nor Terrible Father figure. Neither is he an archetypal Irish king battling an evil enemy. Conchubar sacrifices the unification of all Ireland in the name of revenge, though he insists he is simply upholding the law. An interesting parallel may again be drawn here between Russell's text and contemporary Ireland. The sectarianism of early twentieth-century Ireland continued to undermine the dreams of a united Ireland, free not only of English domination but also of its own internal religious divisions. Is that so different from Conchubar sacrificing his vision of uniting the five provinces in the name of the law? In this respect, Conchubar is not so much a man to be admired like Naoise, but an example of what can happen to society at large when personal beliefs remain unchecked. In his treatment of both Naoise and Conchubar, Russell allows his characters to resonate with contemporary political concerns. An archetypal reading of Russell's Deirdre shows that Naoise is a far more successful character archetype than either Deirdre or Conchubar. Deirdre as Victorian ingenue does little to endear her to modern audiences. She emerges as a weak young woman

whose only contribution to the plot is her repeated warnings not to trust the king. For his part, Conchubar's sudden and inexplicable decision to kill the lovers poses serious difficulties with an archetypal interpretation of his character. Naoise, however, is very much the archetypal hero and emerges as the one saving grace in a plot weakened by two characters: one insipid and one inconsistent. By adopting the "good story" theory, Russell weakens the archetypal potential, but the political implications are still quite audible.

The "Good Story" Difficulty

There are two problems associated with the "good story" as employed by Russell. The first concerns the very essence of the Deirdre legend. O'Grady claimed that the audacity and freedom of the ancient texts were more exhilarating than any Greek legend. Yet in Russell's Deirdre, there is very little audacity; the boldness and spunk of the characters from LMnU have been replaced by upright and moral personalities. If it was the intent of writers such as O'Grady and Russell to bring the ancient stories to modern audiences, they failed in capturing the mood and feelings from the original texts. As Jeffares points out, O'Grady emasculated the texts and foisted morality upon them (Anglo-Irish Literature 149). The Deirdre redactions which emerged in late nineteenth-century Ireland thus bore little resemblance to the original texts. Influenced by such greats as O'Grady, many of these writers adopted his belief that the heroes from mythic prehistory should be portrayed as romantic, yet asexual; brave, but not barbaric.

This emasculation of the texts leads to the second problem of the "good story" theory. Russell believes in theory that the texts contain heroes worthy of emulation. In practice he must not have really believed them to be paragons of virtue, for he removes much of the meatier details of the texts. In a way, Russell is therefore misleading Dublin audiences. The heroes are worthy of emulation, but only to a degree. It would not be seemly, for example, for Deirdre to boldly woo Naoise with talk of bulls and heifers, so instead in Russell's version, she meets him in a dream. The hussy from LMnU would hardly be a heroine appropriate on the Irish stage. As the audience would have little or no knowledge of the original, they would be tempted to believe what they saw - very polite characters speaking very prim and decorous lines.

In "The Antecedents of History," from The Living Torch, Russell questions, "what does it matter whether Cuchulain, Deirdre or Meave ever lived or acted on earth, as legend relates of them? They are immortals and find bodies from generation to generation" (134). With the exception of Naoise, the bodies that Russell chose his immortals to inhabit are idealized. The characters represent late Victorian notions. Their idealization is in terms of a particular time and place when characters and dialogue must be proper. But the lack of dramatic tension reduces the play to the level of lyric sequence. Whereas Naoise has the dignity of dying an interesting death, battling imagined waves conjured up by the druids, Deirdre simply lies down next to him and expires "with indecent haste" (Mercier 224). It would not be seemly for Deirdre to bash her brains out against a rock as she did in LMnU.

For a woman whose story and personality had the power to excite authors for generations, Deirdre, in this play, is a mere shadow of her potential. The reason that the

immortals found bodies through the years was the interesting and complex dynamics of their lives. By removing the characters from the often barbarous and sexual world in which they lived, Russell has, in the end, taken away the "inner significance" (Gibbon 47) that he considered made them so important.

It is difficult, for example, to discover the archetypal significance of Deirdre as ingenue. She is far more powerful as Erin or Eve. Conchubar is slightly more successful as an illustration of what can befall a nation when there is a strict adherence to creed, but as archetype, he too fails. Naoise provides the best example of character as archetype. He is the Hero whose sole guiding principle is honour. In Russell's view Naoise is one of the immortals who are Ireland's true ancestors, not the Christian clergy who were poisoning Irish life. Naoise shows that honourable action is rooted in Ireland's pagan past and is therefore non-sectarian, but in imitating heros like him, there may be bloody consequences. An uncritical emulation of Naoise's honour without the moderating force of intellect can wreak disaster.

Dublin audiences saw the next dramatic treatment of the legend with W.B. Yeats's Deirdre. Both Russell and Yeats saw the possibilities implicit in the cultural, yet non-sectarian archetypes encoded within the legend. Russell essentially focuses on Naoise and the ideology of heroism. In the end, as Russell's Deirdre makes clear, Russell could not fully reconcile his attachment to the heroic archetype with his perception that unmediated heroic action might cause some difficulties. Yeats, in his version, focuses on Deirdre as icon who could usher in a "Unity of Culture." In Yeats's Deirdre, we return to the powerful and

enigmatic heroine more reminiscent of her original appearance. Yeats adds to Russell's archetypes a complexity of vision.

CHAPTER FOUR

Yeats's Deirdre

Deirdre: A Legend in Three Acts is in every way a "proper" play. Naoise is the brave hero; Conchubar is, marginally, a good king who operates on the level of law-giver; Deirdre is the airy-fairy heroine. Lacking psychological motivation or dark emotions, it is a very pretty play with upstanding characters who could show Dublin theatre-goers the proper way to behave. The Deirdre legend provided Russell with non-sectarian images, symbols of Ireland before the coming of Christianity, of an Ireland that once was and could be again if people would only turn away from religious dogmatism.

Similarly, W.B. Yeats embraced the potential of the archetypes in ancient myths to provide non-sectarian images. However, in Yeats's Deirdre, it is much easier to recognize both Jungian archetypes and Yeats's use of cultural archetypes than in Russell's version. Like Russell, Yeats believed that Ireland did not need symbols which were rooted in Christian mythology, for Christian symbols only served to further divide an already troubled country. Yeats believed that pre-Christian symbols had the power to unite the nation on a cultural rather than political level. Ancient symbols derived from a time before Christianity could inspire the nation on a secular level. With this in mind, Yeats turned to the heroes and heroines of the distant past and the passions that controlled them.

In Jungian terms, Yeats's characters display archetypal emotions: love, jealousy, and faith. When they collide, the world explodes. Yeats's use of archetypal passion is in keeping with one important facet of his aesthetic. He believed that poetry, and hence drama, should be universal, not individual. A poet, he believed, should take inspiration from types of great

emotion rather than individual personality (Welsh 66). As such, he sought out the archetypes behind the myths, the universal emotion or pattern imbedded within the myth itself. Paradoxically, this seems in direct contrast to his belief in an Irish "Unity of Being," and his desire for a "Unity of Culture." He had hopes that a revival of the ancient myths would provide the touchstone for uniting the nation. As he said in "The Galway Plains," "a community [is] bound together... by a past of great passions which can still waken the heart to imaginative action" (Jeffares, ed. Selected Criticism 129). For Yeats, dramatizing the primordial archetypes through the medium of cultural myths would show the nation that it could unite. Jungian criticism of Yeats's Deirdre will show that Yeats hoped to improve the psychic life of the community by uniting the Irish people under a common bond.

A Jungian interpretation of Yeats's play reveals Jung's theories at work on three levels. Firstly, Yeats's play is structured on a series of opposites: man and woman, darkness and light. Secondly, Yeats employs Jungian archetypes which he manifests as primal emotions: love, jealousy, trust. Thirdly, Yeats understood that utilization of the archetypes could help improve the psychic life of the community. In terms of the Irish question, this improvement of society translated into uniting the nation behind a cultural icon - Deirdre - whose Irishness derives from the pagan past, removed from the particular divisions of Yeats's world.

Yeats and Jung

Although contemporaries, it is unlikely that Yeats and Jung ever met, yet they share many ideas. In The Rhizome and the Flower, James Olney offers a very detailed

investigation of the connections between the beliefs of these two men. They both believe, for example, in the existence of primordial archetypes and their corresponding symbols. What Jung calls the "collective unconscious," Yeats calls the "anima mundi." There is agreement between them on Jung's theory of the shadow archetype, and Yeats's doctrine of the Mask. Yeats's poetic aesthetic often echoes Jung's psychological theory. By understanding Yeats's beliefs in the anima mundi and archetypal patterns, we will understand how he used these primal emotions in his Deirdre.

Yeats devotes much of his prose writings to his concepts of the Great Memory, the Great Mind, and Unity of Culture. What Jung refers to as the collective unconscious, Yeats calls the Anima Mundi or Great Memory. This Great Memory is composed of collective images that are archetypal and mythological. Independent of individual memory, these images constitute a Unity of Image which could serve as the originating symbol of a national literature (Kearney 24-5). Once adopted by the poets, this Unity of Image would form a Unity of Culture. Adjunct to this theory of the Great Memory is Yeats's concept of the Great Tradition, an Irish tradition which is in contact with the accumulated memories of generations (19).

Like Jung, Yeats recognized the difference between the individual and collective memory. For Yeats, the collective soul (Anima Mundi) and the human soul (Anima Hominis) constantly overlap (Welsh 61). The human soul is able to draw images and symbols from this connection with the collective soul, and Irish mythology, told in the stories of the peasants, reveals in symbol the archetypes of the Anima Mundi. As Yeats says in the introduction to Lady Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirthemne, "... the great virtues, the

great joys, the great privations come in the myths" (15), and he gives them to us, almost undiluted, in his version of the Deirdre story.

Before addressing the text of Deirdre itself, it is important to consider one more similarity between Yeats and Jung: their belief that the world is ordered on a system of opposites. As Jung says, "... so far as I can pass judgement on my own point of view... it is not monistic but, if anything, dualistic, being based on the principle of opposites (Freud and Psychoanalysis par. 758). In fact, he thought in terms of rigid opposites, with the female, Eros, emotion on one side, countered by the male, Logos, and reason on the other. Furthermore, Jung's archetypes were dualistic in nature, that is, they could be positive or negative, good or evil. The mother archetype, for example, could be manifest as the goddess or the witch. Yeats's concept of opposites is slightly more complicated and was not codified until he published A Vision in 1925, nearly twenty years after completing Deirdre.

Yeats, like Jung, believed the world could be viewed as a series of opposites. This is demonstrated in his doctrine of the Mask - each person is composed of the self and the anti-self, the ego and the persona, reality and the Mask. He would later form a more complex version of this idea as he patterned his theory of opposites in the form of two interconnecting, opposite gyres (or cones): the Primary gyre and the Antithetical gyre. In terms of his theory of the Mask, the Primary gyre is the mask of the Antithetical gyre. They are the opposite of each other, but are always connected (Unterecker 25). The symbol of syzygies is Jung's comparable element here, male/female pairs of deities, paired opposites.

In summary, a Jungian investigation of Yeats's Deirdre reveals archetypes at work on three levels: in Yeats's use of opposites; in Yeats's adaptation of archetypal primal

emotions manifest in the three primary characters, and Yeats's belief that archetypal Deirdre as cultural icon could contribute to the consolidation of the Irish people under the umbrella "Unity of Culture."

Opposites

Contrary to Russell, Yeats's version of Deirdre is a one-act play that begins "in medias res." The curtain rises with the lovers' return to Emain Macha. The story of Deirdre and Naoise prior to the action is summarized in a conversation between Fergus and three musicians who function as a chorus. This background allows the audience to understand the legend up to the point when Yeats begins his drama. Deirdre soon arrives, and Yeats's use of opposites becomes immediately apparent.

The basic opposition in Deirdre is man vs. woman and the myriad symbols that are able to be derived from this opposition. The play opens with the lovers' arriving at a guest-house in the woods. The stage is unlit, save for a brazier of light surrounded by three female musicians. The pattern of opposites is laid out from the beginning. On one side of the unlit room is a chessboard; on the other side of the stage, a lighted brazier. Fire is a visible symbol of a woman's sensibility, here indicative of enlightenment. When the lovers arrive, Fergus and Naoise move to the unlit side of the room and Deirdre goes to the women and the light. This layout of light and dark signifies what will happen thematically throughout the rest of the play.

On one side of the room there will be light, women, realism, intuition, and the individuating power of love. On the other side of the stage there will be darkness, men, blind trust, and the depersonalizing influence of the male code of honour. Just as the brazier serves as a metaphor for women, so is the chessboard emblematic of men, representing code, decorum, rules, strategy. As darkness falls, the torches are lit throughout the room, but just as the "day's grey end" (63) represents the coming death of the lovers, so do the newly lit torches represent the lovers' growing courage. With the light comes the realization that Conchubar has tricked them all. The opposing passions are now at their strongest as Deirdre tries everything to keep her love alive, while the betrayal of Naoise's trust forces him to battle the king. The archetypal pattern of light and dark, women and men, connected but antithetical, form the basic design of the play.

Though the system of opposites plays out thematically in Deirdre, it also operates on another level. Jung insists that archetypes are not inherently good or evil, but contain both positive and negative qualities (ACU 82). How they appear in images is dependent on mitigating factors. In Yeats's Deirdre, archetypal passions produce positive and negative results which originate from one primal emotion. Deirdre's love for Naoise, for example, will cause her to don any mask to save him, while her love means she will ultimately choose death over life without him. Naoise's trust in the king initially requires that he maintain faith in Conchubar, even though all signs point to Conchubar's duplicity. Naoise's lost faith leads to disastrous results, however, as battle erupts and Emain Macha is destroyed. Thus Jung's notion of the complexity of the archetype is given dramatic form in Yeats's Deirdre. It is the opposing forces that make up the archetypal passions that wreak havoc in Yeats's play.

ARCHETYPAL EMOTIONS

In an essay entitled "First Principles," Yeats maintains that "... the subject of all art is passion, and a passion can only be contemplated when separated by itself, purified of all but itself, and aroused into a perfect intensity by opposition with some other passion" (Selected Criticism 142). The passions aroused in Yeats's Deirdre represent three primal emotions: Deirdre's love; Conchubar's jealousy; and Naoise's faith. These passions do not simply oppose one another, however. They fight to the death.

Deirdre: Love

While symbols of opposites form the structure of Deirdre, it is passionate, unambiguous emotion which controls the plot. Up until now, we have addressed Deirdre in terms of her representation of an archetypal female, as Eve, Erin or ingenue. Yeats's Deirdre, however, will be considered in terms of her one archetypal, ruling passion: love. For Yeats, underlying passion is more significant than the particulars of character because archetypal emotions are connected to the Great Mind or Memory (Welsh 58). And Deirdre is connected through the most powerful emotion of all.

Love has been the motivating factor of Deirdre's life. She tempts fate for love of Naoise, and presumably returns to what she believes is a certain death for them both for love of him. Because the play begins with their return, we are not given the reasons for her

decision. But throughout it, we are witnesses to her determination to keep Naoise and their love alive by assuming different roles as the situation demands. This is an interesting approach to the typical use of role-playing as metaphor. Role playing is most often used as an image to convey duplicity, self-deception or emotional superficiality. Yeats, however, uses it as a metaphor for intensity of feeling (Cave 6). The strength of her love for Naoise gives her the ability to change roles as the situation demands.

When she has inferred from the musicians that Conchubar intends to make her his wife, Deirdre first calmly reasons with Naoise. She is shocked to discover that he cannot see what is so plainly obvious to her. When this fails, she attempts to arouse his jealousy by suggesting that "[she] put on beauty; yes, for Conchubar" (58). She then proceeds to threaten to mar her beauty. When Conchubar arrives, she switches again, this time into a meek and humble woman, begging for her husband's life. After Naoise is killed, she dons the most important mask of all, that of demure and seductive queen, ostensibly brought under Conchubar's will, but in effect, planning her own suicide.

Deirdre, then, is the consummate actress, playing different roles as the situation demands. In an article on the lack of real tragedy in Anglo-Irish drama, Serpillo suggests that the Mask of Medusa is an apt metaphor to describe the state of the drama. In Greek tragedy, there is one mask for tragedy and one for comedy. There is a third mask, however, and that is the Mask of Medusa, neither tragic, nor comic, it contains elements of both. It is the mask of metamorphosis, or ambiguity (148). The Mask of Medusa can very well be used as a metaphor to describe Deirdre, altering the masks as she battles the ruling passions in her opponents. When Deirdre first appears, she wears the mask of tragedy because she suspects

Conchubar's treachery and believes that, if true, his duplicitous actions will initiate a period of disorder and violence. She then adopts the mask of beguiling lover, and finally the mask of the resigned queen who ostensibly accepts her position as Conchubar's future wife. She is, in fact, the queen of metamorphosis, donning masks to keep up with changing circumstances. Through it all, however, behind the mask, is her undying love for Naoise, and she uses the masks to fight Conchubar's primal passion - jealousy.

Conchubar: Jealousy

In Yeats's theoretical Primary and Antithetical gyre paradigm, Deirdre and Conchubar would face each other on opposite poles, staring straight at each other. They are mirror images of each other; both express their ruling passions with intelligence, and through cunning manipulation of events (Cave 8). They are both actors, able and willing to adopt any mask for their benefit. Whereas Naoise is blinded by his faith in Conchubar's word as king, Deirdre immediately recognizes Conchubar's plan for what it is - to make her his wife. Freed from the strictures of the male code of honour, she can understand that Conchubar, the king with an "iron tongue" (60), would never bend. He is consumed by his one ruling passion, his jealousy. In Jungian terms, his shadow is in total control, and has been for the many years the lovers have been gone.

Critics disagree about Conchubar's nature in Deirdre, although there is general agreement that jealousy is the motivating force in his life. Cave contends that Conchubar is more than the simple villain of the play, but his supporting arguments in fact prove that is

exactly what Conchubar is (7-8). Since the lovers eloped, Conchubar has managed to hide his jealousy, so much so that Fergus is firmly convinced that Conchubar has forgiven Deirdre and Naoise. At no point does Conchubar give the lovers any quarter, from the killing of Naoise to coldly informing Deirdre, "Come to my house now, Deirdre,/For he that called himself your husband's dead" (69). He is very much the villain, betraying the lovers and Fergus, sacrificing his kingdom for the sake of revenge, and feeling absolutely no remorse in doing so, as he says at the end, "I, being King, did right" (73).

In "Deirdre: The Rigour of Logic," Clark suggests that Conchubar actually loved Deirdre, even though that love was completely self-centered. He is never concerned with Deirdre's happiness (101-3). However, just as Conchubar's love for Deirdre is never mentioned in Russell's play, neither is it an issue in Yeats's version. The closest Yeats comes to implying any love at all is Conchubar's first words, "One woman and two men; that is the quarrel/That knows no mending" (65). The issue is not that Conchubar loved her, or that the lovers broke the law (as in Russell), but that Deirdre chose Naoise, "Because of his beauty and the strength of his youth" (65).

In fact, Conchubar is not simply jealous that Deirdre chose Naoise over him, but that she chose a young and handsome man. The initial conversation between the three is centered on the fact that Naoise is in the prime of his life, while Conchubar is old. The vengeful king of Russell's version has become the thwarted suitor in Yeats's play, who, "after seven years/Of longing and of planning here and there... and watching my own face/That none might read it" (67), has become the Terrible Father figure. As Knapp contends, the trauma he felt due to the humiliation of their elopement festered until, behind

the mask of a pardoning parent, he was, in fact, the devouring male. As Whitmont explains, feelings of possessiveness, envy, jealousy and the compulsion to subdue are all indications of a patriarchal ego (Symbolic Quest 86). As king, Conchubar has the ability, and perhaps the right, to subdue and conquer those who aroused his long-festering ire. He uses his knowledge of Fergus and Naoise's belief in the code of honour to manipulate the men to his advantage. As the archetypal villain, he gives no quarter, and feels no remorse. Recognizing that Naoise's fealty is the means to bring him down, Conchubar appeals to Naoise's ruling passion - trust.

Naoise: Trust

One can only wonder at Naoise's supreme stupidity. In fact, until Synge chose to have the lovers' return to escape the inevitability of old age, no Deirdre version showed Naoise as anything other than a naive, all-too-trusting hero who foolishly believes in Conchubar's assurances of safety. Apparently no author could envision an alternative to this tragic flaw: blind faith. It seems the only rational excuse to explain Naoise's behaviour. When it is obvious to Deirdre that a return to Emain Macha means certain death, unswerving trust in Conchubar is the only excuse for Naoise's lack of vision. Like other Deirdre authors, Yeats sees no alternative to Naoise's decision.

When Naoise appears, he and Fergus retire to the "male" side of the stage where darkness and delusion have control. And it is there that Naoise remains in his howling ignorance, constantly rejecting Deirdre's enlightened pleas for him to see reality. Naoise thus

becomes Deirdre's second, and in many ways, more dangerous opponent. As she tells the musicians, it was "my husband's will/I show my trust in one that may be here" (53). It had been his decision to return and his to remain, though all signs point to their impending doom. Deirdre must battle the very person she is trying to save. And it is her one passion, love for her husband, that battles his one passion, blind faith. Naoise's moral code is an enemy of love.

Whereas both Conchubar and Deirdre are consummate actors, Naoise is exactly what he seems, a scrupulous man trusting his king. Bound by oath and his own concept of honour, his choice of action is limited. Not bound by a code of honour, Deirdre is free to act as she chooses. Moore calls Naoise the "center of gravity" of the play (147) whose steadfast beliefs determine the moves of the vacillating actors. He is grounded in what he believes to be an inviolable oath, one he assumes Conchubar still believes in. Tragically, Conchubar knows that Naoise is an honourable man and can plan his vengeance around Naoise's predictable trust.

Cave suggests that Naoise as well as Fergus must have trust in Conchubar, to doubt him would call into question the very foundation upon which their lives are based (8). As trust is Naoise's controlling archetypal emotion, he must maintain his faith, until the messenger arrives to finally destroy Naoise's delusion and informs them that only Deirdre and Fergus are summoned to supper. If Naoise had expressed any doubt prior to this, it would have meant a loss of his own honour, the cornerstone of his makeup.

Ironically, it is only Naoise, the "center of gravity" of the play who is forced to sacrifice his soul's underlying passion. The two master thespians are able to stay true to

theirs: Deirdre adopts her final role as seductive queen to ensure a "secret wilderness of their love" (72); Conchubar's jealousy has killed the lovers, but still he can claim "you are all traitors, all against me" (72) and feel no remorse at his deeds. Neither Deirdre's love nor Conchubar's jealousy is extinguished by their deaths; it is Naoise alone who is forced to sacrifice his passion. In this respect, Naoise emerges as the most tragic figure in Yeats's play. Conchubar lives with his jealousy after the lovers have died; Deirdre chooses death rather than relinquishing her love. Before his death, Naoise realizes that Conchubar is unworthy of his loyalty, but to fight Conchubar means abandoning his primary passion - trust.

Deirdre's Message

Since Yeats adopted Deirdre as cultural icon, it is difficult not to draw a socio-political message from Deirdre, though Yeats would vehemently deny any political connotations associated with his plays. As Kearney notes, part of Yeats's agenda was to take the subversive harm out the potential political ramifications of nationalist icons like Deirdre (26). It is fine to see her as an Irish image, as Erin calling the men of Ireland to set her free. It is another thing entirely to have those men go out and revolt.

The legend of Deirdre and Naoise is a tale of passionate love, but it is also a tragedy of revolt (Mathelin 169). Two individuals rebel against society manifest in the kingship of Conchubar. Though they might have the moral right on their side, it is prophesied that their union will ultimately cause the break-up of a nation. In simple terms, to rebel against

authority, whether legitimate or not, is to invite certain disaster. In Yeats's opinion, this maxim is as true for contemporary Ireland as it was for pre-Christian Ireland. Even with the noblest of intentions, radical nationalism can only lead to tragedy.

It was not Yeats's intent with Deirdre to provide Irish nationals with a rallying call. After the debacle wrought by the fall of Parnell, Yeats saw the future of nationalism in a "Unity of Culture," believing that cultural revolution was far less violent than political agitation. The primordial images of ancient Celtic mythology pre-dated subsequent historical divisions, and to recognize their potential was the first step on a path toward cultural unity, one that could include peasant and nobleman; Catholic and Protestant; Yeats and Edward Martyn.

In early twentieth-century Ireland, the Anglo-Irish Ascendency was experiencing a growing feeling of displacement. To the English they were Irish, but to the majority of their fellow countrymen, the Anglo-Irish were descendants of English colonizers. Men such as Yeats sought to find a place for themselves within the parameters of developing nationhood. Yeats's belief in a "Unity of Culture" would allow him a cultural position in Ireland, whereas the nationalist agitation would marginalize him (Cairns and Richards 58, 63-7). A cultural revival based on apolitical symbols such as Deirdre could serve as communal images. Archetypes that existed independent of, and prior, to contemporary political and national ideology could be the rallying call in a country fraught with internal religious strife.

Yeats's contribution to the Deirdre canon was to recast her as a powerful Irish archetype on the Dublin stage. She was transformed from Victorian ingenue in Russell's version to an intriguing and sexually mature woman in Yeats's, a heroine whose appeal was

national, but not "nationalistic" in terms of the contemporary political lexicon. Synge's contribution to her development was the re-introduction of the barbarous qualities inherent in the LMnU original. He reinvents Deirdre as the "Noble Savage," a woman at one with nature, totally in control of her own destiny, who chooses her fate rather than allow it to be dictated to her.

CHAPTER FIVE

Synge's Deirdre of the Sorrows

J.M. Synge can arguably be called the uncrowned king of the peasant drama and defender of their faith. Eschewing Yeats's romantic aesthetic and heroic protagonists, Synge's drama gives center stage to the vagabond, tramp and tinker, representatives of the people he found on the Aran Islands. Prior to Synge's trip to Aran, he spent time studying at the Sorbonne, learning unbiased versions of Celtic history from Celtic scholars. He approached the natives on Aran armed with Celtic philology he had amassed in Paris, and found on the Aran Islands the people who kept the Gaelic language and traditions alive (King 8-11).

It was in the wild, primordial areas in the west of Ireland and Aran that Synge found inspiration. Their language, attitudes and belief systems supplied Synge with the foundation stone on which he was able to build and create such unusual characters and situations, from Christy Mahon in Playboy of the Western World, hailed as a hero for killing his father, to Martin and Mary Doul from Well of the Saints, who having been given their sight, in the end choose blindness once again.

The Aran Islands became for Synge the last bastion of Celtic pre-history. Relatively untouched by modernity, the existence of the islanders had changed little through the passing centuries. They were not simply the guardians of pre-Christian folktales and mythology; they were living the life of the "noble savage" that Synge came to revere. They were the archetypes that Synge presented in his plays. This chapter will investigate Synge's

use of the "noble savage" archetype in Deirdre of the Sorrows, his adaptation of the legend in which the heroine emerges as a wild, wanton woman determined to live her life as she chooses. As we shall see, by casting Deirdre as the noble savage, Synge's play emerges as a socio-political commentary on contemporary Ireland. Just as encroaching society manifest in Conchubar threatens Deirdre's pastoral and happy existence, so is the life of the Gaeltacht threatened by the intrusive forces of urban civilization.

In 1907, Synge began his own version of the Deirdre legend, and true to form, we once again have a peasant drama, for all that it is the story of kings and queens. Though he died before he was able to rework it to his satisfaction, the finished product adds a new dimension to the Deirdre archetype. Whereas Russell saw her as Victorian ingenue and Yeats envisioned her as representative of passion, Synge returns to the Deirdre of LMnU, the Deirdre who chooses her mate and ultimately her fate. For the first time in the history of the legend, Deirdre becomes a willing participant in the unfolding story; she actively embraces her mythological status as "Deirdre of the Sorrows."

By this time, Irish theatre-goers were more than aware of the story of Deirdre and Naoise. Synge, however, gave the audience the closest thing they had seen to the original in terms of mood and tone - a wild young woman using peasant speech, calculating in her plan to elope with Naoise, and brutal in her final exchange with Conchubar prior to her suicide. Before studying the play itself, however, it is necessary to take a closer look at Synge's use of language and nature and their relationship to each other. Contrary to Russell and Yeats who used high poetic language, Synge chose to use peasant dialect. He alone made nature an integral facet of the characters, of the mood and plot.

The Aran Islands: Language and Nature

According to Thornton, on the Aran Islands Synge discovered, among other things, a "living language," English sharply influenced by Gaelic that could work beautifully as literature (72). Others had tried this before: Douglas Hyde in his Love Songs of Connact; and Lady Gregory in Cuchulain of Muirthemne. Synge chose to adopt this Anglo-Irish idiom for his drama. In its simplest definition, Anglo-Irish idiom is a form of English modified by Gaelic habits of thought, speech and syntax. Synge did more than simply write down what he heard, however. He reworked the words and expressions to make them poetic and dramatic. He selected his words; he did not copy them (Price 43). And the critics, almost from the beginning had to admire his creation. In a letter written to the Times, (13 Feb 1905), George Moore said that Synge "discovered great literature in barbarous idiom as gold is discovered in quartz." Lady Gregory said that "he had got emotion, the driving force he needed... and it was the working dialect that had set free his style" (125).

Synge's use of language is important in its relation to his concept of the "noble savage." Whether tinker, vagabond, or indeed queen, the noble savage symbolized what was best in Irish culture. On Aran, Synge discovered not simply a living language, but a people whom he admired for their communion with nature and their lack of artifice. For Synge, the peasants represented "real Ireland" (Fleming 30).

Synge was not alone in his admiration of the peasant. As Fleming explains, nationalists and literary revivalists saw the peasant as a cultural symbol, representing all that

was not English. Rather than indigent and ignorant, the Irish peasants were unmaterialistic and naturally wise compared with their continental equivalents (46). Cultural primitivism as embodied in the peasants was part of the philosophy of the Celtic Revival, but for Synge, the Irish peasant was more than an image. Having lived among the "noble savages," he came to admire them for their wealth of ancient wisdom, envy them for their apparent ease with the world, and adopt them as ideal characters for his dramatic works.

Archetypes predate their literary expression. According to Stelio Cro, the noble savage first appeared as an image in the European mind with the discovery of the New World, but it was under Rousseau that the myth of the noble savage became an allegory for freedom: physical freedom from Absolutism; moral freedom from the stringent tenets of Christianity (137). In Rousseau's opinion, "Man is born free, and everywhere is in chains" (4). But the noble savage of myth is born free and stays free. The noble savage is essentially a pastoral character who obtains knowledge from experience and religion from nature. He is free of ambition and greed. His simple way of life keeps him in touch with the old values, but the way of life is threatened by a corrupt and encroaching civilization (Fleming 54-8).

On the Aran Islands, Synge discovered the noble savage. He repeatedly describes the people there as "primitive" or "archaic." In his lexicon, this is a compliment. According to Thornton, this archaic culture provided Synge with an alternative world view. It allowed him to see and feel reality from a perspective different from any he had ever known (75), uncluttered by urban Catholicism and quasi-revolutionary rhetoric he had been exposed to in Dublin and Paris.

On Aran, he was both witness to and participant in "nature's profound mysteries," words which resound throughout his essays and notebooks (Saddlemeyer "Doors of Perception" 106). Watching a storm, he said "... it seemed like a dream that I should be sitting here among these men and women listening to this rude and beautiful poetry that is filled with the oldest passions of the world" (Aran Islands 118). Later, he would experience his own communion with nature: "I seemed to exist merely in my perception of the waves and of the crying of the birds, and of the smell of the seaweed" (153). Aran Islands is full of these moments of vision and he obviously delights in them. Synge returned there again and again, learning their language and dialect, listening to their stories and folktales. The people did not simply live in the countryside; they were part of nature. This experience led Synge to believe that nature and the individual personality were complimentary (Saddlemeyer "Doors of Perception"). And in his final play, he showed how even a queen can enjoy this unity.

Act 1 - Noble savage or Lady of Shalott?

Synge's play opens as a storm is rolling in, and just as the storm drives the sons of Usnach to Deirdre's house, so are the troubles foretold about to begin. As Empson states, "On the classical tragic model it makes the day of action an unusual one, a day on which it seems fitting that great things should happen" (39). The storm symbolizes the inevitable tragedy that will begin to unfold as Naoise arrives to escape the weather, Conchubar returns to Emain to avoid the storm, and the great love of Deirdre and Naoise is awakened.

Deirdre dominates the action from the opening scene to her final soliloquy. From the very beginning, she emerges as a child of nature at one with the physical world, for "lightning itself wouldn't let down its flame to singe her beauty" (215). She is determined not to have any reminders of her future life at Emain Macha with Conchubar in her house, thus the cottage is bare with the exception of a large press, an oak chest and a half-finished tapestry. All the lavish gifts from Conchubar remain packed away. The scene in the cottage demonstrates Synge's understanding of women's symbolic systems and their non-verbal powers of communication through domestic arrangements (Kime Scott 180). By refusing to display any of Conchubar's presents, Deirdre's rejection of him is established. In archetypal terms, she is spurning male-dominated society, embodied in the king and controlled by the warriors. In Celtic mythology, nature is the female realm, and it is there she will stay.

Though raised to be his queen, her happiness comes from the wild, "picking flowers or nuts" (215), and as Levarcham says, she is "growing too wise to marry a big king" (216), wisdom derived not from books, but from her time in nature. She is the noble savage come to life, enjoying her time in Slieve Fuadh, determined to resist Conchubar and the encroaching society he represents.

Synge's Deirdre, then, is not a wilting wallflower. She is not a defenceless Demeter, helpless in her abduction by the big, bad male. Rather she is the noble savage, at one with her natural surroundings and determined to stay there, "having [her] freedom on the edges of the hills" (200). After several attempts at trying to convince Conchubar that her happiness lies in the woods, she tells him flatly, "I'm too long taking my will, and it's that way I'll be living always" (221). Deirdre dreads Emain because it is unnatural. As a child of nature she

has little fear of death, regardless of the prophecy, because it is part of nature's law. Conchubar and the artificiality of society are decidedly unnatural for Deirdre (Saddlemeyer "Literature First" 199).

When Naoise appears, she is almost brutal in her wooing, refusing to let him go. Her central argument for their elopement is what Benson calls "a powerful Irish restatement of the 'carpe diem' theme" (140), that is, "It should be a sweet thing to have what is best and richest if it's for a short space only" (230). Aware of the fate that awaits them, they intend to escape, knowing "silence and a near death" (230) is their destiny.

Synge makes interesting use of the fact that the lovers are aware of their fate. He uses the prophecy to initiate the tragedy but does not rely upon it to bring Deirdre to destruction. He uses the prophecy for mood, not plot (Farris 245). But while it is true that it is Deirdre, not simply the unfolding of the prophecy that determines the outcome, Synge also uses the prophecy to determine Deirdre's character. Critics such as Gerstenberger, King and Skelton have considered Synge's use of the half-finished tapestry. Like the Lady of Shalott weaving the images from her mirror into her tapestry, Deirdre has woven the image of Naoise. But more, she is weaving her destiny, a vision of "a man who'd be her likeness" (218). The tapestry is a reflection, translated into art, of her mythologized self. But like the Lady of Shalott, as long as Deirdre lives her life only through the image of the tapestry, she is doomed to see herself only within the imprisoning confines of myth (King 182-3).

Because she is aware of the prophecy, Deirdre sees herself as a doomed heroine in a fated drama, "Naisi! Do not leave me... I am Deirdre of the Sorrows" (228) are the first words spoken to Naoise. Deirdre in fact sees herself as both subject and object, as can be

seen in the changing use of the first and third person. As a subject she is a woman in love; as an object she is a mythological character, and she embraces her mythological status with gusto (Macintosh 111). As Skelton notes, "Knowledge of her destiny turns Deirdre into a heroine who sees her life's only justification to be its tragic pattern" (150). Because of the prophecy, love and death are intertwined. To accept the first is to ensure the second. She embraces her destiny with enthusiasm, and the lovers escape to Alba.

Act II - Seven Strange Years

Deirdre and Naoise spend seven years in Alba, the amount of time usually allotted for living in a strange land (Spangler 104). Critical commonplace recognizes that the second act is by far the weakest for two reasons. Firstly, Synge introduces Owen, a character whose existence has confounded critics. He is crass in his conversation with Deirdre, but we soon discover he is in love with her. When he realizes the lovers will be returning to Emain Macha, Owen rages like a wild man, then kills himself, the first casualty of Deirdre's beauty (Saddlemeyer "Literature First" 205). Gerstenberger suggests he is the archetypal "wise fool" (103), whereas Benson thinks he is a mere cardboard figure (143). None of these theories really explain Owen's role. In the preface to the play's first publication (1910), Yeats suggests that Synge intended him to be a "grotesque figure," but that Synge was never able to rework Owen to his satisfaction (quoted in Benson 142-3). His character remains a riddle. Owen, however, is only one of the difficulties with the Act II.

The second problem is that Synge does not make Alba a viable alternative to Emain Macha. The lovers have escaped for what they know will be a passionate but brief existence. What Synge presents, however, is more an abstract, idealized love than a passionate love worth dying for. Benson contends that Synge was unable to make the time in Alba seem real, and the portrayal of a mature, sexual relationship was outside his realm (142). The second act is, according to Vivian Mercier, "the strangest, a howling anachronism from beginning to end" (226).

But a handful of critics have suggested an alternative to the idea that Synge wasn't able to present a mature and viable love. These critics contend that Synge purposely depicted the lovers' time in Alba as unbelievable. By having the lovers escape to live in the woods, Synge is drawing on a particularly Irish archetype. In traditional Irish love poetry, woods represent safety for the lovers. Unfortunately, however, there is a double standard. With the changing of the seasons, woods also represent mortality. Just as summer gives way to winter, so does youth give way to old age and death (Fleming 117).

Nicholas Grene has pointed out that after living for seven idyllic years, their love hasn't developed into a mature relationship (177). They have not experienced any of the trials or problems that help love develop and grow. But that is precisely the point - the lovers have escaped to a natural surrounding, but are leading decidedly unnatural lives. Naoise and Deirdre, a "sleepy queen" (235), are living "so quiet in the woods" (234). They do nothing, and Ainnle and Ardan are mere shadows. The "Plower of Ireland" (229) now spend their days chasing otters. Ironically, by choosing to escape the artificiality of Emain into the nature of Alba, they have been living very artificial lives. There is no reality to their

existence. King points out that their alienation from society has made their lives, and indeed their love, artificial, able only to be asserted, never tested (187). And when the test comes, in the form of Fergus and Owen, they fail.

Kiberd, King and Macintosh all suggest that Deirdre and Naoise's love doesn't collapse with the quarrel in Act III, but begins disintegrating prior to the arrival of the messengers from Emain. Seven years have passed and neither can escape the ever encroaching possibility of old age. Their winter has come and as Deirdre says, "I'm well pleased, Naisi, we're going forward in the winter time the sun has a low place " (243). Always the child of nature in tune with its changing seasons, she sees the end is near. The lovers decide to leave nature, and in returning to Conchubar, they return to society, and death. In the mind of the noble savage, the two are one.

Act III - Demythologizing the Myth

Synge sees the tragedy partly in terms of the archetypal January/May relationship (Cave 9). Conchubar hopes that the youthful Deirdre will give him a renewed vigour for life. She sees Conchubar, the ageing king, as a warden in an artificial prison. Ironically, both are obsessed with age: Conchubar chooses Deirdre to keep him young; Deirdre returns to Emain so that she won't grow old and see her love for Naoise fade with time. Saddlemeyer suggests that Deirdre has less fear of death than she does Emain Macha because while death is part of nature's law, Emain is unnatural and unfamiliar to a child of nature ("Literature First" 199).

Deirdre and eventually Naoise decide that death is preferable both to old age, and the possibility of an unnatural union between Deirdre and Conchubar.

But here a problem arises. When the lovers return and face imminent death, Deirdre panics and implores Naoise once again to escape from Emain with her. Why, after convincing him that an early death is preferable to old age and tarnished love, does she suddenly change her mind and say to him "Take me away" and "Come away to the places where we're used to have our company" (254)? It seems she can't make up her mind, but in a tent outside Emain, Deirdre the character and Deirdre the mythological figure collide head on. In Jungian terms, Deirdre is undergoing the process of individuation and coming into her sense of Self.

Jolande Jacobi, a first generation Jungian, describes the individuation process as "the conscious realization and integration of all the possibilities congenitally present in the individual" (quoted in Tyas). For Deirdre this realization means recognizing the fact that her ego-conscious, her vision of herself as mythological figure, is not the sum total of her psyche. Having lived with Naoise for seven years, she is no longer willing to relinquish that love. By the third act, she is integrating her unconscious self with the conscious image of herself as "Deirdre of the Sorrows." When her Self emerges, she becomes once again the noble savage, wanting escape from the potentially lethal consequences of living in society. No longer content to be the object "Deirdre of the Sorrows," a mythological image woven in a tapestry, she wants to live. She is, in fact, human. Seen in this light, Deirdre no longer seems so enigmatic. Wanting to live is a basic human instinct, and as Jung states, instinctual behaviour is itself archetypal (ACU 44).

The humanization of Deirdre, with her strange pathologies, is Synge's greatest contribution to the Deirdre canon. She has decided they will return, but once there she changes her mind, negating what had been the motivating factor throughout the play. As Gerstenberger states, "... the tragedy turn[s] upon the failure of human beings in the face of life's uncompromising demands instead of upon the betrayal of kings" (96). Within the Jungian paradigm, however, Deirdre is facing her shadow, in her case, the desire to love outside the confining structure of her mythologized self. She is no longer a stately queen calmly accepting her foretold destiny, but a frightened young girl who doesn't want to die. Synge presents Deirdre, Conchubar and Naoise as individuals who suffer from pride, fear and, most importantly, doubt which culminate in the argument between Deirdre and Naoise. Having offered up their lives to maintain the integrity of their love, they suffer the brutal irony of an ugly quarrel prior to Naoise's death.

Deirdre's harsh words to Naoise have brought near universal condemnation upon her. Skelton is particularly damning, "It makes her a prisoner of her own ego" (150), and while she may be heroic, "... she is finally a predator, a monster" (146). Begnal suggests an alternative: faced with the knowledge of Naoise's imminent death, she is conscious mainly of her loss, not of her status as mythmaker (93). In anger and fear she lashes out at he whom she loves best. This bitter quarrel moves the tragedy from the death of the lovers to the death of their love, which they were intentionally sacrificing their lives to safeguard.

In Deirdre of the Sorrows, the heroic is undercut as the characters are not able to live up to the audience's expectations. Where we expect love and bravery, we hear harsh words and cowardice. Synge essentially demythologizes both the characters and the myth - no

noble kings and heros, but fallible humans. Synge destroys the expected archetypes. Deirdre is neither an admirable sacrificial virgin, nor a lusty femme fatale. She has changed from the Victorian ingenue of Russell's version. Nor is she the thespian from Yeats's Deirdre, donning any mask to save their lives. In Synge, she is a vain, somewhat neurotic woman, content to live as the archetypal noble savage in nature.

Synge was not content to invert simply the Deirdre archetype, however. Alba, for example, is not wildly romantic, but has more in common with a rather dull Tir-na-nOg, the Irish "Land of the Youth". Rather than the calculating, vengeful king of myth, Conchubar is more a pathetic old man who "arranges himself before a mirror" (217) prior to Deirdre's arrival. The tragedy does not end with the lovers wrapped in each others' arms in death, but with a bitter fight. And in presenting the story thus, by demythologizing the myth, Synge might well be giving us the real story: that Alba wasn't that good; that their love wasn't that strong; and that while other redactions made it heroic and romantic, it wasn't heroic at all.

With Deirdre of the Sorrows, Synge inaugurated what was to become an important current in modern Irish literature, the conscious demythologizing of Irish mythology (Dasenbrock 142). By adopting the traditional archetypal stories and characters, then deliberately inverting or reworking them, storytellers are able to keep the myths fresh, interesting, and most importantly, relevant to the changing times.

For Synge, casting Deirdre as the noble savage serves another purpose, however. Saddlemeyer contends that it is possible to see glimpses of Synge's personal view of the world within the framework of established mythology ("Literature First" 199). In terms of Deirdre of the Sorrows, this personal view translates into a commentary on Irish society at

large. Synge wrote in The Aran Islands, "The charm which the people over there share with the birds and flowers has been replaced here by the anxiety of men who are eager for gain" (125). In Synge's opinion, this ability of the islanders to share a communion with nature is commendable. Synge admits that, at the age of sixteen or seventeen, he rejected Christianity but felt shame at his decision. On Aran, Synge discovered a people who felt as he did, but experienced no guilt; who believed in God and the fairies and saw no inherent dichotomy in this blend of orthodoxy and paganism (Thornton 17, 44). In Synge's opinion, the people on Aran did not simply live in nature; they enjoyed a communion with nature that transcended the petty divisions of urban life, a life that he feared would eventually encroach upon and then tarnish the islanders archaic and primitive existence.

Synge accepts the framework of the Deirdre mythology, but imprints the dignity of the noble savage on its heroine. By casting Deirdre as the archetypal noble savage, Deirdre of the Sorrows emerges as an exemplum of what Synge considers to be the "real Ireland," (Fleming 30), primitive people at one with nature, resisting geographical entrapment manifest in both patriarchal Emain Macha, and anxiety-ridden modern Dublin. It was Synge's belief that the Irish peasants could tell Dublin audiences about their own country (Fleming 10), for the islanders were the guardians of the collective Irish racial memory. Jungian literary criticism of Deirdre of the Sorrows demonstrates Synge's fear that modern urbanism was threatening the existence of Ireland's cultural history. Deirdre as noble savage in pre-Christian Ireland was under the same threat of extinction that modern Irish peasants were fearing. And it was Synge's personal experience that the peasants and Deirdre shared a common enemy - Irish urban society itself.

AFTERWORD

In early twentieth-century Ireland, art was propaganda. Russell, Yeats and Synge determined that the possibilities inherent in the archetypes of the Deirdre legend were manifold. Russell saw Deirdre and Naoise as characters worthy of emulation, ones who could issue in a new age for Ireland, free of Christian dogmatism. Yeats saw the characters both in terms of their ruling archetypal passions, and as non-sectarian cultural images. In Synge, Deirdre became the noble savage, the Irish peasant, content to live in the wilds of nature.

A Jungian interpretation of George Russell's Deirdre: A Legend in Three Acts, W.B. Yeats's Deirdre, and J.M. Synge's Deirdre of the Sorrows demonstrates the cultural and political problems each of these dramatists believed Ireland was experiencing at the turn of the century. Russell thought that Christianity was poisoning the life of the Irish people and a renewal of the old druidic beliefs could issue in the age of a new Avatar. Like other Anglo-Irish writers, Yeats was experiencing cultural and political marginalization in the wake of sectarian-based agitation. He envisioned a "Unity of Culture," with figures such as Deirdre supplying the unifying image which could transcend religious and political divisions. Synge believed the Irish peasants were the guardians of Irish culture, but were threatened by an ever-encroaching urban society. In Synge's opinion, assimilation of peasant and city dweller could only mean disaster for the future of Irish culture, hence he casts Deirdre as the noble

savage rejecting society manifest in Conchubar. She is both representative and guardian of Synge's vision of "real Ireland."

For these three dramatists, the exploitation of Jungian archetypes redefined within Irish cultural parameters served two purposes. Firstly, Russell, Yeats and Synge all saw in Deirdre a non-sectarian enabling myth, one that could appeal to Catholic and Protestant; cultural or political nationalist. Secondly, the framework of the Deirdre legend allowed for her twentieth century adaptations to emerge as commentaries on Irish society at large. None of these men interpreted Deirdre as a rallying call for radical nationalism. Rather, they saw her as an esteemed and admirable Irish cultural icon who could speak to the country from the glory of Ireland's pre-Christian past, with a message relevant to the future.

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