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# **Kathleen Ni Houlihan and her Discontents: The Heroine in Anglo-Irish Drama.**

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Kathleen Ni Houlihan, the eponymous heroine of W.B. Yeats' play, is a personification in the heroic mode of Ireland in its struggle for independence, and by extension, has become an archetype of the heroic representation of women in the best Abbey Theatre tradition. In more recent times, the Abbey Theatre heroic Irish acting style has come under question, as have in other spheres the different levels of rhetoric in the mythic representation of Ireland's political struggle and identity. One of the Abbey's productions, Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, was undertaken in recent times by the Druid Theatre of Galway under the direction of Garry Hines: this new production which diverged from the Abbey style was the subject of much controversy. When Garry Hines was appointed director of the Abbey Theatre, a situation arose where traditional and radical representations of Irish drama were brought into crucial focus: the production of O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*, directed by Mr Hines for the abbey, brought new production values to a classic Irish dramatic text on the historic Abbey stage, and was again the subject of much controversy, some critics arguing that the new approach was a much-needed revitalisation of the Abbey school of production, some that the masterpieces of the classic period were being destroyed by an over-modern approach to direction.

My thesis is that the 'heroine status' of the principal female characters of the plays of W.B. Yeats, J.M. Synge and Sean O'Casey is one aspect of classic Irish drama which is much in need of questioning and revitalisation, that without a renewed approach to direction, the female characters of these great plays are restricted and limited representations of women, lacking full resonance as heroines. I wish in the first place to ask the question: what is a tragic heroine? and to review the function of the female heroic protagonist; secondly, to examine a number of plays by these authors, plays which might be called tragedies or have been called so by their authors, to see how, and whether, their 'female leads' function as tragic heroines — either as the heroines of a 'narrative sequence' as

defined by Claude Brémond (the network of options logically available to a narrator, at a given point in the narration, in order to continue the story), or heroines of a human group or network of relationships, or whether their signifiers, in the dramatic sense, as a whole are such as to enable them to achieve the effect of a tragic heroine. (The *signifier* is the manifest part of the sign, the *signified* being the conceptual part. Here I am using the term *signifier* to indicate the manifest part of any sign, or code of signification, whether linguistic, visual or other).

In the third part, having argued that the woman characters of these plays cannot, for a number of reasons, function, psychologically speaking, as tragic heroines, I shall look briefly at some possible reasons for that conclusion, bearing in mind the prevalence in Irish civilization of the female archetype and/or stereotype. Finally, I will take one example of a production innovation in the Druid Theatre / Garry Hines production of the *Playboy of the Western World* where, by an introduction of stage direction, the focus of the characters of the Widow Quin is made more truly heroic.

It is itself significant that the question 'what is a tragic heroine?' should be followed by the question 'what is a tragic hero?' To this second question many great minds have turned their attention. The first is usually a sort of addendum, like the word 'she' after the normative 'he'. Aristotle's *Poetics*<sup>1</sup> explained the functioning of the tragic hero in terms of *catharsis*, that is, the spectator's imaginative identification with the plight of Oedipus or Orestes, leading to a sharing of that plight, an experience of pity and terror whose end result would be purgation, cleansing of these extremes of human emotion and suffering. The hero was a being of nobility, often courageous or possessing other admirable qualities — thus making his plight remarkable, his personality interesting, and himself a likely object of identification. This heroic being would however have offended the gods, overreached himself, tried to go beyond his fate: committed the sin of *hubris*. The spectator's identification thus involves, to some extent, a sharing of guilt.

The character of Oedipus became the focus of a new exploration of another form of *catharsis* in the clinical research and theories of Sigmund Freud, who wrote: "every man has at some time been Oedipus in his thoughts,"<sup>2</sup> tacitly ignoring the 'other' sex and gender. Oedipus, a central figure for Aristotelian dramatic theory, thus became a central focus of psychoanalysis, and in turn, the

1. Aristotle, "On the Art of Poetry", in *Classical Literary Theory*, London: Penguin, 1965.

2. Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Psychoanalysis*, London: Imago, 1954, p. 223-4.

object of psychoanalytical literary criticism. Theatre and the unconscious are linked through the renewed investigation, by Freud, of the Aristotelian concept of *catharsis*.

My preoccupation here is to see how this theoretical model of the function of tragedy, together with its avatar in psychic theory, can be seen today to deal with the other, female, half of humanity. Women were excluded from participation in Greek tragedy. Female characters were written by men, acted by men and seen by male spectators. Women were not by any means excluded from psychoanalysis, as patients, though still rather the objects of psychoanalytic investigation, rather than in control of it. The founding theorists of psychoanalysis were men. However, Freud did not exclude female contribution to psychoanalysis and indeed acknowledged that more case-history of and by women analysands and analysts were needed.

The question of women and catharsis has thus changed between Aristotle and Freud. In the Aristotelian theory of tragedy, women are specifically excluded from participation, as spectators and experiencers of catharsis, though present in the female of male-written female characters, and catalysts of catharsis for male characters. In the Freudian theory of the unconscious, there is no exclusion of women, nor predetermined marginalisation of the female unconscious. Freud does not conceive of the unconscious mind as being sex-determined. However data on women undergoing analysis with women is lacking, and theoretical studies of the unconscious by women are few. As a result, Freud's models of the development of the personality are based on partial clinical observation of patients and his definition of the Oedipus complex, the family syndrome of human relationships between the sexes, applies to male subjects, leaving the development of the female personality rather vaguely defined. If Freud's models are seen today as being sexist, I do not assert that this invalidates them as representations of the unconscious mind disorders. That the disorders were such, is demonstrated by the only 'proof' of disorder that can be held to stand, that is, the patient came to Freud voluntarily seeking help. Freud drew conclusions from the cases he observed, seeing them, inevitably, through his own personality and through the filters of the relationships the patients established with himself through transference. Because the personality of the analyst was that of a man, the observation and conclusion-drawing process is weighted toward the man as theorist and the woman as object, but the observation and conclusions may nonetheless be true or useful as far as they go. What was and is needed is similar observation by women analyst, to balance out our model of the human psyche. Aristotelian theory of tragedy and psychoanalysis are both predicated on an inadequate consideration of the un-

conscious mind, the first because of the exclusion of women, the second because of their under-representation.

What then of modern, post-Freudian literary theory? How are women involved in catharsis, and how is that involvement included in theoretical models of the psychic functioning of tragedy and drama in general? As in all models of human activity, the question of 'equal roles for women' may imply two orders of transformation which I shall call, for convenience, respectively, inclusion and integration. Inclusion would mean the simple extension of the situation or model to include women. For example, women are now allowed in theatres, to act in plays, to be treated with equal respect even though they act in plays, to give lectures in universities about Aristotle, to write essays about Irish plays written in English, as I am doing at the moment.

A corollary of this, though a subtly different point, and one which must be analysed, rather than taken for granted without question, is that pre-existing models of the theatre, even those which excluded women, may not now do so any longer. I can read Aristotle on catharsis and feel that he is talking about me when he describes the pity and terror the spectator experiences at the sight of Oedipus' streaming eyes. This is an important aspect of the changing role of women in twentieth-century society — that they are admitted to places, to activities and to concepts which were constructed to exclude them but which now do not. The fact is that I can relate to Aristotle's concept of catharsis, and it does not appear to function for me. This can be explained by the fact that both women and men are subsets of the set of humanity, and the intersection of the sets 'women' and 'men' may very probably be such, and so large, that Greek tragedy though designated to exclude women, is in fact available to them, psychologically, aesthetically or in any other of the types or relationship which the human mind may establish with theatre. It is remarkable that this is so, and that we appear to find it quite natural that this area of activity, like so many others, once opened to women, proved to be available to them, meaningful to them, useful and important to them. I would argue that we should not take this simple retroactive inclusion for granted; that although it is wonderful that it is possible, it is also in many respects suspect.

This leads me to integration. Simple inclusion of women in many, nearly in all of humanity's concern and activities has in most cases proved to be only the beginning of a process of change. Much as public opinion has changed on the role of women, the simple extension of equal human rights to all women is still very generally seen as the beginning and end of the problem, whereas women living in this revised societal model do not feel that their situation is thereby sufficiently improved.

The inclusion model would show a structure where from the time when humanity existed, it was divided into two parts, men and women, having different rights. All humanity had certain rights, men had extra rights that women had not; Add these rights to the female sector, and the corrected model becomes that of humanity without discrimination. This is known in feminist theory as the 'reformist' as opposed to the 'radical' model. That other attitudes must exist is obvious, if only from the perception that there must have been historic causes for their existing such a model for human relationships in the first place, and that we cannot assume that these causes have disappeared without danger of reappearance. For example, did humanity in its origins fall into segregated sex-roles because the sex which had babies — and did so every year, often dying in the process — could not feed itself as well as that sex which was not occupied with uncontrolled gestation and could hunt constantly? Has the control respectively of food production and of fertility caused the present change in the trend of humankind as to sex discrimination? If this or some other cause-and-effect model operates, other conclusions must be drawn, e.g. what mental trace have these generations of physical male dominance left, even if the proximate situation has changed? Has our very notion of social structure become irretrievably predicated on the notion of separate role, inferiority / superiority differences, so that even if we change its elements, our basic theoretical model of humanity remains one of conflict and discrimination? An example of this would be the idea that Western white women achieve equality *because* there are still Third-world or working class women to replace them in the position of exploited underclass, and that no real change has taken place in humankind's mental model of humanity as a clearly-defined class pyramid.

It is quite possible that the simple extension of rights to women carries with it the conflictual concept of rights, of assertion of right by confrontation, of exploitation of the economically weaker by the economically stronger, or of other ideologies fatally inscribed in the very discourse of equal rights. It is indeed possible that the flaws in humanity's grasp of such notions as freedom, right, truth are such that some cosmic holocaust will prove, in the eyes of some extraterrestrial culture, to be not only the chronological but also the logical outcome to the history of humankind. Yet even if this is so, we appear to have an apprehension of meaning and of perfectibility which drives us, or some of us some of the time, to seek after the meaning of literary discourses in the light of new perceptions of the role of women; and even the hypothetical apocalyptic outcome will not, if it takes place, suffice to invalidate our search. It is still arguably possible for humans to be free, and if the twentieth century's simple

inclusion of women within the legal structures thrown up by male dominated societies does not lead to freedom, there is arguably another approach which would do so.

Integration would mean any approach to a new model of the roles of men and women which seeks to revise the societal model to take account of the new situation of women. An example would be the notion that equality does not mean admitting women to the exclusive male clubs where useful professional contacts are made, but questioning the very notion of old boy networks and working for their disablement and replacement by networks not based on the difference between being included and being excluded. From such a point of view, the establishment of women's right to publish, lecture, read Aristotle, see Greek plays, etc. is just a beginning. The arrival of women on the scene means a radical re-thinking of the pre-existing male-dominated criticism; not only the right to read Aristotle, and to experience the relevance of Aristotelian theory to women's experience, but also its fundamental incompleteness *because* it did not take women's experience into account. In fact the practice of criticism shows examples of both approaches, inclusion and integration (and indeed still shows, in many cases, good old exclusion of women).

My concern here is to define a problematic of women's criticism of the characterisation of women in some Irish plays; to analyse, and not to attempt to resolve its inherent paradoxes. There is a pragmatic distinction to be made between dealing with issues in the society in which one lives, and with literary works. Injustice in society is intolerable, because one's life span corresponds with a particular sequence of years in the history of the society — one is actually living in the society and suffering from the injustice. Injustice in literary criticism is experienced on that level — the necessity for women to be given access to study, to publication, to debate and development of critical ideas — but also experienced at chronological remove. The overdetermination of Synge's, Yeats' and O'Casey's female heroines does not need to be solved by rewriting the plays, as do society's injustices, by changing society. Rather does it call for a new critical response.

What is a heroine? A female hero of 'shero'? Are heroines different from heroes? Is the whole notion of a protagonist predicated, in any case on male-female domination? Will female dramatic characters achieve the status of heroine, only by redefining the dominance — structure of master and servant? What of the heroines of Greek tragedy, or Shakespearian tragedy? These questions are bound up in consideration of historicity and genre to an extent which makes them almost unanswerable. I intend, while bearing this problematic in mind, to focus on the Aristotelian and psychoanalytic concepts of catharsis, exploring the notion that

the heroine is she who succeeds as a catalyst for catharsis. Recognising the problematic nature of this working hypothesis, I have chosen the threefold analytical method outlined at the start: first of all, a narratological approach, examining the degree of capacity of my heroines to influence the course of the narrative; secondly, an examination of the relationship-network of the play, showing the female character's role in relation to the other characters; thirdly, a semiological analysis of what I call 'dramatic signifiers', that is, the means of signification at the character's disposal in performance. The examples of signifiers which I have selected are: the spatial movements the characters make; how the other characters speak of her; how she speaks of herself; the stage directions and descriptions for that character; and the verbs she uses.

The Freudian interpretation of catharsis explains how the unconscious mind deals with negative feelings, or frustrated positive feelings by 'acting out', whether in daily life, in dreams, in artistic activity or in other ways. Freud's view of Oedipus was, as we have seen, that every man could identify with his situation, thus liberating himself from the feelings of guilt or desire associated with the mother. It is not really necessary for my purpose to go into the ramifications of the Freudian Oedipal situation and its stages, nor into post-Freudian developments of the theory or the growth of the human psyche from birth to adulthood. The basic Oedipal situation is the idea that, for the child, its early relationship with its parents is all-important in the development of the self, with some sort of differentiation between the parent who is of the child's own sex, and that parent who is of the opposite sex. In the case of the male child and of the stereotypical marriage relationships of Freud's own era and since, for the most part, this difference takes the form of father as authority figure and mother as gentle dependant, so that some sort of special relationship between mother and infant son may be posited; this would clearly be a central influence on his development, particularly on the development of human relationships and specifically, relationships with women other than his mother. The early relationship with his mother would leave traces in the unconscious mind which would affect later relationships. His own experience of desire for his mother would among other things lead to identification with a tragic character like Oedipus.

Where does this leave women as spectators of tragedy? They have presumably not all at some time been Oedipus in their thoughts. Jung's *Electra-complex*,<sup>3</sup> a concept whereby the female equivalent of the Oedipal situation, that of desire for the mother, was the Electra-situation, one of jealousy of the mother,

<sup>3</sup> C.G. Jung, "Versuch einer Darstellung der psychoanalytische Theorie", in *Jahrbuch für psychologische und psychopathologische Forschungen*, vol. V, 1913, p. 370.



desire for the father, wish to have the brother kill the father, punishing her for her involvement in desire, as Electra took revenge on Clytemnaestra through Orestes, is by no means as clearly defined as the Oedipal situation, nor has it gained even the qualified acceptance, as a model of the female unconscious, of the Oedipal situation. It is in any case clear — and Freud recognised this — that what is needed is more case-histories of and by women analysands and analysts.

The kind of identification which leads to Aristotelian catharsis depends on what is called *transference* in psychoanalysis, that is, the cathexis of affect from one object to another.<sup>4</sup> This means for Freud, the cathexis of affect from a subject's own psyche (and, particularly, unconscious drives) onto Oedipus, thus experiencing his guilt, his punishment and his purgation. The psyche establishes relationships of transference in all kinds of situations; in daily life, in relationships, with the analyst during psychoanalysis, with various other objects both in case of mental disturbance however defined, and in general. These objects of transference may include works of artistic expression, e.g. characters in plays. In the latter case, catharsis supposes that the identification with the character is complete enough, psychically speaking, to enable the spectator to live through these unconscious feelings which the transference has enabled him, and, presumably her, to become aware of the experience. So the unconscious drives which give rise to dreams and can inhabit and even haunt daily life can be worked through by watching a play, as well as in other ways.

But is catharsis a male preserve? What objects of identification can we find which will function as effectively for the female spectator — for whom Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides did not cater? This is the question which I shall attempt to answer in the second part of this essay. To move forward to more recent developments in psychoanalysis, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan is, as was Freud, deeply interested in such emanations of the human psyche as the literary work, as well as those encountered in clinical practice. Lacan's theory that the unconscious mind is structured like a language has led to renewed ways of interpreting the literary text, finding enriched meanings in traditional methods of analysis such as the rhetorical figures of metaphor and metonymy, associated with Freud's concepts of condensation and displacement, as modes of unconscious expression.<sup>5</sup> Freud was examining how images work in dreams and in

<sup>4</sup>. *Affect* basically means something similar to feeling, but including unconscious feeling or response to stimulus. *Cathexis* is Freud's term for the unconscious association of affect with some person, thing, idea, etc., as in a strong dislike for somebody because that person is associated in the subject's mind with some unconscious fear, etc.

<sup>5</sup>. Jacques Lacan, "L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient, ou la raison depuis Freud", in *Ecrits*, Paris: Seuil, 1966.

daily life, 'Freudian slips', and wit. Lacan's 'figures' make it possible to analyse the unconscious structures of a text along the linguistic lines of more recent critical methods. This does not necessarily mean however that female response is better, or at all, accounted for by Lacan or by other post-Freudian linkings of psychoanalysis and literature. Judith Gardiner<sup>6</sup> drew attention to this lack, particularly in relation to Norman Holland's book about reader response *Five Readers Reading*<sup>7</sup> — a well-chosen example since the neglect of female readers response in Holland's work would not necessarily be that of the pre-Freudian egregious sexist, since Holland made various attempts to address the question of female response and included a female student in his five readers.

Recent work has been done in the general area of women's studies which might tend to fill the gap, though often women in literature tend to be the object of a content-study, an appraisal of a society, class or culture, and moreover, the genre of fiction is the primary focus of attention, to the neglect of drama. There is a certain gap between studies about women and the relevant methodologies, on the one hand, and textual criticism and its methodologies, on the other. In Lacan's and Roland Barthes' work on the sign this general problem is present, but not necessarily focused. I wish therefore, to look at these 'heroines' as women in a certain dramatic environment, a recognisably Irish environment, whether mythopoetic or 'peasant', taking account, not only of the women as dramatic characters and recognisable psychic subjects, but also of textuality, of narratology, and of the modes of signification at their disposal in the theatrical space. Signification, and also what Julia Kristeva calls 'significance',<sup>8</sup> that is how, in the reader / spectator's own mind, the signs, of which the dramatic text / potential performance is constituted, reconstitute themselves into the spectator's own experience. I do not expect to find a definitive answer to the question of their adequacy of heroines, since no non-gender-defined definition to the heroine can be posited. I hope, however, by close analysis of the plays from the different perspectives of narratology, character psychology, and various dramatic codes (stage direction; movement; characteristic terminology), to observe semantic and semiological patterns or tendencies, suggesting that the heroines of these plays offer the female spectator limited scope for catharsis, and that their dramatic signification is overdetermined, that is, displaying an unconscious bias or tendentiousness, and is therefore more or less invalidated.

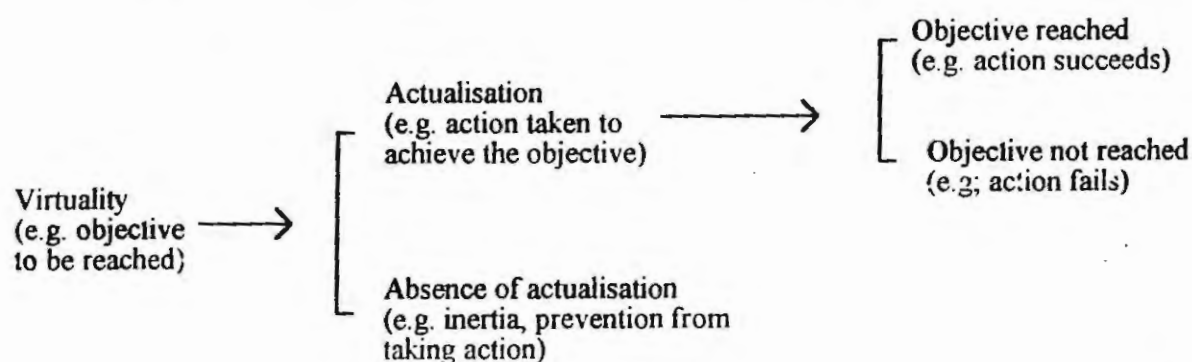
6. Judith Gardiner, "Psychoanalytic Criticism and the Female Reader", in *Literature and Psychology*, 26, n° 3, 1976, pp. 100-7.

7. Norman N. Holland, *Five Readers reading*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973.

8. Julia Kristeva, *Sémiotikè*, Paris : Seuil, 1969.

It may be necessary to reassert here that a psychoanalytic approach to literature confirms what no literary theory can render infirm: that the text is reconstituted by its audience. As for psychoanalytic criticism itself, it supposes the encounter of two discourses; whether reader / spectator with author, reader / spectator with a given character perceived as a human being or reader / spectator with her- or himself, none of these encounters excluding the others.

I shall look at three heroines: Deirdre, particularly in Yeat's play *Deirdre*,<sup>9</sup> though to some extent also in Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*;<sup>10</sup> Juno in O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*;<sup>11</sup> and Pegeen Mike in Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*.<sup>12</sup> I wish to examine three aspects in turn; first their role as characters in the narrative sequences of the play; second, their function as characters in relation to the others; third, the dramatic signifiers they use. Diagram A shows Claude Brémont's model for examining narrative sequences:<sup>13</sup>



This type of sequence called a triad (French *triade*) is a development both of Roland Barthe's extension of the laws of linguistics to any set of signs including literary signs, and of Propp's analysis of narrative structure in *Morphologie du conte*.<sup>14</sup> The idea is that at a given moment a character has at her or his disposal a certain number of options, in the sequence which is to follow, defined by virtuality (*virtualité*) — that is, for example, what the character might be trying to do — which may lead to actualisation (*actualisation*) — for example, steps taken to achieve the aim — or its absence (*absence d'actualisation*) — for example inertia or being prevented from acting. The first of these might lead to the achievement of the aim (*but atteint*) or failure (*but manqué*).

9. W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Plays*, 2nd ed., London: Mcmillan, 1952.

10. J.M. Synge, *The dramatic Works*, Dublin, London: Maunsel, 1915.

11. S. O'Casey, *The collected Plays*, vol. 1, London: Mcmillan, 1949.

12. J.M. Synge, op. cit.

13. Claude Brémont, "La logique des possibles narratifs", in *Communication*, n° 8, Paris : Seuil, 1965.

14. V. Propp, *Morphologie du conte*, Paris : Seuil, 1965.

	Virtuality	Actualisation	Absence of actualisation	Objective reached	Objective not reached
1	Deirdre does not want to see Conchubar		She is not there when he comes		He waits: she sees him unwillingly
2	She is attracted to Naisi	She invites him to the house and dresses up for him *			He is frightened
3	She wants to go away with Naisi	She shames Naisi, taunting his manhood *		They go away	
4	She wants Naisi to flee from Conchubar	She pretends to be attracted to Conchubar *			He is not fooled
5	She wants to be left alone so as not to be prevented from killing herself	She lies to Conchubar *		She is left alone	

\* examples of stereotypical women's role-play.

**General observation:** Deirdre succeeds in arriving at her objective only by the use of stereotypical 'female wiles', and only in two cases: she attracts Naisi into taking her in the first place, and she manages to destroy herself. The second instance is obviously a negative success; and even the first is a stereotypical, overdetermined and qualified 'female' victory; She cannot escape by herself, she can escape only by seducing Naisi into taking her. Naisi's perception of her is of a wild bird, or prey. He is prepared to dare Conchubar's anger by taking his 'game,' but not to make a long-term commitment to her which would involve a long-term split from Conchubar. So although she persuades Naisi into taking her away, she does not in fact succeed in her objective which is to escape from Conchubar's power.

Diagram B shows this model applied to narrative sequences in Yeat's *Deirdre* and, to some extent, Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. At the beginning of the play Deirdre does not want to see Conchubar. She cannot control his actions but she can 'not act' by not being there. In fact, of course, he waits for her and she is forced to see him, willingly or not (seq. 1). She is attracted to Naisi and invites him to the house, but he is frightened by this (seq. 2). She wants to go away with Naisi, whereupon she taunts him, shaming his manhood, in that he is afraid of the King (seq. 3). This and the following examples show Deirdre achieving her aims only by getting someone else to act and using 'women's roleplay' in order to do so: dressing up, making up; flattering, lying, taunting virility; and the action that she succeeds in taking is negative or destructive in tendency: fleeing the country or killing herself. Her scope for action, however dramatic, is strictly confined and contrasts with those of Naisi and Conchubar.

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	Virtuality	Actualisation	Absence of actualisation	Objective reached	Objective not reached
1	Juno wants to prevent Joxer coming into the house	She attempts to achieve this by delaying going to work	but finally goes to work		Joxer comes back and eats the food
2	She wants Boyle to provide for the family	She nags him into changing his trousers	but is distracted by (Bentham's report of) legacy and accepts that Boyle will no longer even pretend to look for work		Boyle does not provide for his family
3	She wants to get the money		She tries to get Boyle to ask the solicitor		Boyle refuses (the news that there is no money comes from Nugent)
4	She wants to escape from the burdens of her life with Boyle	She says she will leave and goes to get Johnny's body		? ←————→ (end of play)	?

**General observation:** Juno either attempts to actualise but quickly abandons or is frustrated in the attempt (ex. 1 & 2), or else she is forced to try to get somebody else to act for her (ex. 3). In example 4 she does state her intention to act. The play ends without our seeing whether she will in fact carry out this intention.

Some of the narrative sequences in *Juno and the Paycock* are shown in diagram C. In the first act, Juno wants to exclude Joxer from the family home and prevent his eating and drinking their scant provisions. She delays going to work so as to achieve this aim, but is finally forced to do so, whereupon Joxer of course comes back (seq. 1). She wants Boyle to make some effort to provide for his family, and nags him into changing his trousers so as to take the job which the priest's good offices may get him (seq. 2), then is distracted by the news of the legacy — and accepts that Boyle will now not look for a job.

She wants to obtain the promised money (seq. 3) but cannot directly intervene in the legal business; she fails to get Boyle to find out and the news of the mistake comes from Nugent. Towards the end of the play, realising how she and her daughter have been betrayed by their men, she decides to leave so that she and Mary may bring up Mary's child together (seq. 4). Is this an 'achieved aim'? There is a question mark about the actualisation / success of this narrative sequence since we do not know, the play having ended, if Juno will effectively shake off the burden of Boyle. She does in fact leave, to get Johnny's body, but

we can only speculate as to the likelihood of her escaping in the end. (A look at the reality of Dublin working-class marriage would lead one to conclude that it is most unlikely that she would free herself from her burdens, but this is of course outside the context of the play).

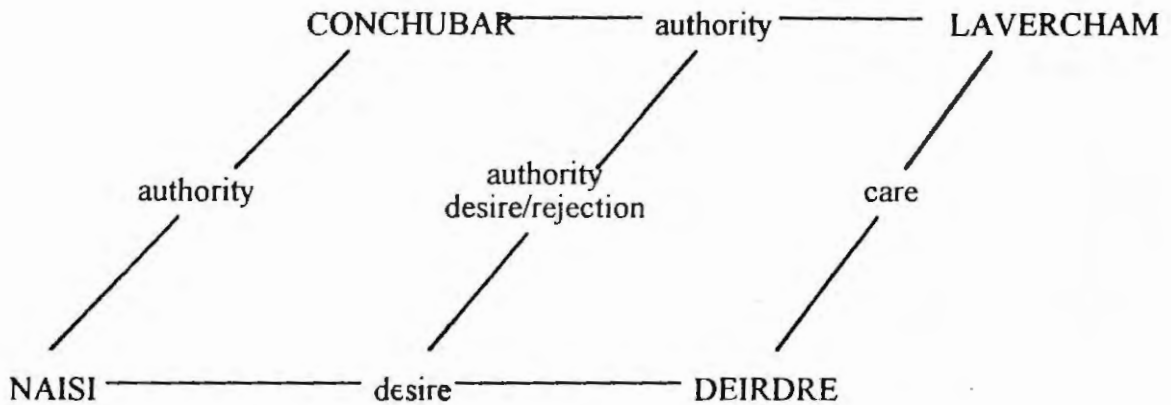
	Virtuality	Actualisation	Absence of actualisation	Objective reached	Objective not reached
1	Pegeen wants company, does not want to be left alone	She tells Shaun			Shaun is too afraid of the priest to stay
2	(the same)	She tells her father			her father does not take her seriously
3	(the same, after Christy's arrival)		She hints to her father to ask Christy to stay	Christy stays - but this is to protect himself, not Pegeen	
4	Loves Christy, or her own fantasy of Christy, or both		She is afraid of 'the deed', she obeys the men who tell her to burn Christy, she is afraid of having made a fool of herself and reviles Christy		Christy leaves

In *The Playboy of the Western World* (see above) a similar narratological overdetermination can be seen. Pegeen, in the first act, does not wish to be kept alone all evening, and says to Shaun who however is too frightened to stay (seq. 1). She tells her father (seq. 2) but he refuses to take her seriously — he laughs at the idea of missing his outing because she is lonely.

She speaks to her father again once Christy Mahon has arrived (seq. 3), she hints to her father to ask him to stay (she cannot do so herself, of course, being the woman of the house), and he does stay, though in fact this is because he wants protection himself. So Pegeen's apparent achievement of her aim is in fact based on fantasy. She loves Christy (seq. 4) (or her fantasised perception of Christy, or both), but she is afraid of 'the deed' and obeys the men who tell her to burn him, when they have decided to reject him, and ultimately she fails in her aim, since Christy leaves.

Brémond defines the *triade* as: "le réseau complet des options logiquement offertes à un narrateur, en un point quelconque de son récit, pour continuer

*l'histoire commencée*"<sup>15</sup> and it is clear that the range of options where Deirdre, Juno and Pegeen are concerned are limited, predetermined by their womanhood and thus overdetermined when they are considered as individual subjects.



Out hunting, he is 'caught' by Deirdre. He sees her as a wild bird.

Deirdre is doomed to be the cause of catastrophe to others and to herself. She is 'found' by Conchubar, 'found' by Naisi, hunted by Conchubar. She is seen as prey: eagle, bird. Her life in Scotland is a 'seven year hunt.'

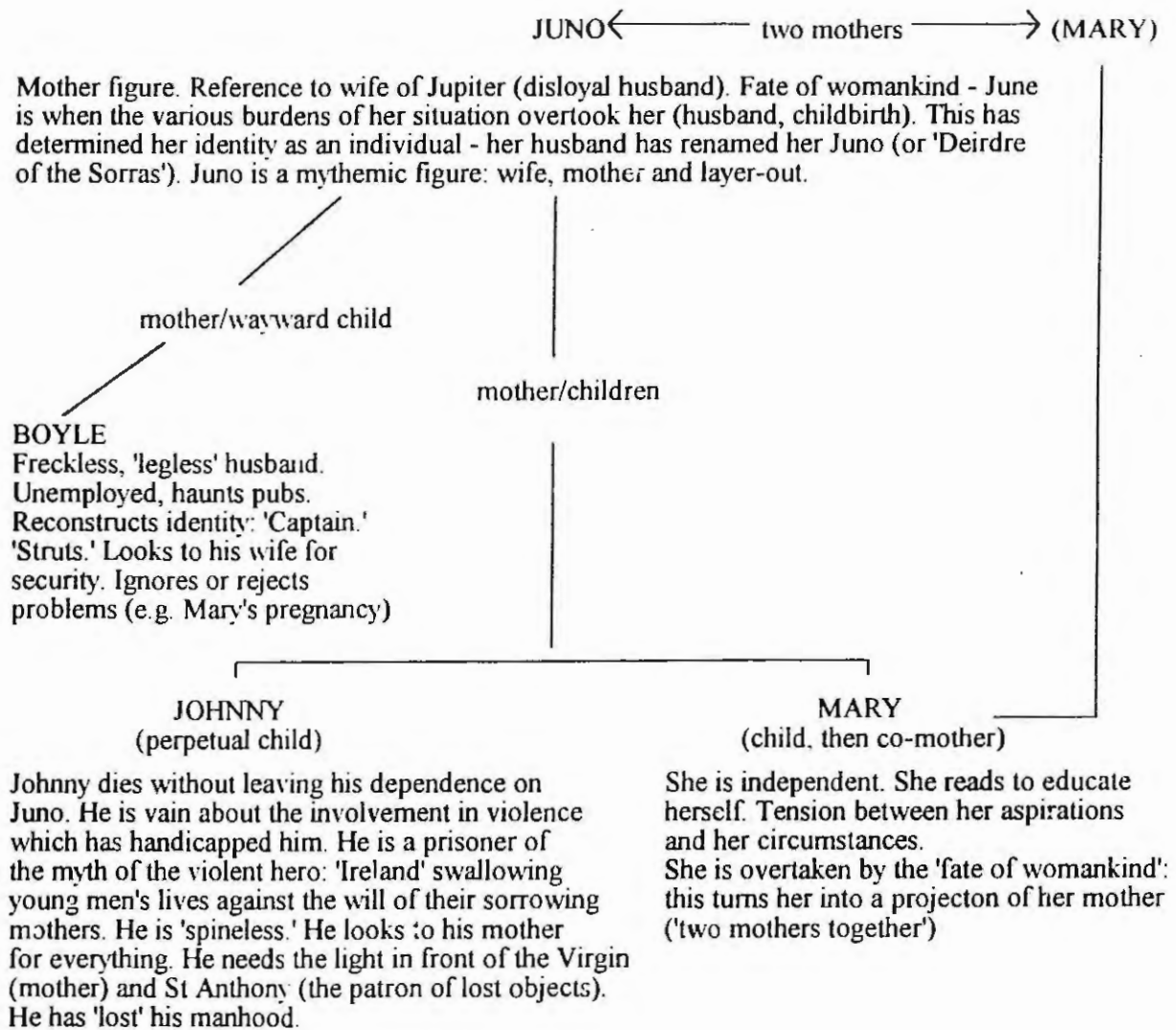
**Diagram E:** Deirdre's function as a character and her place in the relationship-network of the play

Looking at the role of these characters in the relationship-network of each play, further examples of inability to act independently, of limited options, can be observed. Deirdre has been brought up by Conchubar who though much older than her, sees her as his mate, and by Laversham who would in fact be Conchubar's contemporary.

Deirdre is a 'doomed doom' in that she is going to bring doom to others but also to herself. Naisi who is her peer is separated from her by the taboo of the King's ownership. They can only exist together outside their society, not inside it. Naisi who found Deirdre while hunting, continues to see her as a wild thing. She is a sort of quest-object, the object of other people's desire. She does not appear to be able to function, within this network, as a subject, in the psychological sense of being able to follow her own desires. Her function is rather to be desired, and she tries, and fails, to use other's desire of her to achieve her own.

<sup>15</sup>. Brémond, *Ibid.*, p. 8.

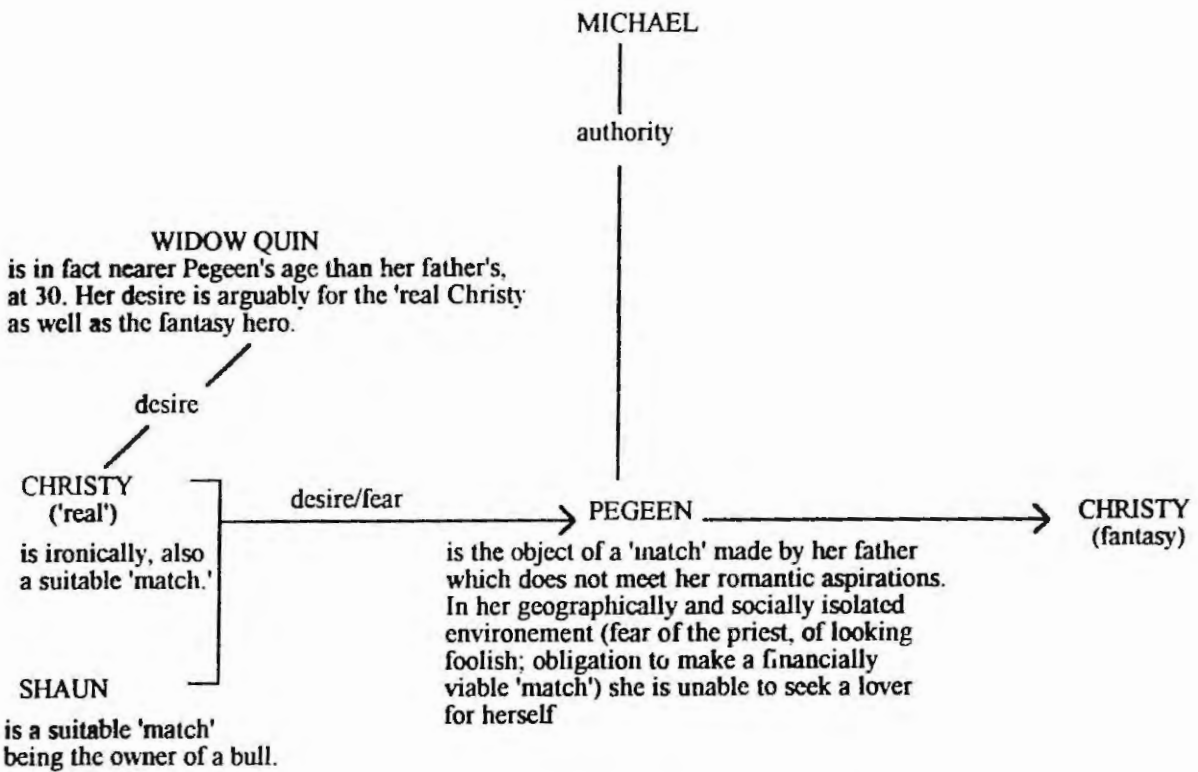




**Diagram F:** Juno's function as a character and her place in the relationship-network of the play.

In *Juno and the Paycock*, Juno is a kind of universal mother-figure with two children and a third 'wayward child,' her husband. Juno is overtaken by the fate of womankind: husband, children who depend on her, all these events having taken place in June, thus even fixing her identity ("Juno"), and making her life difficult ("Deirdre of the Sorras"). Juno is wife, mother, and layer-out to husband and son. Boyle is her 'legless' (drunk) husband who haunts pubs and avoids work, counting on Juno for survival. He is vain and invents identities for himself. He refuses responsibilities and expects Juno to solve his and everyone else's problems, Mary's unwanted baby for example. Mary, though Juno's child, has become by the end of the play a kind of coeval mother; "two mothers together." Mary who is an independent-minded character experiences a certain tension

between her aspirations and her circumstances, but at the end of the play she has been overtaken in her turn by the 'fate of womankind,' that is, a pregnancy, stereotypically inseparable from female sexual activity, and for which she is left to take entire responsibility. She is a "Child of Mary" and has a baby without a father; a kind of virgin birth. Johnny is Juno's perpetual child since he dies without ever having achieved manhood. He is vain about his involvement in the violence which has handicapped him, a projection of adolescent fantasy, and is now a prisoner of the myth which caused it; He is "spineless," full of fear, looking to his mother and needing the light in front of the statues of the Virgin and St Anthony — the saint to whom one prays if one has lost something. Johnny has in some sense lost his manhood.



**Diagram G:** Pegeen's function as a character and her place in the relationship-network of the play.

Pegeen is also at the centre of a relationship-network which restricts her. She is placed between the available 'match' (marriage partner acceptable to her father because he owns land), Shaun, and Christy whom she sees as the fulfilment of her dreams. In fact Christy's personality is much closer to Shaun's than she realises. Pegeen is living in a shebeen four miles from anywhere and has dreamed of travelling to far-flung places. Her marriage has been arranged by her father and

is a typical rural match: Shaun is acceptable for his land and his bull, though he is weak and mawkish even in her father's opinion. Pegeen begins to express her dreams in the context of her relationship with Christy and shows her emotive and poetic side. When he leaves she is left with her father again, without much likelihood of finding mate more her equal than Shaun, whereas Christy is liberated from his father's yoke and from his fear of girls.

In the three cases the heroine is spatially confined. Hunting, going out to see friends, going to wakes and travelling are possible for men, but women are confined in women's space (the home, the King's palace) out of which it is difficult and ultimately impossible to survive. This restriction may further be explored with reference to the signifiers available to the heroine of the play. The set of the heroine's dramatic signifiers (all the words, gestures, movements or other dramatic effects which she may consistently use to convey meaning) gives information about what is her dramatic mode of existence, that to which the audience can respond. Audience response operates through identification with the character as a subject but this is not of course the only possibility.

Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel's study of Alain Robbe-Grillet's *L'année dernière à Marienbad*,<sup>16</sup> uses the psychoanalytic concept of object-relation (*relation d'objet* or *relation objectale*). Object relation is defined in Laplanche et Pontalis' *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* as: "Terme [...] pour désigner le mode de relation du sujet avec son monde, relation qui est le résultat [...] d'une certaine organisation de la personnalité."<sup>17</sup>

The study of a subject's own object-relation, however, is not my preoccupation here but rather the observation of the signifiers which the heroine uses, as potential objects in the audience-performance relationship. I have used a number of categories of signifiers: the heroine's movements; how she is described / seen by the other characters; her self-image as she expresses it; the stage directions given for her; and the verbs / expressions of action or inaction that she uses.

<sup>16</sup> Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, "*L'année dernière à Marienbad*" in *Pour une psychanalyse de l'art et de la créativité*, Paris: Payot, 1971.

<sup>17</sup> J. Laplanche et J.B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, Paris : PUF, 1968.

MOVEMENT	AS PERCEIVED	SELF IMAGE	STAGE DIRECTIONS / SYMBOL.OBJ.	VERBS: action / inability to act
held in wood			- dragon stones	
asks Naisi to come				
dresses up			- Queen Edain	
is taken to Scotland	"the son of Usna and his queen" (173)	"dragonish" (178)	- Lughaidh	"myself wars on myself" (178)
is taken back against her wish	"it is but natural that she should doubt him, for her house has been the hole of the badger" (179)	"this delicate house of ivory" (183)	Redstripe's wife	
puts on jewels	"I ask your pardon for her / she has the heart of the wild birds that fear" (184)	"whatever was to happen to my face / I'd be myself" (187)	- rubics	"it is my husband's will" (185)
makes up				"I put on beauty, yes, for Conchubar" (185)
plays chess	"O my eagle" (196) "pull/ this appeal among the winds" (202)	"I had my beauty" (198)		
snatches knife		"a single woman is of no account" (199)	- "[snatching a knife]" (193)	"I would obey, but cannot" (197)
hides			- [she staggers over]" (199)	"Although we are so delicately made / there is something brutal in us, and we are won / by those who can shed blood" (199)
kills herself			- "[laughing]" (199)	
			- "[almost with a caress]" (200)	

Deirdre's movement is confined within the space allowed her by others. Initially a prisoner in Conchubar's house, she is taken to Scotland by Naisi, then brought back, unwillingly. Most of her movements are related to her role as sex-object (dressing, painting her face). She remains behind when Naisi goes to attack Conchubar, hides the dagger, then hides to kill herself. This is her most energetic action but we do not see it. Deirdre is perceived as a wild creature by Naisi, who apologises for her inability to understand the laws of hospitality (when in reality she has understood Conchubar's intentions better than he has); or as a possession ("his queen" (173), "Deirdre is mine, my queen" (200)) by others. Her self-image is organized around her appearance; self-image equals image in the eyes of others. She does assert that if she spoils her beauty so that Conchubar will no longer pursue her, she will still be herself, but Naisi does not see her this way, and responds by telling her to leave "the gods' handwork unblotched" (187). She is an emblem of female beauty and its fatality affects herself as much as those who desire her. She does not exist independently of her iconic value. She realizes this, as is shown by her use of strategies of seduction. The stage directions are

few, even for Yeat's highly stylised, pageant-like dramaturgy: apart from the snatching of the knife, they refer mainly to her seduction stratagems ("laughing," "almost with a caress"). A number of visual emblems are associated with her, which have mystical, of the chess-game iconic significance: dragon-stones, jewels won on battle, the acting-out of Lughaidh Redstripe and his wife (179), the reference to Queen Edain (177). These 'icons' are like the attributes of saints in paintings: they express what power the saint is supposed to have and/or why she or he is a saint; this being often the type of martyrdom undergone. In Deirdre's case they signify the fatality of female sexuality and of its power to attract. The verbs Deirdre uses express inability to act independently, and sometimes, an effort to persuade or flatter others, in order to achieve her ends: "it is my husband's will" (178), "I am pleading," "I put on beauty, yes, for Conchubar" (185).

MOVEMENT (NB spatially confined in 'women's' areas)	AS PERCEIVED	SELF IMAGE	STAGE DIRECTIONS / DESCRIPTIONS	VERBS: action / inability to act
does not go to work	real name?		"[a look of listless monotony and harassed anxiety of mechanical resistance]" (I,4)	
does house work			"[vigorously shaking the pan]" (I,15)	"Amn't I nicely handicapped" (I,8)
goes to work			"[sing(s) simply]" (II,51)	"Whist" (II,44)
buys gramophone	"there's no tellin' women what Consols is - th' wouldn't understand (II,42)			"I wouldn't care to meddle" (II,44)
sings				"have a hot cup o'tay (II,53)
sits by fire				"God help [...] the Lord be good"(II,55)
does housework	"You're to blame yourself for a gradle of it - givin' him his own way in everything, an' never assin' to check him [...] Why didn't you look after the money? (III,78)	"we're middling old, an' most of our years is spent" (III,74)* "Who has kept the house together" (III,78) "two mothers" (III,87) "your poor old selfish mother" (III,87) "face the ordeal" (III,87)	"[brings in the things asked for]" (III,64) "[in an earnest manner and with suppressed agitation]" (III,71) "[with passionate remonstrance]" (III,78) "[calmly]" (III,85)**	"I don't believe it, I don't believe it. I don't believe it" (III,76)  "What can God do against the stupidity of men?" (III,86)

**Diagram I:** Juno's dramatic signifiers  
(*Juno and the Paycock*)

\* chronological displacement: she is 45  
and Boyle is in his sixties.

\*\* news of Johnny's death.

Juno's movement is confined by work and housework, looking after her family, going to find her son's body. There is a brief flowering when, in the euphoria of imagined prosperity, she buys a gramophone and sings, but this is doomed to end very abruptly and unpleasantly.

The most striking thing about how Juno is perceived is that we do not know her real name: 'Juno,' the woman who became wife and mother in that month, has taken over her individual identity. Everything is expected of Juno, but at the same time, Boyle affects to belittle her woman's understanding, projecting his own ignorance onto her. Johnny blames her for Boyle's excesses, as if she could have prevented them.

She is seen as a universal mother, a *complément maternel* in the Lacanian sense, that is, the mother as she is perceived by the young child, as being the whole of its universe. She sees herself and Boyle as "middling old" (III,74) with most of their life spent — although he is in his sixties and she is only 45.

She sees herself as the person who keeps the house together. Later, she sees herself and Mary as "two mothers together" (III, 87). She takes on all burdens: when Mary is afraid to go and see Johnny's body she blames herself for her 'selfishness' in not thinking of others even for a moment. The stage directions express ability to endure, passive strength and resistance to a harsh environment, and stoic courage.

The verbs she uses show how trammelled she is with the burden of her family: an inability to get free coupled with resignation and, of course, prayer.

MOVEMENT	AS PERCEIVED	SELF IMAGE Nb no expression of self image until act II, after meet- ing with Christy	STAGE DIRECTIONS / DESCRIPTIONS	VERBS: action / inability to act NB connotative inflation of Pegeen's discourse
remains at home while father goes to work	"a kindly woman, the way I wasn't fearing you at all" (I,55)		"[wild looking but fine] (I,56) ["with scorn"] (I,59)	"I won't stop alone in it" (I,63)
serves at bar goes to get goat's milk	"a queer little daughter" (I,63) "the way she'll be rating at your own self" (I,01) "tow fine women" (I,95)		"[taking up the defence of her preperty]" (I,65) "[gruffly]" (I,77)	"would you have me knock the head of you" (I.73)
Goes to games	"a lovely handsome woman" (II,111)	"I wouldn't give a thraneen for a lad hadn't a mighty spirit in him" (II,113) "you'll be starting to some girl" (III,147) "I'd be nice so, is it" (III,149) "and what is it I have" (III,149) "and myself a girl was tempted often marry a Jew man" (III,151) "and to think its me is talking sweetly, Christy Mahon, and I the fright of seven townlands for my biting tongue" (III,152) "the world should see me [...] the fool of me" (III,161)	"[beginning to play with him]" (II,109)  "[radiantly wiping his face] (III,147) "[is moved]" (III,149) "[with real tenderness]" (III,149)  "[glaring at Christy]" (III,160)	"I've no starch for the like of you" (Ii, 105)
Goes to get sheep (Shaun's stratagem)				
Remains at home while Christy leaves				"I swear to God I'll wed him" (III,157)

**Diagram J:** Pegeen's dramatic signifiers (*The Paycock of the Western World*)

Pageen's sphere of action is similarly confined to the home and 'women's work.' Pageen's outward image is that, on the one hand, of a 'fine girl,' marriageable, since her father owns a pub, and on the other hand, that of a shrew, known for her sharp tongue. There is an interesting development in this play whereby Pegeen expresses no self-image until her relationship with Christy has

reached a stage where she finds herself able to reveal another side of her personality. This tenderness she feels and expresses, however, though it might be seen as growth of personality, is doomed to failure when her image of Christy fades and she feels she has made a fool of herself. While examining the stage descriptions and verbs that Pegeen uses, we must bear in mind the connotative, inflation of the discourse: Pegeen talks wildly as do the other characters, but this does not represent realistically a course of action to be taken. It is the idiom of the play and of a certain kind of Hiberno-English. In the end, Pegeen is fully aware of the difference between the "gallous story" and the "dirty deed" (288). The development of her self-image is unfortunately based on her fantasised perception of Christy and is frustrated when this image is exploded, whereas Christy's growth in personality is apparently more lasting.

The foregoing examination of the three plays shows that we do not have here the female counterpart of the noble hero who commits *hubris* and is the creator of his own fate. The psychological relation is different. Juno is a stoic, not a heroic figure, a matriarch stereotype; Deirdre a quest-object or sexual Grail; Pegeen a marriage-prize who finds herself out of place. There is not much catharsis in store for the female spectator here. These women are objects and not subjects and cannot be identified with in the same way as Oedipus. Nor, conversely, are they the objects of comic relief, since their position is tragic although they are the victims not the heroines of the tragic situation.

Their resonance and undoubted power comes, I think, from their mythic rather than heroic dimension. It is as *mythemes*, units of mythic signification, that I wish to consider them here. The mythic origin, in one sense, of the Deirdre story is obvious, though Yeats took Augusta Gregory's *Cuchulainn of Muirthemne*<sup>18</sup> as his source, rather than an original version of the *réamhscéal* to the *Ruaidhríocht* or Ulster cycle. The icons attached to the Deirdre-figure in Yeats' play, the visual mythic elements associated with her, have here, as it were, an emblematic function: the rubies she wears to affirm her queenship before Conchubar, which Naisi had won from a king in battle, the queen's robes, the raddle to mask her fear, are emblems of her status as sexual slave or war-prize, though one of exceptional value to a conqueror, and are metaphors of the inevitable destiny of her woman's part. The dragon-stones are particularly significant emblems: these are stones which Conchubar has hung in his bed and which will, once Deirdre has

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<sup>18</sup> Augusta Gregory, *Cuchulainn of Muirthemne*: the story of the men of the Red Branch of Ulster, arranged and put in English by Lady Gregory with a preface by W.B. Yeats, London: John Murray, 1915.



been reclaimed from Naisi, turn her hatred of Conchubar to love, will she, will she. This is a remarkable male fantasy of being able to control female desire.

Deirdre refers to dragons herself: she remembers how the battle-prize she wears as an emblem of her husband's warrior-status, belonged to a king who was so murderous "he seemed all dragon" (178). She "grow[s] dragonish" (178), at war herself upon herself, in conflict with her self as object, as image, symbol and emblem of male power. Her murderousness, her ability to manipulate men by ridicule and sexual flattery, will be turned only to her own destruction. It is her destiny that she cannot act except indirectly, or upon herself, and her desire, her impulses are displaced because everything she does or is, is significant primarily of her being an object of desire. She exists only as an emblem.

Various Irish *scéalta* have been investigated, along with other Indo-European myths and epics, by Georges Dumézil in his great work *Mythe et épopée*,<sup>19</sup> in which he has recorded certain essential similarities and central patterns in the epics of many civilisations, and tried to trace how these myths and epics related to the society which produced them. He outlines three basic mythic function: warrior, king and priest. In the case of the Macha stories and of the story of Medb, he talks of the functions of maiden, warrior and mother. (Robert Graves' mythic model in *The White Goddess*<sup>20</sup> is a female one, the Triple Goddess). The Cuchulainn stories, it has been suggested, though written down in the Early Christian period, have their origin in the warrior aristocracy of an Iron-age of Bronze-age society, judging by certain aspects of ritual and armour. The accession to literature of the *scéalta* was brought about by the redactor clerics of the Early Christian Church, and eminent scholars such as Proinsias Mac Cana and Christian Guyonvarc'h have noted the fact that these pagan tales of love and war owe their survival to monastic scribes, even if these did sometimes preface them with doubts about their appropriateness.

Yeats's and Synge's versions of the Deirdre story are romanticised: Deirdre's death, for example, in the original, occurred after a year of living in Conchubar's house, when he decided to give her to Eoghan whom she also hated. This ending might not, indeed have suited the Celtic Revival taste in heroines. Deirdre's overt sexual invitation to Naisi in the original, is also censored. It must be realised, however, that the more explicit language of the *scéal* cannot be taken as evidence of a more 'heroic' stature for Deirdre, as openness in speech about sexual matters is not necessarily evidence of the absence of sex discrimination or role

<sup>19</sup>. Georges Dumézil, *Mythe et épopée*, Paris : Gallimard, 1968.

<sup>20</sup>. Robert Grave, *The White Goddess*, London: Faber, 1961, pp. 9-10; 14.

determination. The relative prudishness of the Yeats and Synge plays is a cover-up, but not a change, of Deirdre's status in society.

As for Juno and Pegeen, they also can be said to have a mythic function; though they could not, strictly speaking, be called archetypes, they are stereotypes (unconscious psychic archetypes) of the working-class mother, and the country girl in search of a match (much as described in Arensberg and Kimball's study of rural society (*Family and Community in Ireland*, 1968).<sup>21</sup> I do not mean that as dramatic characters they do not have individuality, but that although they are individuals, their mode of perceived existence, of dramatic signification, is overdetermined: their role as women overshadows their existence as humans. Their dress, appearance, lack of husband, unwanted husband, children, unwanted children, are all part of an existence which is not created by independent choice.

Their often heroic efforts to escape this overdetermined semantic and semiological chain might indeed evoke a kind of pity and terror in the female spectator, but not one that leads to catharsis: there is no purgation from guilt that you bear as an object and not as a subject. It would be rather an exasperated pity, and a nagging terror. For of course myths live on, though mythemes undergo transformation. On another level, a society continues to need and produce myths, for its own validation, as argued by Claude Lévi-Strauss.<sup>22</sup> Freud spoke in *Totem and Taboo*<sup>23</sup> of society in which the myths display an ignorance of the connection between male and female sexuality, and birth, as being, by definition, at a primitive stage of their development. One might expect mythemic transformation in present consciousness as a result of a most important new element in civilisation, which is the control, by women, of the link between sexuality and childbirth. Myths are arguably necessary, in the sense that they are not only the reflection of a society — Bronze age, Early Christian, "Celtic Twilight" or early twentieth century — but are functional, continuing to construct meaning and identity and to provide mind models which change according to the society's evolving needs in relation to its view of itself, its explanation or dream of its origin, or the role models it finds useful at a given period.

They must however, as Richard Kearney and Declan Kiberd have said, be serviceable myths, and this is what these heroines no longer are, I feel. The Deirdre, Juno and Pegeen mythemes were no doubt part of an enabling myth, part

21. C.A. Arensberg & S.T. Kimball, *Family and Community in Ireland*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968.

22. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Antropologie structurale*, Paris: Plon, 1973.

23. Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo," in *The Standard edition of the Complete Psychoanalytical Works*, vol. XII, London: Hogarth Press, 1953-66.

of the Dramatic Revival's effort to stimulate a sense of national identity: but they are no longer serviceable; and the lack of a serviceable myth is naturally filled by whatever identification-object the society can find: today's Maid / Warrior / Crone triad might be held to include the Princess of Wales, Ms Margaret Thatcher, Mr Barbara Cartland. Or the Moving Statue, the aggressive Dallas / Dynasty female, and the creaking-voice heroine of *Harbour Hotel*. There are, unfortunately, the prevalent identification-objects, today's functional mythemes, in the absence of more useful alternatives. Recent theatrical innovation, such as the Druid Theatre's interpretation of *The Playboy of the Western World*, have explored new dramatic signifiers and moved away from the traditional portrayal of Pegeen; it is to such exploration of more relevant alternatives that playwrights', producers', actors' and spectators' attention should now be turned.

In the Druid production of *The Playboy*, the character of the Widow Quin was played by Marie Mullen and portrayed, not as the rather ridiculous widow, foolishly pursuing Christy but undermined as a sexual being, but as a woman whose interest in Christy and encouragement of his attentions seems quite natural. Traditional portrayals of the Widow Quin were more of a figure of fun, though in fact the text gives no precise information as to her age or degree of sexual attractiveness. In the Druid's production, at the point where the Widow Quin makes a play for Christy, pointing out why he would be better off marrying her, a woman of experience who knows how to look after a man, than a flighty young girls, only to have his attention taken from her by the arrival of Christy, dramatic attention was focused on the widow, showing her expression of wry disappointment and recognition that her attempt to attract him to her has failed. For a moment, our attention is on her face, not in ridicule but in sympathy, and her vulnerability as a woman is represented by a sad but resigned expression on the attractive face of a women in her thirties. The text of the play has no stage direction to this effect, and traditional productions have not tended to attract the spectator's sympathy to the character in this way.

This innovation is part of a renewed interpretation of the play which takes attention to some extent from Christy and gives it to the women of the play, not as stereotypes of the young and older women, but as more rounded figures with whom the spectator can enact the relationship of empathy which heroic catharsis needs. Without laying down a new orthodoxy of production of classic Irish drama in opposition to the Abbey school, it seems appropriate to remember that the object of study of Anglo-Irish drama must include the text in production. The text as read will necessarily be incomplete and the producer and performers' interpretation is an essential element of textual criticism. It seems therefore

appropriate that new ideas on production be allowed to contribute to the development of the classic drama, and that no considerations of dramatic tradition be used to limit and censure dramatic innovation. The great plays of the Irish Dramatic revival, those studied here and others by such writer as John B. Keane, offer limited possibilities of representation of women if their interpretation is to be confined to memories of great Abbey Theatre productions, and will lose richness as a result: production innovation, particularly with regard to the representation of the heroine, is, I would suggest, the condition of their survival in greatness.