

## Opponent's Review

Petra Pecovová, "John Millington Synge and Irish Mythology – *Deirdre of the Sorrows*" BA thesis

The proposed topic of this BA thesis is certainly a fruitful one, although it is also one much researched and studied, and this brings certain commitments that the thesis only partially meets. The comparative analysis of J.M. Synge's final, unfinished work undertaken here is quite methodical. Ms. Pecovová devotes the first half of the work to discussion of each of the versions of the Deirdre story and the elements Synge preserved or discarded in writing his own. This chapter provides a descriptive, as opposed to analytical, synopsis of some scholarship in the area. The judgements offered of Synge's objectives and aesthetic for instance, that "the only reality for Synge was the peasant life in Ireland" (23), are rather naïve and not a little ill-informed. Moreover, some discussion of the term "realism" which is used to describe Synge's approach to the legend ought to have been included, as well as some acknowledgement that these earlier versions of the legend differ not merely in terms of content but in their attitudes to narrative.

The remaining part of the thesis, divided into chapters on the role of fate and the status of Deirdre as a tragic heroine both would have benefited from further research. The sources used are limited (only one book on the subject of tragedy), which has repercussions for the development of both chapters. A significant omission is the absence of any reference to Toni O'Brien Johnson and David Cairns (eds.) *Gender in Irish Writing* (1991) which has a substantial essay by Máire Herbert on precisely this topic – "Celtic heroine? The archaeology of the Deirdre story."

In terms of writing style and presentation, the thesis is carefully presented, and generally correct. It is regrettable that the introduction opens with a misspelling of the name of the Irish National Theatre Society. However, this is a proofreading issue; Pecovová's language skills are more than adequate.

To conclude, the thesis tackles an interesting, but extensive topic. Ms. Pecovová demonstrates some research skills, but overall such a topic would have demanded more. Synopsis of the research materials is generally sufficient; critical and nuanced judgement is somewhat lacking.

Suggested areas for discussion at the defence:

1. How would you define the term realism as it pertains to *Deirdre of the Sorrows*? Could you place the term in a historical context, relevant to the ILT at the time Synge was writing?
2. Could you discuss further the "reality of peasant Ireland" (45) to be found in the play?

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade the work "very good" / 2.

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Clare Wallace, PhD

