

## Deirdre and Emer as Ideal Counterparts to Their Heroes

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Kang, Mei and Yun, Ki Ho. “Deirdre and Emer as Ideal Counterparts to Their Heroes.” *Studies in English Language & Literature* 45.4 (2019): 133-151. The purpose of this paper is to study two female characters, Deirdre and Emer as ideal counterparts to their husband-heroes in W. B. Yeats’s two Cuchulain plays: *Deirdre* and *The Only Jealousy of Emer*. To clarify what makes these two characters distinguished, this paper tries to reveal several significant similarities between Deirdre and Emer by analyzing their characters respectively. In *Deirdre*, the analysis is trying to illustrate how Deirdre becomes a worthy partner to Naoise: her superior wisdom enables her to see through the reality; meanwhile, the fidelity to love honors her as noble as her husband; finally, the self-sacrifice fulfills her heroic status. In *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, similar to Deirdre, Emer is more qualified than her two other adversaries: more faithful than Fand and more courageous than Eithne Inguba. More importantly, by her renunciation of her love, Emer proves to be an ideal counterpart to the hero. Thus, three aspects that the two heroines have in common are to be examined: they are equal to their husbands rather than their subordinates; moreover, both of them keep their love noble; consequently, Yeats hoped that as great models, Deirdre and Emer might awaken the national awareness to be restored to modern Ireland. (Chungbuk National University)

**Key Words:** Deirdre, Emer, ideal counterparts, faithful, sacrifice

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## I

W. B. Yeats, one of the greatest poets in the 20<sup>th</sup> century English literature, had a great interest in drama throughout his life and wrote more than 30 plays as well as many good poems. Among these plays, six of them are on the life and death of the great warriors of the Red Branch order and heroic knights, which Yeats links together to be his Cuchulain cycle<sup>1</sup>. By taking *Deirdre* as part of this unit, Yeats states, “I wrote in blank verse, which I tried to bring as close to common speech as the subject permitted, a number of connected plays—‘*Deirdre*’, ‘*At the Hawk’s Well*’, ‘*The Green Helmet*’, ‘*On Baile’s Strand*’, ‘*The Only Jealousy of Emer*’” (VPI 567). Meanwhile, he explains the relationship between Naoise and Cuchulain:

I have written a series of plays upon certain events of the Irish heroic age, set out in their chronological order. In ‘*Deirdre*’ the hero Naoise, who holds what the translators call the ‘championship of the Red Branch,’ dies, making ways for successor in the championship, Cuchulain, to whom I have given four plays: ‘*The Hawk’s Well*’, ‘*The Green Helmet*’, ‘*On Baile’s Strand*’ and the present play, or my verse play on the same theme ‘*The Only Jealousy of Emer*.’ (VPI 572)

Thus *Deirdre* can be considered as one of the Cuchulain plays and “Naoise and Deirdre as the prototypes of Cuchulain and Emer” (Yun 322). And the purpose of this paper is to examine the status of Deirdre and Emer as ideal counterparts to their hero-husbands and so they can be regarded as Yeatsian heroines.

As a method of study, the analysis illustrates Deirdre’s passionate nature and

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<sup>1</sup> According to Joseph Leondar Schneider in “The Drama of the Red Branch,” *Unity of Culture in Yeats’s Drama*, he states that people can get benefit by studying these six plays: *Deirdre*, *At the Hawk’s Well*, *The Green Helmet*, *On Baile’s Strand*, *The Only Jealousy of Emer* and *The Death of Cuchulain*. Through comparing the similarities “between the life and death of Deirdre and Naoise and the unfolding of the careers of Cuchulain and Emer, it contributes to an understanding of the playwright’s development between 1903 and 1939” (Schneider 97). Besides, the similarities also reveal Yeats’s mystical system and his *A Vision* (1937).

transcendence. Being capable with wisdom and courage, she is more sensitive to tell right from wrong with reason. Meanwhile, the faithful love between the couple honors the wife as an ideal counterpart to her husband. Subsequently, her self-sacrifice dignifies sorrow and fulfills her heroic status.

Through another character, Emer with the similar qualities like Deirdre, Yeats intends to create an image of a heroine who has determination and strong will. In the struggle of three women to possess Cuchulain, Emer is more faithful than Fand and more courageous than Eithne Inguba, the mistress of Cuchulain. Furthermore, Emer is suffering a struggle with the circumstances of her own life. Her love for Cuchulain which brings about his resurrection from death, also causes a permanent estrangement between them.

Accordingly, based on those above analyses, I am trying to conclude what Deirdre and Emer share in common by three points: by showing their heroic gestures, Yeats tries to demonstrate the two heroines are equal to their husbands rather than their subordinates; moreover, by keeping their love noble, Yeats intends to create an ideal state of relationship away from snobbery to achieve the unity of being; finally, by establishing their heroic images as models to follow, whom Yeats hoped to restore to modern Ireland in order to awaken Irish national awareness.

## II

*Deirdre*, though written during a painful period of Yeats's life and evoking considerable controversy, remains as a compelling piece. Actually, the story of Deirdre, which Yeats calls the most famous one of all Irish legends, was immensely popular and survived to the 20th century. Among a number of versions existing, Yeats creates his own *Deirdre* and states: "My *Deirdre* goes on slowly, but prosperously. It will be my best play—my *Deirdre* is a very confident serene person" (*L* 657).<sup>2</sup> By portraying such a beautiful woman image—"Ireland's Helen"

(Pethica 141)—Yeats is determined to maintain Deirdre as a worthy counterpart to Naoise by her heroic transcendence.

There are three points to support the statement: be endowed with superior wisdom, Deirdre has much more capacity to reason. Meanwhile, the couple appreciate, understand, and love each other through the best and worst times of their life, even right up to the end. There is no doubt that the embodiment of fidelity keeps their love noble. And between the couple, the love obtains the sublimation and the eternal. Finally, her self-sacrifice dignifies sorrow and disaster and fulfills her heroic status.

Obviously, Deirdre's superior wisdom enables her to see through the truth more than others. Some evidences are available both in the source and the play. On one hand, the different parenting backgrounds lead to different acknowledgments to identify the reality. The court-raised Naoise considers all men as upright as he is and believes Conchubar's official pardon to go back home. Even with no one to welcome them in the guest-house, Naoise still takes deep belief in the High King: "I have his word and I must take that word" (*CPI* 178). Obviously, without knowledge for the evil nature, Naoise is easily blinded by innocence and suffering the inability to recognize truth. On the other hand, the wood-bred Deirdre with her passionate nature has the ability to sense the crisis. By talking to the musicians, Deirdre gradually understands that the High King has no intention for the forgiveness but plans to kill Naoise and wed her. At first, she is terrified and then cries out:

O Mover of the stars

That made this delicate house of ivory,

And made my soul its mistress, keep it safe! (*CPI* 183)

Being a creature of nature, her terror is for herself, rather than for Naoise or their

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<sup>2</sup> Yeats considered Lady Gregory's retelling in her *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* the best version. Based on that source, he created his own *Deirdre*.

love. To be worthy of an ideal counterpart, she must possess great courage to deal with the situations which are getting worse and worse. As the plot progresses, she asks the musician a knife which will be used in case of need.

As a matter of fact, Deirdre shows her great courage to outwit Conchubar after Naoise being captured. When Conchubar declares that Naoise for high treason, Deirdre tries her best to plea for forgiveness: "For giving gifts; and you will pardon us" (CPI 197). Obviously, Deirdre is trying to win over Conchubar's sympathy, which, she thinks, is a good strategy to save Naoise. The couple have no one to ask for support except that Fergus promises to call up his friends, "the reaping-hooks," the local farmers. As the later scene shows, it is in vain to prevent their death. Then Deirdre becomes more reasonable to make her plea:

What am I saying?

You may have need of him, for you have none

Who is so good a sword, or so well lived

Among common people. You may need him,

And what king knows when the hour of need may come?

You dream that you have men enough. You laugh.

Yes; you are laughing to yourself. You say,

'I am Conchubar-I have no need of him.'

You will cry out for him some day and say,

'If Naoise were but living-' (CPI 198)

At this moment, although noticing the sinister character of the High King who has been deliberately planned it for years, Deirdre still holds a glimmer of hope to persuade Conchubar to let them go. Essentially, she possesses the optimistic attitude and persistent courage; she is more patient than Naoise and more intelligent than Conchubar.

Hearing the news of Naoise's death, Deirdre uses her intelligence to persuade Conchubar through the etiquette and manners that Conchubar conspicuously lacks:

In good time.

You'll stir me to more passion than he could,

And yet, if you are wise, you'll grant me this:

That I go look upon him that was once

So strong and comely and held his head so high

That women envied me.

...

It's better, when you're beside me in your strength,

That the mind's eye should call up the soiled body,

And not the shape I loved. (*CPI* 200)

Being overwhelmed by her heroic act, Conchubar has no choice but let her go and make her farewells to Naoise. Therefore, it is a kind of mortal victory for Deirdre. Being a creature of the unconquerable spirit in the circumstances of disaster and defeat, Yeats endows his Deirdre with a strong will and courage as well as intellect.

Furthermore, in order to keep their love noble, Yeats depicts an image of a faithful wife, which honors Deirdre as noble as her warrior husband. And it can be proved mainly from two aspects: the conflicts between Deirdre, Naoise, and Conchubar as well as the tension between Deirdre and Naoise.

Actually, Deirdre and Naoise stand for "a symbiotic relationship between opposites, the decorous but rigid Naoise and the naturally passionate but fearful Deirdre" (Schneider 101). In other words, the conflicts between them come from the opposite qualities of their characters: Naoise learns courage from his warrior's code and Deirdre learns love from her passionate nature.

In order to keep their love noble, Deirdre would rather "spoil this beauty that brought misery" (*CPI* 186) to save her lover's life. Being a cleaver woman, she can identify the facts between love and hate. As a noble man with dignity, Naoise asserts: "leave the god's handiwork unblotched" (*CPI* 187) and promises to give her "A cleanly death" (*CPI* 189).

Meanwhile, Naoise suggests to play the chess game like Lugaitlh Redstripe and his seamew wife doing on the night of their betrayal. Probably, by idealizing their death as noble as it can be, it fits Naoise's warrior code and implies a moral victory for them both. Actually, Deirdre possesses much more passion than the seamew wife. Though at first, she agrees:

though I have not been born  
Of the cold, haughty waves, my veins being hot,  
And though I have loved better than that queen. (*CPI* 190)

Comparing with the seamew wife who is only a kind of memory, the symbol of death, Deirdre is more willingly to fight for her love. Thus, she states her mind to Naoise:

I cannot go on playing like that woman  
That had but the cold blood of the sea in her veins. (*CPI* 191)

In fact, by asking the last kiss, Deirdre shows her passion more boldly:

And when that's over, we'll be different;  
Imperishable things, a cloud or a fire.  
And I know nothing but this body, nothing  
But that old vehement, bewildering kiss. (*CPI* 192)

However, as the anti-hero, Conchubar considers Deirdre's value as "his royal prerogative rather than her human needs and characteristics" (Schneider 107). He only cares about his own frustration, not the death of the woman who he claims to love: "She cannot have escaped a second time" (*CPI* 202).

At any rate, the conflict between youth and age is irreconcilable. It is doomed that young Deirdre won't love Old Conchubar anyway. In the source, it is

Conchubar that finds out Deirdre earlier than Naoise, and raises her up to her womanhood. But Deirdre has no hesitation to elope with the young warrior.

Futhermore, the selfish personality decides that Conchubar will give up nothing to win back the woman he appreciates. It is natural that at the end, the High King reveals his own self-deceiving mind: And every common man can keep his wife, / But not the King (*CPI* 202). Obviously, it is just a stratagem to delude himself.

At last, Deirdre's self-sacrifice completes and perfects her own character, elevating her to archetypal significance. Her death and reunion with Naoise is also what Yeats calls the tragic joy.

There is no doubt that the self-betrayal is against the nature of Deirdre. According to various versions of Deirdre legend, Deirdre survives and becomes Conchubar's queen. Anyway, she is reluctant to talk to anyone and dies of depression. Otherwise, like some modern readers argue, the lovers could wait because they know Fergus has gone for helps. And the lovers could pretend to accept Conchubar's condition to gain time. In fact, no matter which way they choose, that is totally against their nature and neither of them would survive. In the play, Deirdre once persuades Naoise to give her up. As a noble man, Naoise would not let his beloved Deirdre make compromises. Because both of them are eager to die rather than live in shame.

And there is not hard to understand that Deirdre's sacrifice is a fulfillment of her own transcendence. She cannot decide to accept death or not totally by herself. Rather than dragging out of an ignoble existence, Deirdre would like an upright death in order to avoid the after-life agony.<sup>3</sup> "Since Deirdre's whole existence has hinged on love, her betrayal of Naoise (even to save his life) would constitute an offense against her nature, after which on one, not even Naoise, could save her from a painful Dreaming-Back" (Schneider 103). Therefore, Deirdre's passionate nature enables her the dignity in accordance with her hero husband.

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<sup>3</sup> The basis of this lines comes from "The Soul in Judgment" section of *A Vision*.



### III

As their perfect mates like Naiose and Deirdre, Cuchulain and Emer should deserve the same attention. Since *The Green Helmet*, Yeats begins to treat Emer seriously as a heroine. Her faithfulness to Cuchulain foreshadows her heroic decision in the later play *The Only Jealousy of Emer*. With alternations of the source, Yeats modifies Emer's temperament a lot: she is no more a jealous wife with her fifty maiden retainers to attack Fand; instead, her "jealousy" comes from the concerning of her husband's well-being. In order to illustrate Emer's heroic transcendence, three evidences are examined to her as an ideal counterpart than the two other adversaries: more faithful than Fand and more courageous than Eithne Inguba. And finally through illustrating what is the essential significance of her renunciation, Emer's transcendent status can be seen.

First of all, Emer's faithfulness contributes the solid foundation in contrast to Fand. On one hand, the nature of Fand is full of deception and allurements in contrast to Emer's passionate suffering. In the source, by learning that Cuchulain is only enjoying her company for a while, Fand decides to give up him and returns to her husband, the god of the sea.<sup>4</sup> From this source, Yeats has created a much more sophisticated drama that shows another side of the Sidhe. After *On Baile's Strand* where Cuchulain dies fighting with the waves, she possesses the spirit of Cuchulain for her own good in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*. Differently from *At the Hawk's Well* with the disguise of hawk, now she has changed into a beautiful woman. In the beginning song, the chorus reveals the image of Fand as "a fragile, exquisite, pale shell" (*CPI* 282). The "shell" represents the image of her temptress.

In fact, Fand has no experience of living as a mortal. Thus, she can never feel

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<sup>4</sup> In *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, Cuchulain goes with Fand to the Otherworld. When Emer arrives with fifty women to bring him back, Cuchulain insists that he will always love his wife and cannot understand why Emer will not let him enjoy the company of Fand. Manannan, the deserted husband, causes Cuchulain to fall ill for a year, administers a drink of forgetfulness to him and to Emer, and passes his cloak between Fand and Cuchulain to ensure they will never meet again.

the remorse of Cuchulain. Rather than helping Cuchulain out of the painful memory of betrayal of Emer, Fand aims to satisfy her own desire. Actually, Fand entraps Cuchulain into more risky situation. Although promising to Cuchulain paradise, she attempts to trap him in his painful memories and remorse. Actually, Fand is planning to fish Cuchulain and “glitter in her basket” (*CPI* 290). However, in order to destroy Cuchulain totally, she plans to steal his life permanently and keep him in a painful entrapment between life and death.

On the other hand, through Bricriu, the god of discord, Emer recognizes her opponent immediately:

I know her sort.  
 They find our men asleep, weary with war,  
 Lap them in cloudy hair or kiss their lips;  
 Our men awake in ignorance of it all,  
 But when we take them in our arms at night  
 We cannot break their solitude. (*CPI* 290)

Against her unhuman adversary, Emer draws a knife from her girdle. Then, Bricriu states the truth that no knife can wound the Sidhe, for it is invulnerable to earthly weapons. Differently from the source that Emer takes fifty women, she must face Fand with no other help from the frail Eithne Inguba nor bargaining with Bricriu. Instead, she must make her own choice. Like Deirdre, these successful tragedies confirm what Yeats once said, “to bring their man to the greatest obstacle he may confront without despair” (*A* 189).

Besides Fand, Eithne Inguba, Cuchulain’s mistress from the mortal world, is another adversary in the struggle to possess Cuchulain. Nothing happens in this play that is not reciprocal, and this is certainly true of relations between Emer and Eithne Inguba (McAteer 104). And Eithne’s confused and cowardly action is in contrast with Emer’s brave and insightful behavior.

In the song of the musicians, Eithne Inguba is beautiful as “a white / Frail bird,

like a white sea-bird alone / At daybreak after stormy night / Between two furrows upon the ploughed land" (*CPI* 281). Being young and beautiful, she gets Cuchulain's favor to be his "newest love" (*CPI* 285). But essentially, she lacks the strength to deal with the risk and is unable to compensate Cuchulain for his deficiency. Therefore, it is doomed that Eithne Inguba is only as an image of the frail sea-bird.

While being a faithful wife, Emer is willingly to stay with Cuchulain after he fought with the sea and "lies dead or swooning" (*CPI* 283). In order to wake her husband up, she calls for Eithne Inguba. Because Emer knows that a young beautiful woman can get more chance to win back Cuchulain. Being timid, Eithne Inguba is afraid to sit down beside the bed, asking "is he dead?" (*CPI* 283) Only Emer's faith in the greatness of her husband enables her to think that though lying down in grave-clothes, he is not dead. Then, Emer recounts the scene of Cuchulain's combat with the waves after having killed his own son at the Baile's strand:

Toward noon in the assembly of the kings  
 He met with one who seemed a while most dear.  
 The kings stood round; some quarrel was blown up;  
 He drove him out and killed him on the shore  
 At Baile's tree, and he who was so killed  
 Was his own son begot on some wild woman  
 When he was young, or so I have heard it said;  
 And thereupon, knowing what man he had killed,  
 ...  
 He fought the deathless sea.  
 ...  
 But the waves washed his senseless image up,  
 And laid it at this door. (*CPI* 284)

Emer imagines that Cuchulain's body is lying in front of her. In fact, she can feel the suffering and pains of Cuchulain in his dreadful 'dreaming-back'. What's more, it is Emer's wisdom throughout the play, recognizing the truth that the Sidhe may

already substitute something in Cuchulain's place: "A sea-borne log bewitched into his likeness" (*CPI* 285).

At the first time when Eithne Inguba tries to call Cuchulain's name, Emer tells her to bend over him to touch his heart. Then, at the second time when Eithne Inguba calls upon Cuchulain's name, Emer rebukes her for calling too timidly: "Those words sound timidly; to be afraid / Because his wife is but three paces off" (*CPI* 286). Finally, Eithne Inguba calls out Cuchulain's name. Then Emer asks her to kiss the dead body. Unexpectedly, the kiss brings back life to the Figure of Cuchulain. On seeing the distorted face, Eithne Inguba flees in a panic. Again, when Eithne Inguba returns into the stage, Emer has already renounced her love. And the play ends with Eithne Inguba holding Cuchulain in her arms:

Come to me, my beloved, it is I.

I, Eithne Inguba. Look! He is there. (*CPI* 294)

Apparently, among the cautious entrance and terrified flight, Eithne Inguba lacks of courage. And she deceives him by claiming "won him from the sea" (*CPI* 294). But in *The Death of Cuchulain*, Cuchulain remembers that it is Emer not Eithne Inguba who saves him. Therefore, Eithne Inguba fails to be an ideal partner.

However, both by the presence of Eithne Inguba to claim "won him from the sea", and the promise of Fand for the eternal youth, Emer enters into a struggle to maintain her heroic ideal. By her renunciation, it is right for Emer to save her husband from the magic sleep.

After fighting with the sea in *On Baile's Strand*, Cuchulain's body has been rescued from the dreadful sea. The warrior hero is confronting with the supernatural power again. But this time he is the one who is pursued rather than pursuing. And Bricriu explains Cuchulain's plight:

A dream is body;

The dead move ever towards a dreamless youth

And when they dream no more return no more;  
 And those more holy shades that never lived  
 But visit you in dreams. (*CPI* 290)

Having chased Fand in *At the Hawk's Well*, Cuchulain continues to pursue these unreal images without noticing the danger of losing his own life. And what's worse, in the painful dreams, Cuchulain would never have the chance to find solace. Actually, he is kept in a dilemma: as a hero, he cannot live at ease with Emer; but being a mortal, he cannot possess Fand who belongs to the immortal world. Besides, the spirit of Cuchulain has entered into the dreaming-back phase of after-life. The goal of such a spirit is "to progress beyond this phase by mastering its past, then to pass through the other phases between death and rebirth and be reborn as quickly as possible" (*AV* 219).

Then, by giving the second sight to see Cuchulain and Fand in the immortal world, Bricriu urges Emer to cry out her renunciation:

Cry out that you renounce his love;  
 make haste  
 And cry that you renounce his love for ever. (*CPI* 294)

Then, Emer has proved her superiority again by claiming "I renounce Cuchulain's love for ever" (*CPI* 294). Thus, Emer saves her husband from the limbolike existence. And the play ends while Cuchulain wakes up in Eithne Inguba's arms. It proves the curse that Bricriu puts on Emer that she has lost his love forever. Anyway, Emer has not much to say then. Somehow, as Leonard E. Nathan calls "that calm exaltation that Yeats felt to be the quality of heroic transcendence - it should not be inferred that she is reduced to dumb pathos" (283). And in a sense, the great quality enables the heroine to be extremely calm to mask her disappointment and pain. Otherwise, her grief also contained within is necessary to the same value of her great transcendence: to win back her husband from the other

world. Thus, in her own mind, there is the tragic joy to demonstrate what she does.

Anyway, Emer has proved to be the ideal spouse for Cuchulain rather than two other adversaries. Thus, with her jealousy and self-sacrifice, Emer saves Cuchulain from the limbolike existence. As Earl Miner speaks highly of the character of Emer in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* as “one of the few plays of our time to show convincingly the nobility of human suffering” (Miner 206).

## IV

Few would doubt that Deirdre and Emer represent the idealized Irish women in Yeats’s mind: brave, dignified and devoted to their husbands. Thus, in order to figure out their significance in Yeats’s plays, three aspects of what they share in common is to be examined: firstly, they are equal to their husbands rather than the subordinates; secondly, both of them keep their love noble; finally, Yeats hoped to restore their images to modern Ireland.

As a matter of fact, Yeats tries to illustrate the heroines being equal to their husbands by showing their heroic gestures. Their husbands, Naoise and Cuchulain are the greatest Irish warriors. Naoise, the “championship of the Red Branch,” dies and then makes way for the successor, Cuchulain. Although both men possess heroic qualities, they cannot achieve their status without the helps of their wives. Moreover, Deirdre and Emer’s passionate natures compensate for the shortcomings of their husbands.

Naoise, as the greatest Irish warrior before Cuchulain, can not fulfill his heroic cause without the help of Deirdre. At first, he naively believes others as noble as he is. According to Yeats, the man with such personality is incapable of distinguishing truth from falsehood. And that can explain why he has been blinded by Conchubar who fears to confront him in single combat later and entraps him into a net. Then, the warrior code would not allow Naoise to yield to Conchubar. Thus, there is only

one way for Naoise: to die in dignity. Comparing with the decorous but rigid Naoise, the naturally passionate but fearful Deirdre helps her husband to die as he wishes. By her wisdom, she can understand Conchubar's purpose and then helps Naoise identify the difference between love and deceit. Furthermore, she persuades Conchubar to meet Naoise for a farewell with courtesy and etiquette which Conchubar lacks. Hence, she resolves the need of Naoise.

Like Deirdre, Emer possesses the similar qualities to fulfill her husband's heroic cause. On one hand, it is Emer that recognizes the evil nature of Fand. As the Sidhe, Fand gives Cuchulain the curse and then keeps his spirit in the other world. By promising him eternal youth and to forget remorse of betrayal, what Fand creates is only the temporary happiness. Under the disguise of a beautiful woman, she attempts to destroy Cuchulain step by step. Thus, she is by no means being Cuchulain's savior. On the other hand, there is no possibility for Eithne Inguba to save Cuchulain. Her timid and cowardly action fails her to be a proper candidate to wake up Cuchulain, because she thinks of love only in terms of physical desire. Apparently, she feels difficult to understand Emer. Indeed, Emer plans to use Eithne Inguba's youth and beauty to draw back the spirit of Cuchulain. By using desire and jealousy as weapons, Emer already transcends the ego. In fact, only Emer can be only the one who can save her husband. With her sensitivity and wisdom, she can tell Cuchulain's spirit has been kept into a deep remorse: a painful memory of his betrayal of Emer which constitutes the dreadful dreaming-back. And in this dreadful oblivion, Cuchulain is either dying at some future moment, or resolving his guilt through dreaming-back. Under such circumstance, neither the beautiful Fand, a statuesque goddess in the supernatural world, nor Eithne Inguba, a tender girl in the temporal world, can save Cuchulain. Definitely, as the incarnation of a sun goddess and rightful mate, Emer drags her husband back into life with her resolute action which gives the soul peace without suffering.

Meanwhile, both Emer and Deirdre choose to keep their love noble. It fits their passionate nature of "two different entities which offers the spiritual fulfillment" to

their husbands' heroic actions (*AV* 232). Besides, their noble love is the spiritual transcendence which is far from the materialistic and snobbish world.

In the source, Deirdre has fallen in love with the young handsome Naoise. They run away and live happily for six years. Comparing with the rich King Conchubar who can provide her all kinds of material demands, Naoise only can give her true love with a wandering life. Anyway, the couple cannot wander forever and must return home some day. Without good intention, Conchubar tricks them by a false forgiveness. Meanwhile, the High King is planning the wedding in a veil of secrecy with "embroideries to hang upon the walls, or new-mown rushes / To strew upon the floors, and came at length / To a great room" (*CPI* 173). Being a materialistic character, Conchubar can only show his love by material comfort without understanding that Deirdre belongs to nature. When she ignores those rich ornaments, Conchubar cannot understand Deirdre at all. After learning that it is impossible to win Deirdre by finery, Conchubar decides to use force. For what he wants is a beautiful queen who can live in the fancy palace as an ornament. And the value of his bride is considered only as a symbol of the High King's royal prerogative:

I will not make a bargain; I but ask  
What is already mine. (*CPI* 195)

Unlike Conchubar's selfishness, Deirdre and Naoise have already obtained the victory over mortal temptation. In order to die with dignity, the couple decide to follow the Lugaidh Redstripe and the seamew wife who are playing chess when waiting for their last moment. Otherwise, in order to be worthy of her husband's place, Deirdre must sacrifice herself for Naoise, just like Naoise sacrifices himself for her. Actually, Naoise does not give up fighting in a battle which he may win. When being tricked and captured in a net, Naoise would not allow Deirdre to prostitute herself to save him. Meanwhile, he envisions their future life:



If you were to do this thing,  
 And buy my life of Conchubar with your body,  
 Love's law being broken, I would stand alone  
 Upon the eternal summits, and call out,  
 And you would never come there, being banished. (*CPI* 197)

Hence, both of them choose to die honorably to keep their love noble, which ensures their salvation from remorse.

Comparing with Deirdre and Naoise, Emer demonstrates the similar heroic transcendence to rescue Cuchulain from the pure spirit world. Yeats treats Emer seriously earlier in *The Green Helmet*. In *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, she is no more young and beautiful. Different from Mary Bruin in *The Land of Heart's Desire* and Michael Gillane in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, Cuchulain can neither stay in the supernatural world nor returns to the temporal world. No matter how, he has already lost Emer. Theoretically, whatever Emer's choice is, Cuchulain would be into someone else's arms:

I have but two joyous thoughts, two things I prize,  
 A hope, a memory, and now you claim that hope. (*CPI* 289)

As the object of her love, she would like Cuchulain alive with another woman than dead. Emer is jealous. She is suffering her own fate by the choice and its significance for Cuchulain. On one hand, Fand, being non physically, can only allure Cuchulain in a spiritual world of dreams. Meanwhile, Eithne Inguba believes love in terms of physical desire in the temporal world. On the other hand, Emer enters into a struggle of her own choice and so maintains her heroic ideal. She uses desire and jealousy as her weapon against the Sidhe, while her pride and nobility allow her to love Cuchulain beyond human jealousy. By saving her husband from death, Emer's renunciation is justified.

At any rate, Yeats creates the heroic images of Deirdre and Emer. They possess

the noble qualities and are willing to sacrifice themselves to save their husbands. And Yeats hoped to show them to modern Ireland as models of ideal women.

In his eyes, Yeats calls up that “Deirdre was the Irish Helen, and Naoise her Paris, and Conchubar her Menelaus” (*Comm* 75). As a complex human being as well as an archetype, Yeats made Deirdre’s heroic nature in conflict with her human passion. And Deirdre takes a detached attitude to perfect her character as an ideal heroine. Similar to Deirdre, Emer is another archetype who possesses the qualities that Yeats hoped to restore to modern Ireland.

Besides, Yeats believed in Irish nationalism and supported to revive ancient Irish culture. Considering the social background of colony, it is a matter of the utmost urgency to restore an ideal Irish society order. Through Yeats’s female characters as symbols in promoting nationalism, the idea of uniting people of Ireland together was widespread. The ideal Irish women Yeats tried to show in his plays were self-sacrificing, faithful, and morally upstanding ones. Based on the myths, Yeats’s female characters are situated in his moral centers. In other words, they are Ireland itself.

Therefore, by analyzing their characters and what they have in common, this paper proves why and how they can be ideal counterparts to their husband-heroes, and so the two great women are Yeatsian heroines.

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