

***THE PORTRAYAL OF THE IRISH WOMAN
IN SELECTED PLAYS BY W.B. YEATS
AND J.M. SYNGE***

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Abstract

Irish drama reached its peak in the late nineteenth-and early twentieth centuries. The Irish stage was mainly dominated by the plays of two famous playwrights: W.B. Yeats and J. M. Synge. Yeats governed the stage by his beautiful lyrical plays, and Synge by his intense realistic method. Psychologically speaking, both playwrights drew their inspiration from their personal experiences by reflecting their own problems and fears through their characters, yet in different ways. Certain themes dominated Yeats's and Synge's plays, such themes are the awareness of the supernatural, the struggle of internal and external forces in man's life, and the assertion of one's identity. The medium through which they conveyed their themes was the construction of the female characters in their plays and how those characters thought and reacted.

As an Irish artist, Yeats is deeply concerned with the legendary lore and the mythological heritage of Ireland. He planned to revive the heroic past of Ireland through writing heroic drama. Therefore, aristocracy and peasantry met, in his plays, to form one ritual for the whole of Ireland. Aristocracy is represented by his heroines, who are either queens or noblewomen surrounded by faithful peasants. As for Synge, his

art is deeply rooted in the folk tales of the Irish countryside. He modifies those folk tales into modern plots, by adding his special touches of sharp humour and bitter realism. His heroines are real human beings who face the hardships of every day life.

This thesis is divided into three Chapters and a Conclusion followed by a Bibliography. Chapter One is an Introduction. It is divided into two Sections. Section One traces the portrayal of the Irish woman throughout Irish literature. Section Two illustrates the establishment of the Abbey Theatre and the theatrical career of both Yeats and Synge accompanied by certain details that concern their personal lives.

Chapter Two deals with W.B. Yeats's portrayal of the Irish woman. The selected plays for analysis are: *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), *Deirdre* (1906), and *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1919). Yeats's theatrical career can be divided into three phases: the young dreamy playwright, the successful theatre director, and the old wise artist. One quality which is shared throughout those different phases is his concern with the motives behind a woman's choice of devoting herself to either spiritual love or physical love and the journey of the soul between the two. His philosophy is mainly the product of his various readings and his devoted passion for Maud Gonne, the well-known Irish nationalist.

Chapter Three deals with J.M. Synge's portrayal of the Irish woman. The selected plays for analysis are: *In the Shadow of*

the Glen (1903), *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), and *The Tinker's Wedding* (1908). In these plays, Synge portrays the Irish peasant woman as a representative of a real human suffering from oppression and poverty. His heroines stand also for women's aspiration towards the assertion of identity and self-respect.

The Conclusion sums up the findings of the study. This is followed by a Bibliography and the Abstract in Arabic.