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Celtic Mythology Revived in Selected Works by Lady Gregory

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Zásady pro vypracování

Bakalářská práce je věnována tématu keltských motivů v divadelní hře The Golden Apple od Lady Augusty Gregory. První část práce bude věnována kulturně-historické charakteristice období keltského osídlení Británie. Zaměří se především na hodnotový systém, spiritualitu a mytologii. Dále bude následovat charakteristika literárního kontextu, ve kterém vznikala díla Lady Augusty, tj. období tzv. Irish Literary Revival, zmíněna bude i role keltské historie v utváření národní identity Irů. Analytickou část práce pak bude tvořit literární a kulturní rozbor divadelní hry The Golden Apple na základě poznatků prezentovaných v teoretických kapitolách.

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Annotation

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to analyse Celtic motives that were adapted by Lady Gregory in her works. The theoretical part of the thesis describes the cultural and historical context with the emphasis on Anglo-Irish relations and Irish Literary Revival, and the Celtic nations. The following chapter is dedicated to Gaelic religion and mythology in general. The final, practical, part compares extant Celtic and Irish myths to motives portrayed in the plays *The Golden Apple*, and *The Dragon*.

Key words

Celts, Ireland, Celtic Renaissance, Irish Literary Revival, Irish Folklore, Myths, Lady Gregory, Golden Apple, Dragon

Anotace

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat keltské motivy, které ve svých dílech zpracovala Lady Gregory. Teoretická část popisuje kulturní a historický kontext s důrazem na Anglo-Irské vztahy a Irskou literární obnovu. Následující kapitola je věnována gaelskému náboženství a mytologii všeobecně. Poslední, praktická, část porovnává dochované keltské a irské mýty s motivy vyobrazenými v divadelních hrách *Zlaté jablko* a *Drak*.

Klíčová slova

Keltové, Irsko, Keltská renesance, Irské literární obrození, Irská lidová kultura, Lady Gregory, Zlaté jablko, Drak

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Introduction

At one point of history, the British Isles were the centre of the Celtic realm. Thomas William Rolleston even likens the importance of the British Isles to the Celtic religion to the importance of Rome to the Christian world.¹ Some parts of the British Isles retained their Celtic heritage. In those regions, i.e. Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Isle of Man and Ireland, the Celtic spirit is still present and manifested in language, folklore and stories. Together with Brittany, they constitute so-called Celtic fringe.² Most people seldom question the Celticism of the people living there, and yet scholars often ask questions: ‘Is that what has survived really Celtic?’ and especially: ‘Who is the Celt?’ It is not the purpose of this paper to answer these questions, but since they are closely related to its topic, it will be briefly commented on them.

Throughout centuries, the Celtic nature proved to be ineradicable. Ireland had to deal with several waves of invaders but always managed to Gaelicize them. The invaders accepted the language, the habits and the lore of the locals. It was, however, a two-way process. The newcomers brought their way of life with them and imposed some of its features on the Irish. Another challenge to the Celtic lore was Christianity. The Irish adopted Christianity rather eagerly but it absorbed certain pagan beliefs and interpreted them according to its worldview. Therefore, not all aspects of Celtic religion and knowledge have been preserved and yet it is because of the work of early Christian monks that significant portion of the Irish mythology survived.

Many experts such as Peter Beresford Ellis³ or Doris Edel⁴ deem that the term Celtic is no longer question of a race but of a language. Celtic blood was diluted with the arrival of foreign races – the Vikings, the Normans and the Anglo-Saxons. They say it is the language that shapes a culture, which means if the Irish culture is called Celtic or Gaelic it is because the inhabitants of Ireland speak Gaelic. And yet it was found out that in countries of the Celtic fringe there is an increased rate of incidence of cystic fibrosis. It is a disease affecting the lungs and digestive system. As stated in the journal *Vesmír*, it is caused by mutation of the

¹ Thomas W Rolleston, *Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1911), 37.

² Frank Delaney, *The Celts* (London: HarperCollins Publisher, 1989), 15.

³ Peter Beresford Ellis, *A Dictionary of Irish Mythology*. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc. 1987), 58.
<https://archive.org/details/dictionaryofiris0000elli>

⁴ Doris Edel, “Kelská Literatura,” in *Keltové: Mýtus a realita*, ed. Stefan Zimmer, (Praha: Vyšehrad, spol. s r. o., 2017), 134.

gene G551D and because of its occurrence, some biologists suggest it might be a Celtic inheritance. What a Czech reader would surely find interesting is the fact that in the Czech Republic, too, the incidence of cystic fibrosis is above average. It means the Czechs are quite likely descendants of the Celts.⁵

This thesis aims to detect and analyse Celtic motives in selected works by the Irish playwright Isabella Augusta, Lady Gregory. Namely, the two of her plays, *The Dragon* and *The Golden Apple* will be closely examined. All plays were written during the Irish Literary Renaissance at the beginning of the 20th century.

Isabella Augusta, Lady Gregory (1852, Roxborough, Co. Galway – 1932, Coole) was one of the leading figures of Irish Literary Revival. During her fruitful life, she wrote or translated about 40 plays. She collected stories and poems of Irish oral tradition, some of them she edited and published, the other she incorporated in her works. She is the author of an artificial dialect of Kirtantan that is based on her idea of how an Irish peasant would speak English⁶ and for instance the play *The Golden Apple* was written in it.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. In the first chapter, the Irish history with an emphasis on Anglo-Irish relations is discussed since the mixture of conquest efforts by England, Irish stubbornness and free-spiritedness, and above all, the absence of an effort to understand the other led to the formation of Irish nationalism and the separatist tendencies that have manifested themselves culturally in the Irish Literary Revival. The characteristic of the Revival movement is not omitted. The following chapter deals with the nature and history of the Celtic race in general. The specifics of the Irish faith are captured in the third chapter. The last three chapters represent the practical part, hence are dedicated to the comparison of *The Golden Apple* and *The Dragon* to selected extant motives, stories and elements of Irish myths.

⁵ Alice Křebsová, Milan Macek, Věra Vávřová, Milan Macek, jr. "Keltský původ populace v Česku" *Vesmír* 79 (2000): 285. <https://vesmir.cz/cz/casopis/archiv-casopisu/2000/cislo-5/keltsky-puvod-populace-cesku.html>

⁶ "Augusta, Lady Gregory," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last modified May 22, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Augusta-Lady-Gregory>

1 Social, Cultural and Historical Context

Ireland has never been a world power nor it has ever had a great influence on the world events, yet Irish history is rich and the Irishmen are justly proud of it. There are only a few things that shape a nation's character the way history does. In the case of Ireland, it is double true. As John O'Beirne Ranelagh suggests, the oral tradition in Irish society is rooted so firmly that certain events are passed on and remembered for long centuries.⁷ This chapter is dedicated to significant historical affairs that affected the nature of the Irish nation, especially to Anglo-Irish relations whose dismal state resulted in Irish nationalist movement and influenced the character of the Irish Literary Revival.

Judging by the development of the Celtic languages in Britain, the Celts colonized the Isles in several waves. It is not known when the very first Celtic tribes came to the isle, but Frank Delaney reckons the first proto-Celtic culture arrived in Britain after 1300 BC from France and around 700 BC there was the second migration wave. The third wave followed at the beginning of the 5th century BC.⁸ Ranelagh adds that by 500 BC Ireland was fully inhabited by the Celts.⁹ The former settlers of Ireland merged with the newcomers and quickly adopted Celtic conveniences. The development of Celtic Ireland was not interrupted by the Roman conquest which resulted in Ireland growing a strong Celtic heritage and becoming a refuge for sapience and learning. Prior to the 7th century AD, there are no written records of the earliest Irish history. It is important to mention that it was not so because of the ignorance of an alphabet or because of the inability to use it. Caesar comments on Celts using writings as follows: 'The Druids think it unlawful to commit this knowledge of theirs to writing (in secular and in private and public business they use Greek characters.)'¹⁰ Furthermore, Gaels of Ireland developed a unique writing system called *Ogham* which makes the Irish language the third oldest European written language.¹¹

Despite the fact that the Celts highly respected their traditions and faith, they adopted Christianity rather easily. The historians assume the new faith started to spread across Ireland in the 5th century AD. Presumably more apostles than one came to Ireland, yet the tradition

⁷ John O'Beirne Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland* (Gateshead: Athenaem Press Ltd, 1999), 8.

⁸ Delaney, *The Celts*, 48–49.

⁹ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, 7.

¹⁰ Peter Berresford Ellis, *The Celtic Empire: The First Millennium of Celtic History 1000 BC-AD 51* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2001), 10.

¹¹ Ellis, *The Celtic Empire*, 178.

has it that it was an Englishman called Patrick that brought Christianity to the Emerald Island. The Gaels proved to be willing to convert to Christian belief, but could not create a centralized system of the dioceses. Soon the individualistic nature of the Celts prevailed and structure crumbled into separate monasteries. The Irish Church reached its peak between 500 and 800 AD.¹² There was no other force within Christianity which could compete with the Irish Church back then.

In the time of the spread of Christianity, five historical kingdoms – Ulster, Meath, Leinster, Munster, and Connaught – started to develop. Each kingdom consisted of many tribes and was governed by the chieftain of the most powerful clan. Even though some chieftains endeavoured to dominate the whole island, no one succeeded and Ireland remained loose federation. The Romans never reached the Irish shore, but the Vikings did. They, however, did not represent a solely destructive element. Besides plundering monasteries of their valuables, they founded many settlements on the eastern shore (Ranelagh gives an example of contemporary capital Dublin)¹³ and traded with the local population. As time went on, the strong position of Norsemen started to weaken. For the subsequent two centuries, Ireland could flourish and evolve undisturbed. The famous richly adorned manuscripts created by the monks come from this very time period.

Since the 12th century, Ireland had to deal with other invaders. As it soon turned out, these attackers were much more relentless. The Irishmen were to face English efforts to seize control over their land for the subsequent seven centuries. Ranelagh stated: ‘in 1155, by the papal bull ‘Laudabiliter’, Pope Adrian IV granted the lordship of Ireland to the powerful King Henry II of England.’¹⁴ The Pope hoped Henry II would impose Roman Catholicism on the Irish. Since there had been attempts to reform the Irish Church in the manner of Catholic Church before and Henry had brought a huge army to Ireland, Irish lords recognized Henry as their King. But there were those who resisted. Among the most prominent adversaries belonged High King Roderic O’Connor, who at that time controlled the eastern part of Ireland. But even he recognized Henry II as a rightful Irish King at last.¹⁵

In 1366 a decree Statutes of Kilkenny came into being. By distinguishing two races – the Anglo-Norman and the Gaelic it aimed to prevent the races from assimilating. Marriage

¹² Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, 26.

¹³ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, 29.

¹⁴ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, 33.

¹⁵ “Roderic O’Connor, King of Connaught,” Library Ireland, accessed November 10 2020, <https://www.libraryireland.com/articles/RodericOConnorIrishNation/>

between the two races was seen as a criminal offence, the Normans were not allowed to play the Irish harp, speak Gaelic or wear Gaelic dress. The act had not the expected impact and some of the Gaelicized Normans took part in the revival of Gaelic culture and literature as early as during 13th and 15th century.¹⁶

English sovereignty in Ireland was slowly fading at that time. The English King Henry VII and especially his son Henry VIII put an end to it. In 1494, Henry VII sent Sir Edward Poyning, an excellent soldier and administrator to Ireland to strengthen King's position. Poyning quickly earned the respect of Irish nobility. In December of 1494, he passed an Act known as Poyning's Law. It declared that the Irish parliament could sit only with the permission of the King. This law was in force until 1782.¹⁷ Henry VIII went even further than his father. He was proclaimed King of Ireland in 1541 by the Irish parliament.¹⁸ Even though, the English Kings already had enjoyed the lordship over Ireland, until that time the right to govern Ireland came from the Pope. From 1541 on, the English monarchs claimed Irish crown on the basis of the decision of Irish parliament so that the papal power over the English King and Ireland was limited. Furthermore, the Tudors initiated a new policy of so-called 'plantations' which reached its peak during the 16th and 17th centuries. Ireland, which was administrated by the Irish and Old English noble families that were accustomed to Gaelic traditions and shared the Catholic faith with locals, was now faced with the influx of Scottish Presbyterian settlers.¹⁹ Not only farmers but also landlords came to Ulster and seize land from the Irish. Unlike many invaders, the Scottish were never Gaelicized, and therefore in 1921, Ulster remained a part of the British Kingdom.

In 1640 Ireland was on the brink of a civil war between Irish Catholics, and English and Scottish Protestants. The Irish nobility started a violent rebellion against English administrators. About 3,000 Protestants were killed.²⁰ Oliver Cromwell, an English general and politician, was sent to Ireland to suppress these defiant tendencies. As a staunch Puritan, he aimed to destroy Catholic element in Ireland. There were several military attacks on

¹⁶ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, 41.

¹⁷ "The Constitutional Position," Ulster Historical Foundation, accessed November 11 2020, <https://www.ancestryireland.com/history-of-the-irish-parliament/background-to-the-statutes/the-constitutional-position/>

¹⁸ "The 14th and 15th centuries," Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed November 11 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ireland/The-14th-and-15th-centuries>

¹⁹ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, 55–56.

²⁰ "Cromwell in Ireland," The Cromwell Association, accessed November 11 2020, http://www.olivercromwell.org/wordpress/?page_id=1837

Ireland. The worst were massacres at Drogheda and Wexford.²¹ It resulted in his becoming one of the best-hated men in Ireland and forming a strong connection between Irish nationalism and the Catholic Church.

Penal laws were a series of laws passed between the years 1695 and 1727.²² The laws were aimed against the Catholic majority in Ireland. Catholics could not read or speak Gaelic, Catholic clergymen were banished and Catholic schooling was banned.²³ Some Catholic teacher continued teaching illegally. It was only because of the existence of those illegal schools that the Gaelic culture and language survived. Patrick O'Farrell argues that despite the religious form, the penal laws represented 'political expedients to exclude disloyalty and ensure English power and control.'²⁴ The British were afraid that the indomitable Gaelic spirit could assimilate the English rulers once again. The Penal laws which deteriorated Anglo-Irish once again

In 1801, Irish and British parliaments merged creating The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, which weakened the Irish political scene. During the 1840s, the greatest catastrophe in Irish history stroke – the Potato Famine. Potatoes were the primary source of food for the Irish and when the blight destroyed potato crop several years in a row, over one million people died from starvation and even more left the country. According to Ranelagh, Britain tried to help but the aid was insufficient and was accessible only to groups privileged by the British.²⁵ The Famine led to further degradation of already poor Anglo-Irish relations. Moreover, the Celtic heritage found itself in danger. The worst affected part of the Irish population was poor countrymen, amongst whom the Gaelic culture was being preserved. Ranelagh concludes that speaking Irish became 'firmly identified with poverty and peasanthood, with famine and death.'²⁶ The English was on the other hand seen as a language of prosperity²⁷ and ultimately was embraced as a national language. Gaelic, on the other hand, was fading away.

²¹ "Cromwell in Ireland," The Cromwell Association, accessed November 11 2020, http://www.olivercromwell.org/wordpress/?page_id=1837

²² Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, 69.

²³ Samantha Howell, "From Oppression to Nationalism The Irish Penal Laws of 1695," HOHONU 2016 Academic Journal 14 (2016): 21–24, <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/campuscenter/hohonu/volumes/documents/HohonuVol142016.pdf>

²⁴ Patrick O'Farrell. *Ireland's English question: Anglo-Irish relations 1534 – 1970* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 47. <https://archive.org/details/irelandsenglishq00ofar>

²⁵ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, 114–116.

²⁶ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, 118.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Irish opposition was getting stronger and stronger. The Irish Republican Brotherhood, established in the late 1850s, was ‘a small, secret, revolutionary body whose sole object was to establish and maintain a free and independent Republican Government in Ireland’²⁸ They were not reluctant to use force to achieve their goals. Similarly, a political movement Sinn Fein, founded by Arthur Griffith in 1905, worked towards an independent Ireland. At the end of 19th century, the Irish lacked an Irish executive body and the possibility to decide for themselves on the Irish matters. The Irish, though allowed to sit in the British parliament, wanted their own administration. Irish hopes were almost fulfilled in 1914 when both the House of Common and House of Lord were inclined to pass the third Home Rule Bill, but it was postponed due to the outbreak of the World War One. Separatist tendencies escalated on Easter Monday of 1916. Irish Republican Brotherhood organized a military attack on the General Post Office in Dublin. Soon, the republican leaders surrendered. Failure of this event resulted in huge support of Sinn Fein, which opposed the idea of home rule under the British Empire.

Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in 1921²⁹ and Ireland was split into two parts –Irish Free State (later renamed the Republic of Ireland) and Northern Ireland, whose citizens wanted to remain in British Empire. Irish history naturally did not stop in 1921 but later course of events had no effect on the plays analysed in this thesis and for this reason will not be discussed.

Fortunately, the Celtic culture was not lost during the Potato Famine. At the end of 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, as Ireland recovering from the Famine, the Irish became interested in their cultural heritage again. In 1893, Gaelic league was established to spread the Irish language all across Ireland. According to Vance, the period of so-called Irish Literary Revival is characterized by ‘anti-modern interest in traditional Celtic lore and literature’ and ‘general rebirth of Irish culture and the Irish language.’³⁰ In addition, many authors of that period idealized peasants and peasantry³¹ and rural traditions. As indicated in the previous paragraphs, the Roman Catholic believe became an inseparable feature of the Irish identity and nationalist movement because it was oppressed by the Englishmen just like the Gaelic

²⁸ “The Irish Republican Brotherhood,” History Ireland, accessed November 13 2020, <https://www.historyireland.com/18th-19th-century-history/the-irish-republican-brotherhood/>

²⁹ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, 133.

³⁰ Norman Vance, *Irish Literature since 1800*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 100.

https://archive.org/details/irishliteratures0000vanc_n7c7

³¹ Vance, *Irish Literature since, 1800*, 104.

population. Although there were tendencies to publish Irish stories and poetry in the Irish language, the vast majority of the works was in English.

It would be a great mistake to see the Revival only as a literary movement. The authors aimed not only to revive the Celtic heritage but also to strengthen the Irish national spirit and prove Irish culture is independent, peculiar and no worse than any other, especially the British one. Hence, the Literary Revival was a movement closely related to Irish nationalism. It was centred on the poet and playwright William Butler Yeats.³² Lady Gregory became his friend and patron and³³ Yeats, in return, supported her in her studies of Celtic lore and traditions.³⁴ Yeats and Lady Gregory became a stimulus to the Irish Literary Revival. Together with Edward Martyn they founded the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899.³⁵ Later its name was changed to Abbey Theatre and Lady Gregory became its director in 1904 and worked there until her retirement.³⁶ Besides Lady Gregory and W B Yeats, among the prominent representatives belonged G B Shaw, John Millington Synge or George Russell.

³² "Irish literary renaissance," Encyclopaedia Britannica, last modified March 2 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Irish-literary-renaissance>

³³ "Augusta, Lady Gregory," Encyclopaedia Britannica.

³⁴ Vance, *Irish Literature since 1800*, 267.

³⁵ "Lady Gregory," Irish Playography, accessed November 5 2020.

<http://www.irishplayography.com/person.aspx?personid=39417>

³⁶ "Augusta, Lady Gregory," Encyclopaedia Britannica.

2 The Celts

The Celtic heritage of Europe had been forgotten for many centuries. Celts together with classical readings were rediscovered during humanism and since romanticism, the word “Celt” takes huge attention and interest. Sadly, the sources are quite limited. The Celts were forbidden to record their doctrine in a written form, which means, Celtology has to rely primarily on comments made by other nations, early Irish and Welsh manuscripts, and archaeological findings. This chapter presents general information based on knowledge of the ancient nations and archaeology. It is important to realise that even the ostensible unimportant may have a great influence on a nation's worldview.

The first written mention of people called Keltoi comes from Greek commentators from the 5th and 6th century BC.³⁷ It denoted a large group of tribes living around the source of the rivers Danube, Rhine and Rhone. Peter Berresford Ellis reckons it has origins in Old Irish word *ceilt* which means concealment or secret. He claims it has a connection with Celtic prohibition imposed on writing down their knowledge and stories.³⁸ Some other authors deem it of a purely Greek origin. The Romans continued using the word Keltoi, though in its Latinized form *Celtae* to denote those tribes. The Celts were, however, rather pugnacious people and soon they disunited the antique nations. The Greek and, to a greater degree, Roman authors were often biased and dismissive, and their perceptions were only scarce. They, however, reach an agreement about some Celtic characteristics.

The Celts were described as tall, fair people with mostly red hair, fair skin and robust stature with the love of beauty, gold and decorations. They were extremely mindful of personal hygiene and nice appearance as testified by a historian Ammianus Marcellinus during his visit of Gaul – “[people] were singularly clean and proper in their persons – no one was to be seen in rags.”³⁹

Their products were full of natural motives and endless ornaments. It can be seen on anklets, bracelets, torques or fibulae. But the Celts decorated not only jewellery but also articles of daily use, weapons and armour. Caesar in his *Commentarii De Bello Gallico* mentioned Celtic warriors wearing high, richly decorated helmets which made them look taller and in combination with bluish body painting more frightening. Celtic art was renowned across

³⁷ Ellis, *The Celtic Empire*, 9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 29.

ancient Europe. The Celts were the first people to discover enamel-working. This kind of artwork was very popular particularly among the Mediterranean region and the Greeks and Romans lively traded with the Celts from the British Isles whose products belonged among the most beautiful.⁴⁰

The Celts were tempted by mental beauty as much as by a physical charm. They approached language with the same ingenuity and friskiness as decorating. This proposition is supported by several Antique authors, who admired Celtic eloquence and mentioned their appreciation of poems and songs. Posidonius mentions a bard coming late to a feast held by Celtic chieftain Lovernuis. After his arrival, the bard sang the praises of the chieftain and repented his lateness. Lovernius was so pleased by the song that he gave a pouch of gold to the bard.⁴¹ Moreover, Caesar and Strabo described Celts as intelligent, fond of culture and science. Even though the Celts did not record their tradition in writing, pieces of it are extant in works of the Greek and Roman greats, and Celtic manuscripts.

As already mentioned, antique commentators were often prejudiced, sometimes nearly rancorous against Celts. Therefore many bad personality traits were attributed to them. Plato viewed the Celts as barbaric, drunken and combative people.⁴² Caesar and Strabo confirmed Plato's opinion; according to Caesar's observations, the Celts, both men and women, were eager for battle and very passionate. Not only could women fight, but it seems they fought quite often and were feared. Quite interesting might be the fact that women possessed almost the same rights as men and were equal to them.⁴³ Caesar also highlighted the role of Druids. He wrote that the Celts were extremely submitting to the Druids not only in public business but also in private matters. Apparently, the Druids held a more important post than chiefs.⁴⁴ Strabo saw the Celts as disputatious but generous and unsuspecting people.⁴⁵ Diodorus Siculus was horrified by the custom of Celtic warriors to decapitate their enemies and hang the heads on their houses as trophies.⁴⁶

From previous lines, it follows that the common conception that the Celts were underdeveloped barbarians or 'noble savages' is deceptive. The Celts were culturally on a

⁴⁰ Ellis, *The Celtic Empire*, 15.

⁴¹ Edel, "Keltská literatura," 133.

⁴² Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 8.

⁴³ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, 16.

⁴⁴ Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 24–25.

⁴⁵ Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 26.

⁴⁶ Ellis, *The Celtic Empire*, 21.

level comparable to the Greeks and Romans, and in terms of craftsmanship, they surpassed them at times. That rather a low notion is to certain extent caused by uncritical acceptance of Caesar's points of view in particular. Caesar's *Commentarii* was for a long time considered as a plausible source. Nevertheless, recent archaeological findings prove them wrong. Be it already mentioned enamel work or fashionable cloaks called *sagi* (sg. *sagum*). To possess this cloak was deemed to be very prestigious.⁴⁷ Celtic construction skills can be still seen on *brochs*, tall towers of dry stone. Quite recently, foundations of roads dated to the Celtic period had been found in Britain.⁴⁸

Although its beginnings go back to the 18th century, archaeology is still a relatively young discipline. There are still many unexplored fields awaiting scientists and many challenges to overcome. Furthermore, prehistoric archaeology has to rely only on material sources and therefore is unable to fully examine or understand every aspect of prehistoric lifestyle, culture and beliefs. In the case of Celts it intensified by the fact that they did not produce any writings which would help archaeologists with their examination. A turning point in the history of archaeology was radiocarbon dating developed in 1949.⁴⁹ Hand in hand with more precise dating, the archaeologists were able to divide prehistory into three large periods – Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age – and assigned their findings to these periods. The Celts are associated with the Iron Age, which is further split in so-called Hallstatt period and La Tène period.

Exact dating varies but it is considered that Hallstatt period, named by a locality near Salzburg, Austria, starts in the 12th century BC and spans until the 5th century BC⁵⁰. This period is believed to be a cradle to the Celtic culture. La Tène period derived its name from the settlement in Switzerland and is younger (5th century BC – mid 1st century BC)⁵¹. Materialistic culture produced in this period is attributed to the Celts with only a little doubt.

Ethnic groups do not emerge all of sudden. There is always gradual development which leads to the formation of a certain culture. The Celts are no exception. As stated by P B Ellis, there are voices saying one of the possible predecessors of the Celts were so-called round-headed

⁴⁷ Ellis, *The Celtic Empire*, 15.

⁴⁸ Ellis, *The Celtic Empire*, 14.

⁴⁹ Delaney, *The Celts*, 23.

⁵⁰ "Hallstatt," Encyclopaedia Britannica, last modified June 27 2007, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Hallstatt-archaeological-site-Austria>

⁵¹ "La-Tène," Encyclopaedia Britannica, last modified May 24 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/place/La-Tene>

Beaker folk in Middle Bronze Age and Urnfield folk living roughly between the years 1200 – 700 BC in the Danube basin, western Germany and eastern France further expanding to eastern Germany, Po Valley, southern France and the Iberian Peninsula.⁵² And yet as the climate changed in the 4th century BC, the Celts were forced to seek new, fertile lands. At around 300 BC the first Celtic tribes started to spread across Europe and quickly became a menace. At that time there was no army able to defeat them. In 390 BC they almost razed Rome and in 279 BC they sacked Delphi.⁵³

The Celts were agricultural folk; they cultivated the land and raise cattle and horses. Ranelagh recounted the Celtic society as sophisticated and strongly hierarchical one. The most important and honoured were the chiefs, poets, warriors, and Druids who are said to have been able to settle disputes and avert a fight.⁵⁴ The second class consisted of farmers, craftsmen, and traders⁵⁵. The bottom rung of the social ladder stood slaves and criminals. The family was valued which is attested by burial ground near Nebringen in Germany. Archaeologists found 25 graves arranged according to age and sex of the entombed. There is no doubt that the arranging of the graves reflects family relationships.⁵⁶ House layout clearly shows the importance of family as in a single house lived a number of generations. The Celts and their descendants were so family-oriented that consanguinity was the main criterion while making alliances. This is one of the possible reasons why they never build a united and centralised society.

With the growth of the Roman Empire and incipient expansion of Germanic tribes, the continental Celts were pushed out of their homeland and the time of the Celts was marching to its end. During the 1st century AD, the Celtic society in Britain was destroyed by the Roman invaders and slightly later by the Viking raiders. Thanks to its marginal position, Ireland was spared.

Other sources of information about the Celts and Celtic belief system are the Irish and Welsh texts written by Christian monks during the 7th and 12th centuries. These codices, however, in most cases, they deal with mythological history. Events described there may be based on real

⁵² Ellis, *The Celtic Empire*, 11.

⁵³ Delaney, *The Celts*, 33.

⁵⁴ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, 11.

⁵⁵ Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland*, 12.

⁵⁶ Norbert Baum, "Keltové očima archeologie," in *Keltové: Mýtus a realita*, ed. Stefan Zimmer, (Praha: Vyšehrad, spol s r. o., 2017), 49.

history but contain magic, the protagonists are of godly origin and very often supernatural things appear so it is difficult to separate reality from myths with absolute certainty. Plausibility of this source is also strongly affected by the fact that Christian monks looked with contempt at everything pagan. They either ignored the existence of some Celtic myths or adapted them in accordance with their religious belief. Sometimes they even added a character, which was related to Biblical forefathers and prophets. With respect to its mythological nature, the cycles will be discussed more in the following chapter.

3 Celtic Mythology

Myths and legends have always played an important role in peoples' lives. The very first myths were created in order to cast light on the creation of the world and natural phenomena. People then unaware of physical laws sought answers elsewhere. First religions were animistic (Latin *anima*, ae, f. – spirit, soul, wind). People believed everything that surrounded them, was living, gifted with a spirit. Not only the animals and plants but also wind, rivers, stones, Moon and Sun, etc. were attributed to having living qualities. As time went on, people started to associate the natural things and forces with anthropomorphic personifications thus the first deities came into being.

Antique commentators had a tendency to liken Celtic gods to their own. It means that some of the described characteristics of Celtic gods and goddesses might be inaccurate, influenced by the Roman (and Greek) beliefs. Similarly, the interpretations of Celtic myths and legends made by the Irish monks might not be fully authentic. And yet, not everything was lost. From what has been preserved it is possible to recover specifics of the Celtic faith and many heroic stories.

The Celtic realm at the time of its greatest prosperity stretched from all across Europe. Since the Celts encountered a wide variety of landscapes and climates, it is only natural that feasts and deities accepted by the Celts differed in different regions. Celtic religion was polytheistic – they worshipped a lot of gods and goddess. In addition to that, many deities were tightly bound to a given location. P B Ellis believes that gods had both the positive and the negative features. It is so because the Celts often bestowed their heroes with godly quality and vice versa, the gods were often humanized.⁵⁷

Thomas William Rolleston concludes following distinctive features of Celtic religion can be identified: magic, human sacrifices, belief in the immortality of souls, personified deities, and Druidism.⁵⁸ According to Rolleston, magic is closely related to the animistic belief that all nature is spiritually alive. Furthermore, the art of herbalism and the knowledge of effects that various plants and mineral have on the human mind and body are still linked to magic among primitive tribes all over the world.⁵⁹ Another manifestation of a positive attitude towards magic is human sacrifices. Apparently, it was believed, the ultimate sacrifice would win the

⁵⁷ Ellis, *The Celtic Empire*, 17.

⁵⁸ Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 72.

⁵⁹ Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 45–46.

favour of the gods, who would grant people a great harvest or luck in a battle. No traces of such practices were found in Ireland, yet Rolleston guesses it is reasonable to suppose it was practised in Ireland, too.⁶⁰ It appears, the idea of immortal human soul was common to all Celts, but the conception of underground world or the other world was to be found only on British Isles.⁶¹ The deceased were buried with their belongings and things denoting their social status, age and sex that the dead were believed to need on the otherworld.⁶² There is no clear description of the role of a Druid in Celtic society. Classical nations delineated Druids as a highly respected, educated group of people. The Druids were said to settle quarrels, bring to justice in the event of murder or lead ceremonies⁶³ In Christian literature, the Druids are portrayed as vicious blood-thirsty shamans as an opposite to the Christian saints. It can be assumed, Druidism originated in Britain and later it spread to Gaul. Lewis Spence in his *Mysteries of Celtic Britain* mentioned that the Gaulish Druids sent their apprentices to Britain to various seminaries.⁶⁴ Of note is the fact that, in defiance of numerous written references, there is no archaeological evidence of the existence of the Druids.⁶⁵

Some authors deem the cult of the dead is closely related to Druidism. This cult came to Britain with the Iberians, an ethnic group of North Africa, before the first Celtic tribes. Lewis believes that the faith of Iberians was spread in two directions – eastward to Egypt and westward to the Brittany, and concludes this would explain similarities in mysticism, symbolism, and beliefs shared by the two cultures.⁶⁶ The Celts, having adopted the cult of the dead, buried their dead to richly equipped toms, believed in the immortality of a soul, the Gauls even derived their origin from the god of otherworld Dis.⁶⁷

Another key aspect of Celtic belief is number three. This number was considered to be a perfect number of great power. Celtic deities were often triune. For example, Morrígan, goddess of war and death, was often portrayed as three women Badb, Macha and Nemain.⁶⁸ Morrígan represents another ability of Celtic gods and goddesses – she can turn into an

⁶⁰ Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 68.

⁶¹ Bernhard Maier, "Náboženství Keltů," in *Keltové: Mýtus a realita*, ed. Stefan Zimmer, (Praha: Vyšehrad, spol s r. o., 2017), 59.

⁶² Maier, "Náboženství Keltů," 62.

⁶³ Maier, "Náboženství Keltů," 66.

⁶⁴ Lewis Spence, *Mysteries of Celtic Britain*, (Bristol: Parragon, 1998), 19.

⁶⁵ Maier, "Náboženství Keltů," 66.

⁶⁶ Spence, *Mysteries of Celtic Britain*, 32.

⁶⁷ Maier, "Náboženství Keltů," 61.

⁶⁸ Ellis, *Dictionary of Irish Mythology*, 173.

animal, a crow in particular.⁶⁹ Another example of a triune deity is the goddess Éire and her sisters Banba and Fotla. Each of the sisters wanted the island to carry her name, so when the Milesians came, the sisters asked them for a verdict. The Milesians (see below) chose Éire, and since then the island has been called Éireland (Ireland).⁷⁰ Number three is present in Celtic fine arts (triquetra, triskelion) and shamrock, the symbol of Ireland.

Just like today, people of the past attributed some days or nights to be more significant than other. Among the pagans equinoxes and solstices were believed to have magical power and people held exuberant celebrations. That is the general awareness. The truth is there is no conclusive proof of the Celts celebrating any feast.⁷¹ A very rough idea of what the Celts celebrated can be obtained from the Coligny calendar and Irish myths.

Only fragments of the Coligny calendar have been preserved, but it is clear time measuring was important to the Celts. It gives the scientist names of the months and their arrangement into a cycle and highlights the role of both solstices.⁷² In Tochmarc Emire (The Wooing of Emer), a story from the Ulster Cycle from the 10th century, the names of four Celtic feasts – Samhain, Imbolc, Beltane, and Lughnasadh – are given.⁷³ The problem is that only names are given, no description of how these feasts were celebrated. Moreover, it seems the four festivals are limited to the British Isles, if not exclusively to Ireland.

Irish mythology is traditionally classified into four main Cycles – Mythological, Ulster, Fenian and Historical. Since the Cycles are the fundamental source of Irish myths some important stories will be summarized below. Mythological Cycle, often called Lebor Gabála Éirenn (Book of Invasion) is a pseudo-historical compilation of prose and poetry, entwining history and myth. It consists of 10 books in which six waves of invasion to Ireland are described.⁷⁴ The first wave is named after its leader, heroine Cessair. This part was in all probability added later to connect Irish mythology to Christian faith for Cessair is the

⁶⁹ Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 104.

⁷⁰ Ellis, *A Dictionary of Irish Mythology*, 97.

⁷¹ Pavel Horák, "Keltské svátky: Stará tradice, nebo moderní invence?," in *Hradiště Hrádek u Libochovan: Výsledky archeologického nedestruktivního výzkumu (2013-2016)*, eds. Jindřich Šteffl and Radka Hentschová, (Teplice: Regionální muzeum Teplice, 2017), 111–124.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ "The Irish Mythological Cycle," Ask about Ireland, accessed November 18, <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/reading-room/history-heritage/folklore-of-ireland/folklore-in-ireland/traditional-storytelling/the-mythological-cycle/the-irish-mythological-cy/>

granddaughter of Noah who escaped biblical Flood with her companions.⁷⁵ The second wave came from Greece and took its name from Partholón. They cultivated the land but had to fight with monstrous Fomorians. After several centuries they were killed off by a plague.⁷⁶ Nemedians were the third invaders. Their leader Nemed was a descendant of Noah and the British monster god Magog. He encountered the Fomorians, too and defeated them. After a while, however, the Fomorians returned and expelled the Nemedians from Ireland.⁷⁷ Nemed's descendant returned to Ireland as a race called Fir Bolg, but are soon defeated by Tuatha Dé Danann.⁷⁸ The last but one race to govern Ireland was Tuatha Dé Danann (The Folk of the goddess Danu). To rule the island they had to vanquish both the Fomorians and Fir Bolgs. After a long terrible fight, Tuatha Dé were defeated by the sixth final group of invaders. Milesians (Sons of Mil) came to Ireland from Egypt via Spain. The two races finally made peace. It was agreed Milesians would inhabit the surface world and Dé Danann the rest.⁷⁹ Milesians are considered to be the first human inhabitants of Ireland and forefathers of Irish Kings.⁸⁰ Tuatha Dé Danann represent the Irish divine beings. The space they occupy is usually called the Otherworld, but it has many cognomens such as Land of Youth (Tír na nÓg), Land under Wave (Tír fo Thuinn) or Land of Promise (Tír Tairngiri.) The Otherworld stands apart from the world of humans, but not completely. Divinities quite commonly enter the human world and sometimes a human hero may set his foot in the Otherworld. As their name suggests, Tuatha Dé Danann derives their origin from the goddess Danu.

Ulster Cycle occupies an important place in Irish history. It contains the best-known stories Táin Bó Cúailnge and the story of Cúchulainn. Edel deems that this Cycle holds a similar position in Irish literary history to the one held by Iliad in the Greek culture.⁸¹ The story Táin Bó Cúailnge, in English translation The Cattle Raid of Cooley, suggests an explanation for age-long hostility between Ulster and Connaught. King Ailill and Queen Medb often teased each other about their wealth. Medb, who ascertained her husband, is richer than she as he possessed white-horned bull decided to change the situation by stealing the brown bull of Ulster, which was said to be even more famous. War broke up between the two kingdoms. The famous hero Cúchulainn fought on the side of Ulster. He, in the beginning, had to fight

⁷⁵ Patricia Monaghan, *The Encyclopaedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore*. (New York: Facts on File Inc, 2004), 85. https://www.academia.edu/20358082/The_Encyclopedia_of_Celtic_Mythology_and_Folklore

⁷⁶ Monaghan, *The Encyclopaedia*, 375.

⁷⁷ Monaghan, *The Encyclopaedia*, 353.

⁷⁸ Monaghan, *The Encyclopaedia*, 194.

⁷⁹ Monaghan, *The Encyclopaedia*, 457.

⁸⁰ Edel, "Kelská Literatura," 156.

⁸¹ Edel, "Kelská Literatura," 138.

with the Connaught forces all alone for the Ulsterians had been cursed. When they were to go into a battle they suffer from pain similar to the pain of a woman giving birth. Finally, the curse was broken and the Ulster men defeated Connaught army. Meanwhile, the brown bull was stolen and fought with the white-horned bull. After he had defeated the bull Connaught, the brown bull returned to Ulster where he, severely hurt, died.⁸² Another story of the Cycle is the one about Cúchulainn, who is considered to be the mightiest hero of Irish mythology. If the Ulster Cycle can be likened to Iliad then Cúchulainn can be considered as a counterpart of Achilles. He is a descendant of the god Lugh and a mortal woman Deichtine. Furthermore, he proved his uniqueness and heroism since early childhood. When he was six, he killed an aggressive dog of a blacksmith Culann and then he guarded the southern part of Ulster. This event had earned him his name – Cúchulainn means the Hound of Cullan. Cúchulainn was destined for a short but heroic life. He died shortly after he had broken his promise not to eat dog meat. It made him weak and enabled his opponents to kill him. One episode of Cúchulainn's life illustrates Celtic love for eloquence, intelligence and wit. In the story called The Wooing of Emer, describes how Cúchulainn and Emer talked in a secret language of poets to test the cognitive abilities of the other.⁸³

Fenian Cycle delineates the life of Finn mac Cumhall and his son Oisín. For that reason, it is sometimes called Ossian. Young Finn came to the Druid to become his apprentice. This Druid tried to catch the Salmon of Knowledge which was said to give greatest wisdom to whoever would eat it. Finn had to prepare the fish for his master but was forbidden to taste it. However, while he was cooking the Salmon, Finn burnt his thumb and put it in his mouth. At this very time, he obtained Salmon's wisdom.⁸⁴ His son Oisín, strayed into the Otherworld. There he went through many adventures and eventually he fell in love with a fairy Niam. Oisín, although he loved Niam, got homesick and wanted to return home. Niam let him go but warned him not to touch the Irish soil. Unfortunately, Oisín fell on the ground and immediately turned into an old man. He found out it has been 300 years since he left Ireland. Then Oisín met Saint Patrick and told him about his life and the heroes of his time.⁸⁵

Historical Cycle is a collection of stories describing the lives of Irish Kings. It contains a list of Kings of Ireland, too. The first mentioned King was a mythical forefather of Kings of Leinster and the last one is Brian Boru. The stories explain the traditional enmity of Ulster

⁸² Edel, "Keltská literatura," 138-142.

⁸³ Edel, "Keltská literatura," 142-144.

⁸⁴ Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 219–220.

⁸⁵ Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 233–237.

and Leinster.⁸⁶ It is most likely some of the captured stories are based on the real events but at the same time, there is a supernatural background to them.

⁸⁶ Edel, "Keltská literatura," 150–151.

4 Introduction to the Plays

The plays combine two genres. At the first sight, it is clear that these are dramatic works. Drama originated in Greece and was formerly divided into three genres, tragedy, comedy and satyr plays. The Greeks followed the three Aristotelian unities; the unity of the place (plays must be set in one location), the unity of time (plays should cover a period not longer than one day), and the unity of action (there is one principal action in the play, no side plots should occur.) The plot is created via individual monologues and dialogues, the author may add scenic notes to suggest the manner of the delivery of the play. The dramatic works are intended to be performed on stage.

The second genre that could be identified in those works is a fairy tale. This genre is characterized by fanciful plot, symbolism, and one-dimensional characters. Quite often the fairy tales share the same pattern – the main protagonist must defeat evil forces and usually gains something for it. The fairy tales frequently carry educational or moral subtext. In the analyzed works, this is reflected in the fact that the plot of both works revolves around unrealistic concepts – the marvellous Golden Apple and the Dragon. Furthermore, the occurrence of characters – a King, Prince, Princess, dragon or a witch, is a distinctive feature of fairy tales. From the beginning, it is clear which character is a good one and which is a villain. However, bad characters often evolve and, at least partially, mend their ways at the end of the game. Some figures are included in the plays to lighten the atmosphere and entertain the viewer. Simon from *The Golden Apple*, for example, is frightened and silly at times. The Giant tries to be wrathful, but in reality, he is peaceful. Likewise, in the second game, the Dragon has long been considered a monster, but it turns out his being good and well-behaved.

The main theme of the play *The Golden Apple* is, as the name suggests, the hunt for the Golden Apple and also the rescue of the Spanish Princess. The old King of Connacht is dying. A mysterious messenger appears saying he had heard the King is in the grip of death and suggests a possible cure – a golden apple from the Garden at the World's End, which is possessed by a witch. The King's son immediately embarks on a journey and swears to return in a year and a day. Prince Rury and the King's steward Simon have to face many dangers that were cast on them by the witch, who does not want anyone to get one of her apples.

Pampogue, a spoilt daughter of the witch, accompanies the witch on one of her trips and when she sees the Prince she immediately falls in love with him. She made her mother promise her that the Prince will marry her. Rury, however, falls in love with Muireann, the King of Spain's daughter, who was kidnapped by the witch and now must serve her. Rury swears to set her free as soon as he delivers the golden apple to his father. On the way back, Rury fights with a giant and during this fight, the Golden Apple is stolen from him. Muireann is to be wed to a giant Grugach against her will and Rury decides to help Muireann escape instead of pursuing the thief. He almost succeeded when the witch intervenes and changes Muireann to a cat. The Gardner of the Garden of the World's End took pity on Muireann and set off to find three rods of Magic and Mastery that give the witch her power to save the poor girl. He succeeds but the witch unexpectedly breaks the rods herself and this way she relinquishes her magical power.

The second play, *The Dragon*, deals with the prophecy about the death of a Princess Nuala. She is a young flippant colleen that her stepmother is trying to marry off to a Prince. The King has always defended his daughter but when the Queen suggests marriage might be the only way of saving Nuala from being devoured by a dragon, he swore to find a husband to her. As a first suitor arrives the Prince of Marches with his two aunts. He is rather timid and Princess Nuala makes fun of him. Angry King declares that the first man to enter the castle will marry the Princess. The Queen hires a young lad as a cook. He finds out he is the first man to enter the castle and is determined to marry the Princess. He reveals his true identity only to a nurse – he is Manus, King of Sorcha, and came to save the Princess from the dragon. Meanwhile, the third suitor arrives who introduces himself as the King of Sorcha. When the Dragon flies in, the fake King of Sorcha runs away. The Prince of Marches tries to slay the Dragon, but it is the true King of Sorcha who subdues the Dragon. Princess Nuala dies as she thinks the Dragon killed Manus. Three golden leaves bring her back to life and the Dragon leaves Ireland.

Since Christianity became firmly associated with the Irish nation, even lady Gregory used Christian symbolism and references to the Bible in the plays. It can be illustrated on one line

uttered by Simon: 'I am loth to meddle with apples after what happened in Adam's Paradise.'⁸⁷ For this very reason, it is difficult to assert the motives mentioned are purely of Celtic origin.

In the plays, the characters repeatedly mention certain numbers. It is said the Celts were extremely superstitious and number symbolism was pervasive. Best known is the importance of number three. The three was present in artistry. In visual art, the triplet was demonstrated in ornaments triskelions and triquetras, in Gaelic literature the number is present in a literary genre triad. Monaghan describes it as a short literary form that provides a reader or listener with a list of three heroes, qualities or places.⁸⁸ There are Three Sorrows of Ireland, Tuireann had three sons, Naisi had two brothers... Celtic goddesses were frequently delineated as a triune deity – they appeared as three sisters. Sometimes the number three is believed to stand for the past, the present, and the future, eventually for birth, life, and death. In Christianity, the three refers to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Most used number in Lady Gregory's plays is number seven. The Gardener, Muireann and her brothers spent seven years in the Garden at the World's End. Muireann was threatened to clean seven cow houses that were never cleaned for seven years,⁸⁹ if she failed to complete the tasks that were given to her by the witch. If a character wanted to curse someone, they did it seven times. Similarly, the characters gave seven oaths or swore to seven things. The Prince of Marches had seven aunts. In Celtic myths, the seven is present in the story Táin Bó Cúailnge. Queen Medb and King Aillil have seven sons and after the faith of the two bulls, the seven-year peace was made.⁹⁰ One task that the sons of Tuireann had to fulfil was to bring seven swines to Lugh.⁹¹ Étain, was married off to Midir whose wife was as jealous as to turn Étain into a butterfly. It took seven years for her to return to her human shape. That happened after Étain fell into the goblet of the Queen of Ulster, who unknowingly swallowed her, became pregnant, and gave birth to Étain in the human body, at last.⁹² To Christians, the number of symbolizes the seven days in which the World was created, seven deadly sins and seven virtues.

⁸⁷ Lady Gregory, *The Golden Apple: A Play for Kiltartan Children*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1916), 21. <https://archive.org/details/goldenappleplay00greg>

⁸⁸ Monaghan, *The Encyclopaedia*, 454.

⁸⁹ Lady Gregory, *The Golden Apple*, 7.

⁹⁰ Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 189–190.

⁹¹ Delaney, *The Celts*, 74.

⁹² Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 130.

5 The Golden Apple

The play concerns the journey of Rury into the Garden at the World's End to get the enchanted golden apples that can cure every wound and every disease. This theme is to be found in two old stories. The first one constitutes the so-called Three Sorrows of Ireland. It describes the adventures of the three sons of Tuireann, Brian, Iuchar and Iucharba, that killed Cian, father of the god Lugh. Tuireann and Cian had quarrels between them, which escalated in the murder of Cian. Cian changed himself into a boar but the three sons found him and lethally wounded him. He asked them to turn into a human shape. But it proved to be a trap. Killing a pig would not be judged as strictly as the murder of a human. In order to atone for their heinous act, Lugh ordered them to bring him seven things including three golden apples that hung in the Garden of the Light. The brothers turned themselves into hawks and in that form, they flew to the garden where they grasp the apples in their talons.⁹³ Similarly, a reference to a magical apple occurs in the story that is known under the name The Voyage of Bran (Immram Brian). One day, Bran roaming the neighbourhood heard music so sweet that he fell asleep. When he woke up he found a silver apple branch with blossoms lying next to him. He returned to his palace where he met a strange old woman, who sang to him about the delights that may be found in the Otherworld and Bran immediately embarked on a journey.⁹⁴ It is not explicitly said what power the apple of the silver tree possessed but because of the magical tone of the story, it is more than likely it is not a common apple.

Trees were of great importance to the Celts. Many personal and tribal names were derived from the names of trees.⁹⁵ Trees gave name to individual letters of *Ogham* alphabet and in Celtic beliefs, the trees were connected to wisdom.⁹⁶ The most sacred tree was an oak. Among other holy trees belonged yew, ash, hazel, further willow, birch, ivy, elm, elder, and, of course, apple. The Celts worshipped apple tree as a symbol of life and immortality. It was closely associated with the Otherworld. Sabine Heinz argues there is a link between the Welsh word for apple *afal* and Britannic *aval*, and Arthur's Avalon, which, according to her, is the

⁹³ Delaney, *The Celts*, 71–73.

⁹⁴ Tom Peete Cross, *Ancient Irish Tales*, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1996), 588.
<https://archive.org/details/ancientirishtale00tomp>

⁹⁵ Sabine Heinz, *Symbols of the Celts*, (New York: Sterling Pub, 199), 141–142.
<https://archive.org/details/symbolsofcelts00sabi>

⁹⁶ Monaghan, *The Encyclopaedia*, 452.

Celtic Otherworld.⁹⁷ However, the apple has its symbolism in Christianity as well. Adam and Eve were banished from Paradise after they had eaten the Apple of Knowledge.

The main protagonist is named Rury. There are three possible ways of interpreting his name. The first one is historical rather than mythological. In the 12th century, the last High King of Ireland, Roderic O'Connor is often called Rory in short and Ruaidhri in Old Irish. Roderic was a King of the kingdom of Connaught and the last High King of Ireland. He reigned in the second half of the 12th century. During and after the English invasion led by King Henry II, Roderic became the leader of rebellion but ultimately he had no choice but to recognize Henry as the King of Ireland. He lost the title High King but could continue to administer his kingdom. Later he was banished from Connaught by his relatives. He spent the rest of his life in a monastery where he died.⁹⁸ Just like the historical King, Prince Rury is from Kingdom Connacht (a possible way of spelling of Connaught that Lady Gregory decided to use.) A second parallel can be drawn between the two since both of them left the Kingdom. It is true Roderic was expelled whereas Rury decided to leave the country of his own free will but the result is the same. Moreover, both of them were skilled and brave warriors. Ellis mentions a mythological figure with the name Rudraidhe which seems to be similar to Old Irish name of Roderic. This Rudraidhe was a son of Partholón and according to a legend, he was the founder of the royal house of Ulster.⁹⁹ Patricia Monaghan claims Rudraige or Rory was one of the leaders of Fir Bolg.¹⁰⁰

One theme pervades the entire story and that is a love triangle. Love triangles are a typical topic of many Celtic stories. In Ulster Cycle it is a relationship between the Queen Medb and a hero Fergus mac Roy. The Queen is unfaithful to her husband Aillil but he decides to tolerate their love affair because Connaught and Ulster are in a war.¹⁰¹ In another story of the Ulster cycle Cúchulainn, Emer and Fand. One day a fairy called Fand supervened to Cúchulainn and told him that her realm is under an attack of three demon Kings and that the reward for Cúchulainn's help would be Fand's love. Cúchulainn agreed and entered the realm of fairies and defeated the demons. Then he spent the whole month with Fand. However, Emer, Cúchulainn's wife had heard of it and went to find the adulterer and kill the fairy. But Cúchulainn started to sing praises of Emer so that her anger abated. Fand realised she did

⁹⁷ Heinz, *Symbols of the Celt*, 142.

⁹⁸ "Roderic O'Connor," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

⁹⁹ Ellis, *A Dictionary of Irish Mythology*, 203.

¹⁰⁰ Monaghan, *The Encyclopaedia*, 405.

¹⁰¹ Edel, "Keltská literatura," 139.

wrong and decided to let Cúchulainn go and return to her husband, Mananan, the god of the sea, because he lacked a spouse.¹⁰² Not every story containing a love triangle has a happy ending, though. It can be seen in the story about Deirdre and her lover Naisi. This story belongs between stories of Sorrows but it will be motioned in the following chapter due to the character of the play *The Dragon*. An equally moving narrative is the one about Gráinne and Diarmuid from the Fenian Cycle. Old widowed Finn mac Cumhall was looking for a new wife and proposed to Gráinne, the daughter of the King Cormac mac Art. But the young Princess loved Diarmuid and made him kidnap her and save her from the marriage with the old man. Diarmuid reluctantly did what Gráinne asked of him. But out of respect for Finn, he was refusing to touch her. Finally, Diarmuid fell in love with Gráinne and Finn forgot his anger. But what he could not forget was the insult he had received. One day Finn and Diarmuid took part in a hunt and a magical boar and died.¹⁰³ Two love triangles can be found in *The Golden Apple*. The first one constitutes of Rury, Muireann and Pampogue and can be linked to the story of Cúchulainn. Pampogue fell in love with Rury and wanted no man than him, but Rury was in love with Muireann and paid no attention to Pampogue. She strived to get the Prince to fall in love with her, but in the end, she had to admit her defeat. Rury loved and only loved Muireann. The second love triangle is between Rury, Muireann and the giant Grugach of the Humming. After Pampogue refused to get married to Grugach, the witch decided to marry Muireann off to the giant; however, Rury frustrated the wedding.

While Oisín was in the Land of Youth, he rescued a Princess from a Fomorian giant. He described her as the fairest woman with golden hair, heavenly blue eyes, lips as red as berries, and a pale neck that could compare to a one of a swan.¹⁰⁴ Rury, just like Oisín, was smitten by the beauty of the Princess. It is not said explicitly in the play that Muireann has golden hair, but when he was in the Garden at the World's end, Rury found a curl 'shining of itself'¹⁰⁵ that was cut from Muireann's head. From this, it can be deduced that Muireann had very fair hair if not golden. Rury immediately fell in love with the young lady to whom the curl belonged and made up his mind to marry this very maiden. First, however, he had to overcome the witch's pitfalls and save Muireann from marrying the giant. Rury did not kill him; he played a pipe instead so that Muireann came out of the giant's castle. However, the witch intervened again – she turned Muireann into a cat.

¹⁰² Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 190–192.

¹⁰³ Edel, "Keltská literatura," 147.

¹⁰⁴ Cross, *Ancient Irish Tales*, 440.

¹⁰⁵ Lady Gregory, *The Golden Apple*, 75.

Shape changing was common among the Celtic divinities, heroes and even druids. In fact, it is a frequent motif. Be it in the story Sons of Tuireann, where Cian changes himself into a boar and the brothers took the form of hawks or be it Finnatan mac Bóchra, who turned into a salmon, an eagle and eventually a hawk. Gods and goddesses often transformed themselves into animals so that they could observe doings of heroes unnoticed. Sometimes, especially when the characters are of divine origin, they can change according to their wish but sometimes the people are transfigured into animals as a punishment of themselves alone or of their loved ones, and sometimes it is because nothing but the hatred that the people are changed. In the second story of Sorrows of Ireland, Fir, the god of ocean married Eve, who gave birth to the four children, twins Fionualla and Aedh, and Fiachra and Conn. But the second parturition was complicated and Eve died. Fir loved Eve deeply and her death broke his heart. He, however, did not want to leave his little children motherless so he married Eve's sister Aoife in the hope Aoife would make a great mother to them. Nothing was farther from the truth. Aoife used her magic abilities and turned the four children into swans. The spell lasted for 900 years and when it finally passed the children of Lir turned to their human form, but immediately aged and died.¹⁰⁶ Rury did not know that Muireann was transformed into a cat and drove her away. Later, the witch told Muireann Rury would never love her again and Simon, the King's servant, said he would never want Rury to marry a cat. Cats have been present in many religions and different cultures credited them with different characteristics. The Egyptians worshipped them whereas Christians deemed they are devils in disguise. According to Alfred Percival Graves, the Irish people shared a similar point of view on cats as Christians. Allegedly it was believed that

‘evil spirit in the shape of a cat assumed command over these animals in various districts, and that when those wicked beings pleased they could compel all the cats belonging to their division to attack those of some other district.’¹⁰⁷

Muireann, who was transformed into a cat, could regain her human shape only for one hour a week when the Bell of the Saints in Ireland rang in Ireland.¹⁰⁸ The story about the Children of Lir contains similar motif. The children turned into humans when the bell would ring all across Ireland.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Delaney, *The Celts*, 112.

¹⁰⁷ Alfred Percival Graves, “Irish Folk Lore” in *The Glories of Ireland*, eds. Joseph Dunn and Patrick Joseph Lennox, 297, Washington, D.C.: Phoenix, 1914. <https://archive.org/details/gloriesofireland00dunnuoft>

¹⁰⁸ Lady Gregory, *The Golden Apple*, 91.

¹⁰⁹ Delaney, *The Celts*, 110.

Muireann had five little brothers who were enchanted into five fishes. Muireann's efforts to save her brothers are not elaborated in detail. So it is not possible to say with certainty what Lady Gregory wanted to express. Salmon, less often trout, represented wisdom and longevity, though. Young Finn mac Cumhall burnt his thumb while preparing the Salmon of Knowledge. The Salmon's knowledge entered Finn when he put his finger in his mouth. Since then, every time Finn put his thumb in his mouth, he saw the future.

The crows were closely related to the goddess Morrígan. She was the goddess of death, war, and destruction and has the ability to change herself into a crow. Therefore, Muireann is petrified when she sees the crows: 'There now are the crows gathering to the high elms. ... I am lost now and destroyed.'¹¹⁰ In addition, cutting down an elm tree was believed to bring bad luck.¹¹¹

When he finds out that one of his best ewes was killed, Simon got upset. Later, when it is discussed who should accompany Rury on his quest for the Apple, Simon said he is not scared of the witch or the giants but is concerned about his livestock: 'What about my hay? My stacks? My haggard? With the milk to be regulated and all the cows that are about to calve!'¹¹² In *The Celts: Myth and Reality*, a possible explanation of Simon's anger is stated. The monarch's power in Ireland depended not so much on land ownership, but primarily on the number of his herds. Cattle theft was a fairly common way of waging a war until 1600.¹¹³

Celtic heroes always showed bravery and sense of honour. Every notable person had a geis or geasa. It was 'a bond, a spell, a prohibition, a taboo, a magical injunction, the violation of which led to misfortune and death.'¹¹⁴ To Cúchulainn, the breaking his vow became his doom. He met three witches who offered him dog meat since they knew about his geis not to eat it. At the same time, Cúchulainn was forbidden to turn down a meal when it was given to him. He chose to eat the dog and soon after he was killed in a battle.¹¹⁵ Similarly, the witch offered Rury a meal to get him under her control for she had no power over the royal house of Ireland if they do not accept food from her hands. When Rury declined saying he is in hurry, the witch attacked his emotions by stating she was miserable. Rury answered: 'It is a habit of my

¹¹⁰ Lady Gregory, *The Golden Apple*, 10.

¹¹¹ Monaghan, *The Encyclopaedia*, 152.

¹¹² Lady Gregory, *The Golden Apple*, 21.

¹¹³ Edel, "Keltská literatura," 140.

¹¹⁴ Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 137.

¹¹⁵ Edel, "Keltská literatura," 144.

habits never to listen to the call of a lone woman without getting knowledge of her case.’¹¹⁶ This habit could be his geis. He almost ate the bone that the witch gave him, but Pampogue, who did not realise the meaning of the situation, took the bone from Rury and saved him.

Another reference to the story of Cúchulainn can be found in the following passage: ‘*Giant: (throwing down some heads of cabbage)* I took down a few of the heads are on the forks since yesterday. Let you put them in the pot to boil.’¹¹⁷ Rury and Simon were hidden in the giant's house and could not see that the heads the giant was speaking about were heads of cabbage and therefore they thought the giant brought human heads. According to a legend, Cúchulainn attended a feast at which a demon appeared. The demon challenged the greatest heroes to cut down his head. But there was a catch. The demon would return the following day and demanded the head of the hero. Only Cúchulainn cut the demon's head down and freely laid his head on the block on the demon's return. The demon, however, did not strike – he declared Cúchulainn the greatest hero of Ireland instead.¹¹⁸

At one point of the story, the Giant's wife mentioned that a giant, or more precisely his head and hands that were cut off, played cards with Finn mac Cuil on a ship.¹¹⁹ No reference of Finn playing cards was found. On the other hand, in Curtin's collection, there were two heroes who played cards with a giant. The first was Shee an Gannon, who challenged the giant Gruagach Gaire to a game of cards.¹²⁰ The second one was an unnamed Irish Prince who almost lost his head.¹²¹

The last motif to be analysed is the harp of the witch. She brought it to put Rury asleep. This harp is unique since it plays itself and a human lulled to sleep by this harp is hard to wake up. Dagda, the former leader of Tuatha Dé Danann, had a magic harp with three strings. Rolleston depicted the strings as follows: ‘the Strain of Lament, which caused the hearers to weep, the Strain of Laughter, which made them merry, and the Strain of Slumber, or Lullaby, which plunged them all in a profound sleep.’¹²² Another magic harp was passed by a goblin, which terrorized the King of Tara. No one had defeated the goblin until Finn arrived. It was because of the magical harp that would put every attacker to sleep. Only Finn was able to overcome its

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Lady Gregory, *The Golden Apple*, 41.

¹¹⁸ Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 164–165.

¹¹⁹ Lady Gregory, *The Golden Apple*, 34.

¹²⁰ Jeremiah Curtin, *Myths and Folk-Lore of Ireland*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1911), 123.

<https://archive.org/details/mythsfolkloreofi00curtiala>

¹²¹ Curtin, *Myths and Folk-Lore of Ireland*, 32–33.

¹²² Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 97.

effects since he had a magical spear.¹²³ The Celts loved music and importance of the harp is also evidenced by the fact that it is the national symbol of Ireland.

¹²³ Rolleston, *Myths and Legend*, 220–221.

6 The Dragon

Albeit dragons in European tradition became known as human-eating, all-destroying monsters, Sabine Heinz says that in Celtic stories they played the role of protectors.¹²⁴ Wales, another country with a strong Celtic heritage, has, after all, a red dragon on its flag. Heinz stated: 'the Celtic dragon is also traditionally associated with military matters. It stands for armed forces and sometimes even becomes a hero.'¹²⁵ It seems, Lady Gregory followed the Christian lore in her play rather than the Celtic. For the vast majority of the story, the Dragon is regarded as the abhorrent beast which must be killed. At the end of the play, it transpires the Dragon's heart was changed and he is no longer as blood-thirsty as everyone believed. In fact, the Dragon says he finds blood repulsive and prefers to crack cocoa-nuts to heads of Princesses.¹²⁶

The following excerpt contains several motives to be commented on:

Queen: (To Dall Glic) I must get to the root of this, and the handle. Who, now, is Fintan?

Dall Glic: He is an astrologer, and understanding the nature of the stars.

Nurse: He wore out in his lifetime three eagles and three palm trees and three earthen dykes. It is down a cleft if the rocks beyond he has his dwelling presently, the way he can be watching stars through the daytime.

Dall Glic: He prophesied in a prophecy, and it is written in clean letters in the King's yew-tree box.¹²⁷

The prophecy that is kept in a yew-tree box concerns the death of the Princess Nuala. She is to be devoured by a dragon on the day of her eighteenth birthday. Yew tree is said to represent a connection between the world of the living and the Otherworld¹²⁸ as its toxins can put a person to sleep or kill depending on the amount of the poison. Ellis offers another possible interpretation. In his Dictionary of Irish Mythology, he mentions a favourite way of divination – casting yew three wands inscribed in *Ogham*.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Heinz, *Symbols of the Celts*, 31.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Lady Gregory, *The Dragon: A Wonderplay in Three Acts*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), 130. <https://archive.org/details/dragonwonderplay01greg>

¹²⁷ Lady Gregory, *The Dragon*, 24.

¹²⁸ Heinz, *Symbols of the Celts*, 151.

¹²⁹ Ellis, *Dictionary of Irish Mythology*, 88.

In the book *Myths and Folk-Lore of Ireland*, Jeremiah Curtin recorded folk stories that he collected in counties Kerry, Donegal and Galway. He believed the stories to be authentic since he questioned ‘men well advanced in years’¹³⁰ that spoke only Gaelic or very little English. In several of these stories, a character of an old blind sage called Sean Dall Glic appears. Similarly, as in the collection, Dall Glic from Lady Gregory's play is an old man with only one eye and most importantly he acts as an advisor to the King.

Another character who has its prototype in Celtic mythology is Fintan, the astronomer. Fintan mac Bóchra was a mythical seer and a husband to Cessair. When the Biblical Flood was coming he left his wife and escaped the catastrophe by changing himself into a one-eyed salmon. Later he took the form of an eagle and a hawk. Finally, he resumed his human form and lived for another 5,500 years. Due to his old age and the ability to take animal form, Fintan was regarded as one of the wisest men.¹³¹ Fintan from *The Dragon* is pictured as a very old man, too. The nurse mentioned he wore out three eagles. In refers to Fintan's great age for in the Welsh tradition the eagle is considered one of the oldest animals and ‘stands for wisdom and visionary ability.’¹³²

Lady Gregory based her characters in *The Dragon* on Celtic mythology considerably more than in *The Golden Apple*. According to Monaghan's *Encyclopaedia*, Nuala was a name given to the Queen of fairies that was also known as Úna.¹³³ Muime, the nurse, is a character of Scottish mythology. Monaghan informs that her name means stepmother or foster mother. In contrast with Gregory's nurse, Muime was not always depicted as a good comradely figure. Reportedly, Muime is an echo of the past times when the role of a foster mother was very important.¹³⁴ There is no visible reasoning behind the title and origin of Manus, the King of Sorcha, son of Solas, son of Lugh. No note has been preserved that a kingdom of Sorcha ever existed and Lugh had no son of that name. Although Lugh appears to have been the god of arts and crafts,¹³⁵ as Ellis claims, Rolleston attributes the role of the god of sun to him. Should Rolleston be right, the following hypothesis can be made: Lady Gregory shared the same opinion and on the basis of solar symbolism she emphasized the glory of the King of Sorcha.

¹³⁰ Curtin, *Myths and Folk-Lore of Ireland*, 7.

¹³¹ “Fintan mac Bóchra,” Oxford Reference, accessed November 15 2020, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095819444>

¹³² Heinz, *Symbols of the Celts*, 103.

¹³³ Monaghan, *The Encyclopaedia*, 362.

¹³⁴ Monaghan, *The Encyclopaedia*, 343.

¹³⁵ Ellis, *Dictionary of Irish Mythology*, 154.

Sorcha is an Irish forename meaning *bright* or *clear*.¹³⁶ Solas could be a mangled form of the Latin word for the Sun – sol, solis, m. In many religious conceptions, the Sun is considered the source of warmth and life, and therefore plays a key role in various religions and is linked to leadership in numerology.

In the dialogue with her nurse, Princess Nuala refers to a story from the Ulster Cycle. The story was originally composed between 8th and 9th century, revived in the 15th century and become one of the most popular stories during the Irish Literary Revival. Lady Gregory incorporated the story about Deirdre in her Cuchulain of Muirthemne, W B Yeats and J M Synge dedicated whole plays to her.

Princess: I will wipe them [*i.e. tears*] away! I will not give into danger or to dragons! No one will see a dark face of me. I am a king's daughter of Ireland, I did not come out of a herd's hut like Deirdre that went sighing and lamenting till she was put to death, the world being sick and tired of her complaints, and her finger at her eye dripping tears!¹³⁷

Deirdre was foretold to be the most beautiful woman in Ireland, but it was foretold her marriage would be ruin Ulster. In spite of the prophecy, she was sent away to be brought up in solitude where she would see no man except for the old King Conor whom she was to be wed. Deirdre said to her nurse she would love a young man with the hair like raven's wing, cheeks of the colour of blood, and skin as white as snow. Unknowingly she described Naisi, son of Usna. The two fell in love with each other and at her bidding, they run away to Scotland. Conor pretended to forgive the lovers and invited them to Ireland. But when they arrived, the King had Naisi killed and made Deirdre marry him. For the whole year, she did not smile. Then Conor decided to send her to Owen, son of Duracht, who killed Naisi, but Deirdre committed suicide.¹³⁸ Lady Gregory deviated a bit from the original story. Deirdre was a daughter of the chieftain of Ulster, ergo was not born in a herd's hut. Furthermore, Deirdre does not seem to be a passive tearful character but a strong-minded woman although not as roguish as Nuala. These two ladies have one thing in common. They are both cast a horoscope at their birth. Divination was an essential part of Celtic lore, it is present in many myths and typically heroes and heroines cannot escape their fate. P B Ellis enumerated some of the most practised in forms – astrology, already mentioned casting yew wands, observing natural signs

¹³⁶ "Sorcha," Library Ireland, accessed November 26 2020, <https://www.libraryireland.com/names/women/sorcha-sorcha.php>

¹³⁷ Lady Gregory, *The Dragon*, 52

¹³⁸ Rolleston, *Myths and Legends*, 165–169.

and omens, and last but not least dreams.¹³⁹ Dreams and visions played an important role in Celtic beliefs. Therefore, Manus, the King of Sorcha, came to save the young Princess because he had had a dream she was in great danger. He was told that the Dragon will arrive in a twelvemonth but Manus insisted he is on time because it was revealed to him in his dream.¹⁴⁰

Another Celtic motif can be found in the following utterance of Manus: ‘This silver whistle, that was her pipe of music, was given to me by a queen among the Sidhe that is my godmother.’¹⁴¹ Manus refers to a bond he has with the gods. Sidhe was a name given to the inhabitants on the Otherworld, i.e. Tuatha Dé Danann.¹⁴² Albeit the Kings of Ireland traditionally derived their descent of the race of Milesians, a supernatural being can be found in their pedigree as well. Furthermore, the greatest Irish heroes and nobleman, such as Cúchulainn, Finn and his son Oisín, were related to the divine race and as has been mentioned earlier, the Gauls often derived their genesis from the god of Dis, the god of the underworld. Like Manus, the Princess, too acknowledged she appertained to a witch form the Land under Wave. In the case of the Princess, the relation to supernatural beings, however, might not be taken seriously as she was quite probably making fun of the prince of Marches by saying a course has been put upon her – at some hours she is turned to ‘a sea-filly from the Country-under-Wave.’¹⁴³

The characters show literacy and often mention characters or situation delineated in myths. At one point in the story, Manus said: ‘What way did the Sons of Tuireann get their death but going questioning after a cooking spit at the bidding of Lugh of the Long Hand!’¹⁴⁴ This is once again a reference to the First Sorrow of Ireland. The brothers successfully stole three golden apples and also fulfilled other tasks. The last one was to find a spit which god Lugh demanded from them. They sank to the bottom of the ocean and retrieve the spit from water-maidens. Then they set off to the hill of King Michan where they were to give three shouts. That was the last assignment. But King Michan forbade them to shout so the brothers fought with him. Even though they beat him and gave the shouts, they were severely wounded.

¹³⁹ Ellis, *A Dictionary of Irish Mythology*, 88.

¹⁴⁰ Lady Gregory, *The Dragon*, 61.

¹⁴¹ Lady Gregory, *The Dragon*, 63.

¹⁴² Edel, “Keltská literatura,” 153.

¹⁴³ Lady Gregory, *The Dragon*, 39.

¹⁴⁴ Lady Gregory, *The Dragon*, 67.

Tuireann asked Lugh for help but he refused saying the glorious death at a young age is much better than a long but tedious life.¹⁴⁵

In one of her lines, the nurse mentioned Samhuin time.¹⁴⁶ Even though the spelling is a bit different, it is the Celtic feast Samhain. As mentioned in Tochmarc Emire, Samhain was celebrated at the turn of October and November. The modern tradition has it, the border between the human world and the Otherworld was blurred during that time. Various beings and forces were able to enter the human world and vice versa, the humans could wander in the world of those entities. It is said Halloween, the All Saints's Eve, has its roots in Samhain. For that reason, people wear costumes of supernatural beings like skeletons or fairies or witches. As has been mentioned in chapter three, there are no comments on how the festival was celebrated. Horák, however, implies that one of the possible ways to celebrate Samhain was to make fires. He mentions a tradition of the Isle of Man. Every year on 31st October, people ignited fires that they called Sauin.¹⁴⁷ In addition, he admits that negative forces of the other world could have gained strength and theorizes that the people made fires because they felt the need to protect themselves against the evil spirits. It may be so for fire is considered a method of purification (not only the material but also the spiritual, which is even more important) in many cultures all across the globe and there is no reason to assume the Celts were an exception.

Meanwhile, Manus was fighting with the Dragon, Princess Nuala waited in the castle and when she was told the young man lost his life, she began to wail over him. She was so sad she passed away.¹⁴⁸ The Prince of Marches decided to use the three magical leaves ‘from the Tree of Power that grows by the Well of Healing tied with a thread of the wool of the sheep of the Land of Promise’ saying ‘there is power in them to bring one person only back to life.’¹⁴⁹ According to Monaghan, wells were pagan sacred places of great importance. On the one hand, they were the source of fresh and clean water and on the other hand wells were often used for healing rituals. Furthermore, wells were believed to be a portal to the Otherworld.¹⁵⁰ Resurrection is present in primarily Christian doctrine, the Celts believed in the constant exchange of souls between the human world and the world of fairies, which may resemble the eastern teachings about reincarnation. Taking into consideration the symbolism of apples and

¹⁴⁵ Delaney, *The Celts*, 75–76.

¹⁴⁶ Lady Gregory, *The Dragon*, 102.

¹⁴⁷ Horák, “Keltské svátky,” 118.

¹⁴⁸ Lady Gregory, *The Dragon*, 119.

¹⁴⁹ Lady Gregory, *The Dragon*, 123.

¹⁵⁰ Monaghan, *The Encyclopaedia*, 470.

apple trees as mentioned in the previous chapter and the fact that the witch from *The Golden Apple* referred to the young apple tree in her garden as to the Tree of Power,¹⁵¹ it is almost certain that the Tree of Power about which the Prince of Marches was talking, was actually an apple tree. The magical apple trees grew in the Otherworld alias the Land of Promise so it would be only logical to bind leaves collected in the Land of Promise with a thread of a sheep of the Land of Promise.

By the end of the play, the Dragon said to Manus: 'you changed the heart within me for the heart of a little squirrel of the wood.'¹⁵² In other words, he said he could no longer nor wanted to live as a fearsome beast and now was a peaceful creature. It can be looked upon this line from a mythological viewpoint as well. It is generally believed that reincarnation in the true sense of the word was not a part of Celtic faith. And yet some authors connect the ability of Celtic heroes to turn themselves in animals and transmigration of souls. Monaghan claims that when the appearance of the earthly remains changes, so does the soul.¹⁵³

A love triangle is indicated in *The Dragon*, too. Although the Princess refuses to marry anyone, she fell in love with Manus, eventually. At the same time, she is loved by the Prince of Marches, who, however, decided not to stand in the way of lovers and set out on a journey through the world to gain experience not only in the fighting.

¹⁵¹ Lady Gregory, *The Golden Apple*, 1.

¹⁵² Lady Gregory, *The Dragon*, 128.

¹⁵³ Monaghan, *The Encyclopaedia*, 452.

Conclusion

This thesis focused on the presence of Celtic motives in the work of Lady Gregory. These two plays are connected not only by the same thematic focus but also the period of their origin and their genre. The plays were written in the first quarter of 20th century during the period of Irish Literary Revival even before the Irish Free State was established in 1921.

Firstly, an insight into Anglo-Irish history was provided. It could be described as a series of events that deepened the gap between the Irish on one side and the English on the other. At the same time, it connected the Irish with the Catholic Church. The most significant events were the conquest of Ireland by the English King Henry II in 1155, the policy of Plantations during the 16th and 17th century, and The Potato Famine of the 1840s. If it sometimes feels the thesis is written more in favour of the Irish, it is only because the author attempted to make it clear why the Irishmen longed for their own free state and what influence it had on the revivalists. Irish Literary Revival was a movement that supported Irish nationalism and aimed to resurrect the Celtic legacy of Ireland, spread the Gaelic language across Ireland anew, and to prove Irish culture is independent and no worse than any other culture.

Secondly, the thesis dealt with the Celts and their religion. The first nations to describe the Celts were the Greeks and the Romans. Both nations, however, were often biased and their notes are not always completely trustworthy. Archaeologists believe that the first demonstrably Celtic tribes appeared at the end of Hallstatt period in approximately 6th – 5th century BC. Unlike antique commentators, archaeology provides evidence that the Celts were a relatively advanced nation. The Celts were pagans and worshipped a wide variety of god and goddesses. Among the most distinctive features of Celtic religion belong to the cult of the dead and belief in the immortality of a soul, magic, worship of the trees, and Druidism.

Finally, the analysis of *The Golden Apple* and *The Dragon* was performed. Selected motives from the plays were compared to old Irish stories. Both plays stand on the border of two genres – drama and fairytale – and were dedicated to the youngest audience which is reflected in the nature of the plays. The original Celtic stories had rarely a happy ending and one could consider them too bloody and cruel. In accordance with the hypothesis, Lady Gregory used Celtic lore in her works. Some of the motives reoccurred in both plays, for instance, numeral symbolism, the Otherworld, the healing effects of an apple tree, and references to heroic stories, especially those of Cúchulainn and Sons of Tuireann. Since Roman Catholicism was

an integral part of Irish identity and thus of Irish nationalism, Lady Gregory included elements of Christian doctrine in her works, too. Sometimes it is easy to distinguish between the Christian and the pagan myths and legends but the other time the border is blurred. This, of course, is in complete harmony with the Iro-Celtic nature. For centuries, the Irish faced attempts to erase their culture, but they were always able to maintain their identity. Cultures that sought to stifle the Irish spirit soon found that the Irish would always defend their culture.

Résumé

Cílem této bakalářské práce bylo vystopovat a analyzovat keltské motivy ve dvou divadelních hrách irské spisovatelky Lady Augusty Gregory, která tvořila v období tzv. *Irish Literary Revival*, tedy Irského literárního obrození, na přelomu 19. a 20. století. Jmenovitě se jednalo o hry *The Golden Apple* (Zlaté jablko) a *The Dragon* (Drak).

V první části se práce zaměřila na kulturně-historický kontext vzniku děl a charakterizovala zmíněné hnutí. Protože se práce zabývá keltskými motivy, byla jedna kapitola věnována všeobecné charakteristice keltského národa. Následovala kapitola zaměřená na keltské náboženství, s důrazem na specifika ostrovní víry a krátce popsala čtyři hlavní cykly, které se dochovaly. Druhá polovina práce je věnována vlastní analýze her.

Pro pochopení toho, proč někteří spisovatelé na počátku 20. století zdůrazňovali keltské dědictví Irska a proč ve svých dílech zpracovávali dávné keltské příběhy, je nutno podívat se do historie. Dějiny Anglo-Irských vztahů jsou rozsáhlé a ne vždy veselé. Na obou stranách docházelo k mnoha nedorozuměním. Irsko zůstalo na rozdíl od sousedního ostrova ušetřeno římské invazi a kulturně vzkvétalo až do vpádu Angličanů roku 1155. Angličané se po dlouhá staletí snažili Irům vštípit svou kulturu, ačkoliv o to Irové nejevili větší zájem. Mnohokrát byly vzájemné vztahy těchto dvou zemí natolik vyhrocené, že hrozila občanská válka. Mezi zásadní události lze zařadit vznik Spojeného království Velké Británie a Irska v roce 1801. Následkem tohoto spojení byla Irská samospráva a možnost politicky ovlivňovat dění ve vlastní zemi značně omezená. Irský parlament se totiž přesunul do Londýna. Pravděpodobně nejhorší ránu Anglo-Irským vztahům zasadil Velký bramborový hladomor z druhé poloviny 19. století. Irové vyčítají Britům, že je nechali hladovět a umírat. Jedná se o jeden z nejdůležitějších důvodů, proč Irové začali usilovat o nezávislost.

Aby dokázali, že i Irové mají své místo mezi evropskými národy, se mnozí obraceli k dávné minulosti. Probíhaly snahy o oživení gaelštiny, mnozí autoři Irského obrození našli publikovat práce v Irštině a překládat příběhy irských cyklů a lidové slovesnosti do původního jazyka. Avšak většina děl byla stále psána anglicky. Obrozenecké hnutí se zformovalo kolem básníka a dramatika Williama Butlera Yeatse a kolem divadla Abbey, jehož ředitelkou se stala Lady Gregory.

Keltové pocházeli z oblasti kolem povodí řeky Dunaj. První archeologické nálezy, podle kterých se dá vznik keltského etnika datovat, pochází z 6. až 5. století před Kristem z doby

Hallstattské. Jednalo se o především zemědělský lid, avšak velmi vyspělý. Keltské výrobky patřili v Římě mezi luxusní zboží. Keltové osídlili Irsko pravděpodobně již ve 13. století před Kristem, ale protože měli přísný zákaz písemně zaznamenávat svou kulturu, nedochovalo se žádné bližší informace o keltském osídlení Irska.

Keltské náboženství bylo polyteistické s antropomorfními božstvy. Pro náboženství ostrovních Keltů je příznačný kult mrtvých, což se projevovalo především vírou v nesmrtelnost duše. Duše zemřelých se neustále proudily mezi světem živých a světem nadpřirozeným bytostí. Proto také Keltové poskytovali zemřelým bohatou výbavu pro život v onom světě. Dalším typicky keltským elementem je magie a existence druidů. Druidové byli učenci, kteří kromě náboženské role plnili i roli soudců.

Mýty sepsané mnichy v raném středověku jsou rozčleněny do čtyř cyklů. Mytický cyklus popisuje mytické dějiny Irska a obsahuje seznam králů. Ulsterský cyklus se především věnuje hrdinovi Cúchulainnovi a sporu mezi královstvími Connaughtem a Ulsterem. Finnův cyklus líčí život bojovníka a mudrce Finna a jeho syna Oisiana. Poslední Královský cyklus rozebírá životy a skutky tradičních Irských králů. Lady Gregory dokazuje ve svých hrách velkou znalost těchto cyklů. Avšak, mnohdy příběhy poupravila tak, aby lépe odpovídaly jejím autorským úmyslům. Lady Gregory napsala přibližně 40 her, které jsou svým charakterem spíše určeny dospělému publiku, ale obě analyzované hry je možno žánrově vymezit nejen jako dramata, ale také jako pohádky, které měly s irskými mýty seznámit nejmenší publikum. Hry obsahují humorně laděné repliky a jednotlivé postavy odpovídají postavám typickým pro pohádky. Děj Zlatého jablka se točí kolem snahy zachránit umírajícího krále Irska. Jeho syn se vydává na cestu do zahrady na konci světa, kterou hlídá čarodějnice. V zahradě se setká s krásnou princeznou a snaží se ji zachránit před čarodějnicí. Hra Drak zpracovává typické pohádkové téma – podle předpovědi má přiletět drak, který chce sežrat princeznu. Nakonec se však najde odvážný mladík, který princeznu zachrání.

Původní hypotéza, že hry obsahují keltské motivy, se potvrdila. Nejčastěji lze najít odkaz na hrdinu Cúchulainna a na tři příběhy, které jsou známy pod souhrnným jménem *Three Sorrows of Ireland*, tedy Tři žaly Irska. Princ z první hry zažívá mnoho příhod, které se staly i Cúchulainnovi. Žaly Irska velmi často obsahují zmínky o schopnosti hrdinů měnit se ve zvířecí podobu a tento motiv se vyskytuje i ve hře *The Golden Apple*. Velmi často se Lady Gregory uchyluje k číselné symbolice, která byla mezi Kelty značně rozšířená. Postavy téměř neustále odkazují na onen svět, který měl nespočet přízvisek. Zřejmě se jedná o odkaz na kult

mrtvých, který jak již bylo řečeno, patrně hrál důležitou roli v keltské víře. V obou hrách se objevují náznaky mileneckých trojúhelníků. Ty představovaly oblíbený námět keltských příběhů. Ani hrdina Cúchulainn se tomu nedokázal vyhnout. Ačkoliv se symbolikou jablka primárně zabývá první hra, tak lze najít odkaz na léčivé schopnosti jablek i ve hře *The Dragon*. Ostatně, v keltské věrouce byly stromy hojně uctívány. Nejposvátnějším stromem byl dub, ale i jiné stromy, včetně jabloně, byly přítomny v keltských příbězích. Jednotlivé znaky irské abecedy *Oghamu* nesou jména stromů. Zhledem k tomu, že příslušnost ke křesťanské víře, především pak Římské katolické, bylo jedním z hlavních rysů Irského vlastenectví, tak i Lady Gregory, jak se zdá, občas mísí keltské a křesťanské prvky. Nejvíce je to vidět na symbolické roli jablka a také na významu čísel. Kupříkladu, číslo tři je považováno za typicky keltský motiv, který je přítomen i v keltském krásném umění. Ale trojice je základním prvkem křesťanské nauky, jelikož reprezentuje Otce, Syna a Ducha svatého. Kromě keltských motivů tedy v obou hrách lze hledat i symboliku křesťanskou. Což je ovšem zcela v harmonii s iro-keltskou povahou. Irové po několik staletí čelili snahám o vymazání jejich kultury, ale vždy si dokázali zachovat svou identitu. Kultury, které se snažily udusit irského ducha, brzy zjistily, že Irové budou svou kulturu vždy hájit.

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