**The Mythological Research**

As a feminist performer engaging with mythology, according to Jane de Gay, in *Languages of*  *Theatre Shaped by Women,* I would need to be aware of how myth - certainly Classical myth - encapsulates the patriarchal ideology. I can identify with de Gay’s mission to create a women- centered performance space where mythic heroines can be valued and revalued, their feminine archetypes nourishing and emboldening us to resist the patriarchal narratives embodied in the traditional myths.

Classical mythology tends to cast women as either victim or villain, according to de Gay. Critic Jane Harrision understands Classical mythology as the stories of the invading Doric conquerors who exploited the indigenous Greek and Minoan Goddess-worshipping cults and their mythology. A similar understanding can be applied to the Christian hijacking of Goddess wisdom/archetypes as voiced in early “Celtic” myth - as explicated by Mary Condren. With regard to Classical Greek culture, Harrison maintains that the subsequent Olympian myths “rehearse and substantiate the fear of women,” whether she is portrayed as **victim** or as villain.”

In early versions of *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, Deirdre was shown to act with **agency** and desire in claiming Naoise as her man, countering his initial loyalty-based resistance with threats that shamed his honour. Later Christian versions tame Deirdre’s tongue and render her passive and meek. **In the latest version of my writings, I have inserted a description of the meeting of Deirdre and Naoise portraying that very agency, in alignment with both Harrison’s and de Gay’s theory.**

De Gay examines Classical myths and the female suffering caused by male violence, therein, under the category of **women as victim.** In terms of women performing these mythic roles, de Gay highlights two challenges: firstly, the need to avoid objectifying the woman as victim and, secondly, the need to avoid the audience identifying with the suffering woman in a disempowering way. Writer Susan Guber suggests the strategy of giving these mythic characters agency to counteract their assigned passivity. Pivotally, she argues that this can be achieved through performing them or re-citing them with increased **interiority**. As a feminist artist who is reframing the character Deirdre, this interiority is encoded into the writing. So, according to de Gay, we may agree that the female role is indeed tragic but it is not **passive** - as implied in the original myth. For example, Gerd Christian’s play *Persephone, Bringer of Destruction, Promise of Redemption* aims to connect with the feminine archetype embodied in Persephone and wishes contemporary women to empower themselves by linking their own story with hers. **This accords with my own vision .**

Ovid’s *Philomela* - **a victim** if ever there was one - has been re-cited in a feminist turn by Timberlake Wertenbaker in her *The Love of the Nightingale* performed at the Magdalene Festival 1994. Her play interrogates the nature of victimization and is a parody of the Greek drama based on the mythic Philomela who is raped by her sister’s husband, Tereus who ,subsequently, cuts out her tongue- thus preventing her from voicing her experience. Philomela overcomes this challenge to communicate her story to her sister by weaving her narrative into a tapestry .

In Wertenbaker’s play the tapestry is replaced by a puppet -show. The initial rape is not depicted on stage but only reacted to by her servant ,Naomi. Philomela, portrayed as a rape survivor rather than a rape victim, enacts her rape scene via life-sized puppets and shows Tereus brutally cutting out the Philomela- puppet’s tongue. This device enables the playwright and performer to wield a successful control over the objectifying power of the male gaze and negotiate the central challenges enumerated above.

**I have used the device of the puppet- show for just such reasons.**