

The Image of The Hero in J.M. Synge's Play The Playboy of the Western World

Amir El-Komy

Professor, Jouf University, KSA
amelkom@ju.edu.sa

Abstract

This study will try to show that John Millington Synge (1871-1909) blended metaphysics, mythology and reality to produce an image of the ideal type of individual needed as the savior of Ireland, in particular, and mankind, in general.

The hero concept is best understood as a rather curious and obsessional example of a spiritual phenomenon that reached something of a climax in the nineteenth century, most notably is the thought of Hegel, Ludwig Feuerbach, Thomas Carlyle, August Comte, Marx, and Nietzsche, namely, the uneasy substitution of purely secular objects of veneration for the traditional transcendental ones. Worship of God gave way to worship of man and human society – man as individual in capitalism and society in Marxism. This albeit gave rise to leaders like Hitler, Mussolini and all third world leaders in the first half of the 20th century.

The playboy draws on the myth of the dying god or king who renews his life for the benefit of the community. In addition, in his preface to *Playboy*, Synge places himself in the mainstream of realism: "It is possible for a writer to be rich and copious in his words and at the same time to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, to a comprehensive and natural form", thus he blends mythology and reality.

As for metaphysics, Synge's definition of the literary qualities, or nature, of drama is extremely wide. He says, for example, "Art is but expression" (Works, II, 95). And

the problem of the artist is that he feels "the inexpressible ... We have walked with God" (Ibid).

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I

The hero concept is best understood as a rather curious and obsessional example of a spiritual phenomenon that reached something of a climax in the nineteenth century, most notably is the thought of Hegel, Ludwig Feuerbach, Thomas Carlyle,⁽¹⁾ August Comte, Marx, and Nietzsche, namely, the uneasy substitution of purely secular objects of veneration for the traditional transcendental ones. Worship of God gave way to worship of man and human society – man as individual in capitalism and society in Marxism. This albeit gave rise to leaders like Hitler, Mussolini and all third world leaders in the first half of the 20th century.

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First, I would like to debunk P.P. Howe's myth of Synge's alienation from themes of political and social importance. To this effect Howe wrote in 1912: "Synge, it is probable, never cared at all for great social and political questions".⁽³⁾ But Synge's involvement in the Irish Literary Theatre, in itself, refutes this notion. He wanted to

establish with Yeats, a genuine people's theatre. People's theatre should be above all a theatre of action – there is none which does not have a political dimension.

The Playboy is the play that shows Synge's dramatic power at its ripe; Deirdre, left unfinished at his death, lacks the final shaping. But The Playboy is a triumphant consummation of the form, which subordinates event, and takes for its main theme the growth of man's soul or a group of souls.

The unity of content and form in Synge's theory is usually realized through the hero's pilgrimage from ignorance to perception. This journey is his tragedy's form, its linear action representing this progression. Thus, the skeletal structure of Synge's plays is usually typical and fairly simple: "there is a desiring individual (or group of individuals), the protagonist of the play, there is the object desired, there is a factor which makes the objective difficult to obtain, there is a definite ending to the story, and there is a clear logical course of action leading to this ending. His form has the environmental archetype which is referred to as the 'psychic state of the locality.'⁽⁴⁾

One's examination of Synge's methods shows that he cares for form. As for the relationship of content to form, he adopts the attitude of the ancient Greeks, that is, that form is bound to consume the content completely: "all emotions depend upon and answer the abstractions of ideal form" (Works, II, 15). This idea, which so closely follows Greek aesthetic theories, clearly indicates how important the classical heritage was to Synge.

In fact, form-giving is a judging force, an ethic, there is a value-judgment in everything that has been given form, because drama is always a symbolism of life seen and felt in a single operation of vision or intuition. The truth of the world merges with the truth of the author's feeling and the result is an artistic form.

Subtle, but vital, psychological patterns take shape as a play progresses. The more apparent the pattern becomes, the more it predetermines and limits the choices for

subsequent action. Action, in the true sense, refers to the acts of a character. There is no image in the theatre except that of the act. What Synge wanted to reveal to his audience is man as he acts, as he works, and as he encounters difficulties. Thus, while Synge has the high simplicity of the Greek and Roman dramatists, his care for the depiction of character and his insight into its subtle places make him a modern, as well as, in his ability to present those problems of character with which art was increasingly concerned at the turn of the century. The *Playboy*, for example, cannot be called a simply play. Notwithstanding the play's artful simplicity of form, it presents a very complex interplay of character. Pegeen, for all her capacity for fine reaction against the emptiness of her circumstances, is, when we first see her, content with the prospect of marriage with Shaneen Keogh; Christy, when he enters for the first time, tired and miserable and dirty, is a simple poor fellow, with the poet and fine fiery fellow only potential in him. Scene by scene, from the time their paths cross, Pegeen and Christy work upon one another, until, at the last curtain's fall, we leave them the same and yet different, never to be the same again.

In drama, when the law of diminishing returns is applied to a character, it simply means that the more familiar we are with a character the more predictable his behavior is. When he does act in an unpredicted manner, we say that his behavior is out of character. Hence, the more detailed the character's portrait, the more limited the playwright is in devising new ways for that character to act subsequently. For example, the more we know about Pegeen, the more we know that she will not submit to Christy's wish that she returns to him. The more we know Christy, the more we know that he is the stronger man to whom Mahon must submit.

Definition of form by type (comedy, tragedy, melodrama, and so on) seems to me to be useless in relation to Synge. No play perhaps has ever been at once so completely a tragedy and a comedy as *Playboy*. Yet, as regards Synge's technique, it is well to notice that never at one time does he put a double emotional demand on us: herein

lies his delight in sharp contrasts, which is partly the natural expression of his ironic mind, partly the deliberate method of a craftsman with a true sense of the dramatic value of surprise.

Any account of the form of a play ought to give critical explanations concerning the place, relation, and function of scenes in the play. Moreover, to say that the play has form is to say that it has discernible scenes. I shall deal with this aspect in my analysis of the play. As we have observed in Synge's letter to Molly All good, he plans the sequence of the scenes in his plays in the French manner the entrance or exit of a character marks a new scene. No change of scenery was necessary, for the Abbey Theatre is a notable example of those famous playhouses in which scenery changes were described during the dialogues rather than carried out by a stage crew. To indicate a change of place and to give the impression of taking the audience out of the playhouse to other climes and places, thereby increasing the scenic variations in a play, Synge, in writing for the Abbey Theatre, was forced to include place information and landscape descriptions in the speeches of his characters.

In *Playboy*, which will be dealt with in detail in part two, language acts as the mediator between actuality and potentiality, between reality and abstraction. It is largely through language – through Christy's successive accounts of the murder of his father and his self-surprising eloquence in wooing Pegeen – that Christy projects and brings into being one of his potential selves that had until now lain dormant.

As far as the aspect of Content is concerned, one finds that along Synge's concern with refining an unchanging vision of objective reality, he deals with similar plots and immediately recognizable stock types: a youthful hero often afflicted with braggadocio and folly, a sexy but deceptively permissive heroine, heavy fathers, licentious or dolorous mother-types, and a complement of dunes, parasites, and drinkers. Against this background is set the tragic hero's journey. It begins in ignorance, passes through a period of awakening, and ends in awareness. For this

hero, the journey through life is more than just an inevitable complication of the ideal: it is the necessary detour without which the goal would be empty and abstract and its attainment valueless.

But the hero himself has value only in relation to this specific goal, and his value is only that of having-grown. Yet, he must suffer loneliness, much loneliness, and solitary journeying. The route leads from solitude to solitude past human companionship, through the transience of great loves and back to loneliness. This loneliness is not only dramatic, but also psychological, because it is not merely the a priori property of all dramatis personae, but also the lived experience of man in process of becoming a hero, and if psychology is not to remain merely raw material for drama, it can only express itself as lyricism of the soul.

In this way Synge was able to blend two disparate styles: poetic and naturalistic approaches.

The hero, however, is not moving in a vacuum. There is the zeitgeist, or the time-spirit. Synge's heroes are best understood as congeries of potentialities waiting to be evoked and realized by the imagination through the medium of the zeitgeist. We have seen that the myth Christy Mahon spins about himself is fostered by the wishes of hero-seeking village and expanded by Synge in terms of his own aesthetic creed and philosophical approach to life. Synge's characters, according to Maxim Gorky, "are half gods and half beasts, and are possessed of the childish desire to find a 'hero' among themselves."⁽⁵⁾

What were the main features of the Zeitgeist?

A social system, Synge believes, is no more than a conglomeration of individuals and their traits. The only rule the individual respects is the rule of self; therefore, the society in which he lives is an impersonal one where the Darwinian law of self-preservation is the only guiding principle and the accepted mode of conduct.

Consequently, we can take the obscene words used by Synge as a symbol of protest the rigidities of convention in society. The rebellion implicit in the utterance of the word "shift" on a public stage was rebellion against all society. It was an evocation of disgust so deep that conventional language was powerless to express it, and at the same time, the very unconventionality of the word was itself a gesture of defiance.

II

To begin with the title, there is a certain ambiguity concerning the phrase "The Western World", but it must be interpreted in the light of Synge's cultural orientation. He was trying to direct the Dublin audience to look westward, to their Mayo, certainly, but beyond that to the wider world of Europe and the West: standing on the west coast of Ireland, looking to America, he tried to put Ireland in the western cultural stream of Europe.

The Playboy is violent and brief, centered around one single event; there are few characters, and the story is compressed within a short space of time. As a result, it adopts a kind of "rule of the three unities". A single set, a few entrances, a few exits, and intense arguments among the characters who defend their individual rights with passion. Still despite its austerity and intensity it has not lacked appreciation as well as violent reactions.

The action of the stay occupies some twenty-four hours, and its setting remains unchanged throughout. The action is in the west of Ireland, near a village on the wild coast of Mayo, in a rough shebeen, or wayside public-house.

When Synge visited Mayo in 1904, he found a great contrast between the beauty of the landscape and the desolate, monotonous life of the inhabitants, which was hard and tender, repetitious, and full of nuances, grey and multicolored. Out of the fusion of all these, Synge makes his world. It gave him too the consciousness of the fact that man is lonely in this cosmos. The sea hurls its waves against the coast, the sea

wall can barely protect the land against the gales of winter, but the pure air, and, still more, the heavy mist lends softness to the stony beaches, the hills, and the villages, dispensing a simple, dull tranquility over everything alike. The place gave him the background and the story itself. This setting is carefully delineated in the program note to his play:

The kitchen was filled with men sitting closely on long forms ranged in lines at each side of the fire. A wild-looking but beautiful girl was kneeling on the hearth talking loudly to the men, and a few natives of Inishmaan were hanging about the door, miserably drunk. At the end of the kitchen the bar was arranged, with a sort of alcove beside it, where some older men were playing cards. Overhead there were the open rafters, filled with turf and tobacco smoke.

This is the haunt so much dreaded by the women of the other islands, where the men linger with their money till they go out at last reeling steps and are lost in the sound: Without this background of empty curaghs, and bodies floating naked with the tide, there would be something almost absurd about the dissipation of this simple place where men sit, evening after evening, drinking bad whisky and porter, and talking with endless repetition of fishing, and kelp, and of the sorrows of purgatory." ⁽⁶⁾

The Playboy has its origin in an anecdote that Synge heard in the Aran Islands about a Connemara man who killed his father and fled to the Islands where the inhabitants hid him from the police, and also in the case of Lynchehaun ⁽⁷⁾ who most brutally murdered a woman, and yet, with the aid of Irish peasant women, managed to conceal himself from the police for months and also escape. Of his Aran Islands Synge relates: "Another old man, the oldest on the island, is fond of telling me anecdotes – not folk-tales – of things that have happened here in his lifetime.

"He often tells me about a Connaught man who killed his father with the blow of a spade when he was in passion, and then fled to this island and threw himself on the mercy of some of the natives with whom he was said to be related. They hid him in

a hole – which the old man has shown me – and kept him safe for weeks, though the police came and searched for him, and he could hear their boots grinding on the stones over his head. Despite a reward which was offered, the island was incorruptible, and after much trouble the man was safely shipped to America.

"This impulse to protect the criminal is universal in the west. It seems partly due to the association between justice and the hated English jurisdiction, but more directly to the primitive feeling of these people, who are never criminals yet always capable of crime, that a man will not do wrong unless he is under the influence of a passion which is as irresponsible as a storm on the sea. If a man has killed his father, and is already sick and broken with remorse, they can see no reason why he should be dragged away and killed by the law.

"Such a man, they say, will be quiet all the rest of his life, and if you suggest that punishment is needed as an example, they ask, 'Would anyone kill his father if he was able to help it?'" (Works, II, 95).

As usual in such cases, Synge made fundamental changes when he turned his source-material to dramatic use. He added the resurrection of the father and the bitter departure of father and son from the community which had given shelter to Christy. He set his play in County Mayo, not the Aran Islands. In stories of the Connaught man and the case of Lynchehaun, Synge discovered an essential and archetypal quality that suggests the fertility cycle, the Oedipus dilemma, and the saga of "The Champion of Ulster." In his letter to Mackenna, asserting the seriousness of the play, he declared: "if the idea had occurred to me I could and would just as readily have written the thing, as it stands, without the Lynchehaun case or the Aran case. My story-in its essence ("essence" underlined four times) is probable, given the psychic state of the locality ..." (8)

If Synge's plot and scenes are simple and concentrated, his characters are rich and ambiguous. His characters, like the scenes, are built mainly upon contrast.

Throughout the play, sharp contrast is ever the servant of a heightened reality, or a more delightful surprise. The richness of the playboy lies not in its breadth or manifold implications, but, among many other things, in the brilliance of its coloring, in its nature imagery and the nature of Synge's dramatic theory: his attempt to unite "stoicism, asceticism, and ecstasy." ⁽⁹⁾

The Abbey Theatre, like the Elizabethan theatre, inhibited the scenery changes. Synge, like the Elizabethans, solved this problem by narrating those scenes which could not be staged, and by his stage directions. The first act of the play contains ten scenes, which Synge has defined by the entrances and exits of the characters. His stage directions are of two kinds: unspoken commands printed in the text, and spoken announcements included in the dialogues of the play.

The first scene and setting are immediately established in the opening stage direction: Country public-house or shebeen, very rough and untidy. There is a sort of counter on the right with shelves, holding bottles and jugs, just seen above it. Empty barrels stand near the counter. At back, a little to left of counter, there is a door into the open air, then, more to the left, there is a settle with shelves above it, with more jugs, and a table beneath a window. At left there is a large open fire-place, with turf fire, and a small door into inner room. Pegeen, a wild-looking but fine girl, of about twenty, is writing at table. She is dressed in the usual peasant dress. ⁽¹⁰⁾

The first scene opens on Pegeen reading out the order she is writing, one item of which is "A hat is suited for a wedding day" (act I, p. 19). The rhythm of this phrase, and particularly its cadence, might be said "to haunt the whole play, and helps to establish a firm narrative frame," ⁽¹¹⁾ as P.L. Henry has rightly observed.

Scene two, three, and four establish place and time and give an element of realism to the play, as they deal with the circumstance of a match made between Pegeen and Shawn Keogh, requiring a papal dispensation "possibly on the grounds of

consanguinity."⁽¹²⁾ To Pegeen comes Shawn, a fat and fair young man betrothed to marry her, and awaiting only Father Reilly's dispensation. He is a poor thing, with no savagery or talk at all, but he is her own. Yet "desolation" is the term to describe her life, meaning the absence of life where life had once been strong. Life for her means fighting against submission. She laments the absence of any interesting or exciting person among the men in her village:

Where you'll meet none but Red Linaham, has a squint in his eye, and Patchen is lame in his heel, or the mad Mulvannies were driven from California, and they lost in their wits. We're a queer lot these times to go troubling the Holy Father on his sacred Seat. (Act, I, p. 20).

The girls, too, lack something – a something that the Church would regard as sinful: "you'd be ashamed this place, going up summer and winter with nothing worthwhile to confess at all" (Act II), The inadequacy of their lives, and particularly of Pegeen's, is dramatically expressed in Shawn, the insipid coward toward whom Pegeen has been driven for lack of a better mate. But what critics would eventually interpret as the play's critical representation of Irish country people is soon voiced in Pegeen's scornful response to Shawn's boast that "we're as good this place as another ...":

Pegeen (with scorn). As good, is it? Where now will you meet the like of Daneen Sullivan knocked the eye from a peeler, of Marcus Quin, God rest him, got six months for maiming ewes, and he a great warrant to tell stories of holy Ireland till he'd have the old women shedding down tears about their feet. Where will you find the like of them, I'm saying? (Act, I, p. 20).

Pegeen's loneliness and fear of the dark, to which all are subject, are pointed by Shawn's reference to the despairing fugitive in the furze outside whom he was afraid to approach. Pegeen's father, Michael, enters, followed by Philly Cullen and Jimmy Farrell, and they speak of a man above in the grassy ditch, groaning and going mad or catching his death of cold. Pegeen works herself into a great state about being

asked to stay alone in the shop, without so much as a pot-boy for company, while her father quits for the whole night; while Shawn, when it is proposed that he should stay with her, runs off and leaves his coat in Michael's hands, rather than displease Father Reilly by remaining alone with Pegeen, his lack of manliness, spirit, and independence is indicated by his subservience to Father Reilly.

Michael ... let Shawn Keogh stop along with you. It's the will of God, I'm thinking, himself should be seeing to you now. (They all turn on Shawn.).

Shawn (in horrified confusion). I would and welcome, Michael James, but I'm afraid of Father Reilly; and what at all would the Holy Father and the Cardinals of Rome be saying if they heard I did the like of that? (Act I, p. 23).

Scene four ends with Shawn's success in escaping from staying with Pegeen.

Scene five begins when, after a moment, Shawn comes back, with a terrified face visible over the lower half of the door, white against the dark to say that the queer dying fellow, who is looking over the ditch, is following him now. For a perceptible moment they watch the door; someone coughs outside, then Christy Mahon comes in, tired and frightened and dirty. Pegeen's playboy comes walking into her life from the west or south. It is into an inadequate society that Christy is projected to supply virility, leadership, poetry, and freedom. Perhaps it would be better to say he was summoned, for Pegeen's lamentations immediately precede Christy's appearance, as if in answer, from the ditch. But from the moment that Christy Mahon bashfully and miserably enters the scene and is slowly coaxed into telling his story, the play begins to subvert its realistic conventions.

Scene six opens with an instance of the second type of stage directions, the dialogue. Shawn's dialogue with Michael, Pegeen's father, serves as a verbal direction to announce the arrival of Christy, and serves to describe the action which is taking place offstage. Christy's entrance, in this scene, is far from heroic. His appearance is

disheveled, his manner is timid. His first words are a timorous blessing, and his conversation is tentative and reluctant; he is plainly uncertain of his status and safety.

Michael James and his cronies feel that Christy has committed some offence, and they try to engage him in conversation about it. To get at what he has done, Sygne uses the familiar technique of question and fragmentary answer, which gives the dialogue a staccato effect. This stop-and-go procedure, where a little more information is gained with each new question, is characterized by a growing momentum climaxed by the unusual confession that Christy has killed his father. When he tells this to his questioners, they immediately recognize his worth: this is an act of singular bravery. He is welcomed and lionized by the villagers, and especially by Pegeen. Thus, the more the other characters feel the impoverishment of their own lives the more they are ready to give Christy the status of a hero or a savior. This reminds us of Feuerbach's theory of alienation.

The play's form traces the community's creation of a hero and by implication its own self-estrangement and alienation. It takes a frightened, dirty fugitive and shapes him to fit a vacuum that has been created by the villagers' diminished conceptions of their own natures. They use him to fill their psychological and social need. They ascribe to Christy the crowning perfections of their essential nature: poetry and bravery. Poetry and bravery, in the last analysis, are in feeling, sensibility, understanding, and will. They are, to use Feuerbach's words, "An object of any form of human consciousness." ⁽¹³⁾

The picturesqueness of Christy's tale delights the villagers, and his violent deed appears to them subconsciously as an archetypal act of rebellion. As W.M. Armstrong has observed, "They do not ponder the fact that it represents rebellion not only against patriarchal tyranny but also against one of the traditional institutions of the Irish peasant community—the arranged marriage. Pegeen herself is under pressure

from her father and the parish priest to marry Shawn Keogh, a spineless man of property".⁽¹⁴⁾

The villagers' eagerness to hire a murderer, as Pegeen's defender, and leave the two alone springs partly from their way of life where the only rule they respect is the rule of self: they then hasten to enjoy themselves at Kate Cassidy's wake. They have found in Christy the perfect lad to serve as pot-boy for Pegeen and to protect her from harm. His presence will also alleviate her loneliness and assuage any guilt the men may have felt at leaving her alone.

One may at this point look a little further into the genesis of Michael James. Synge, staying on the great Basket Island, slept in the bed adjacent to his host, who lit his pipe and talked a long while.

Then he put up his pipe on the end of the bed-post. "You'll be tired now," he went on, "so it's time we were sleeping; and, I humbly beg your pardon, might I ask your name?" I told him.

"Well, good night so," he said, "and may you have a good sleep your first night in nthe island."

(Works, 11)

Michael James' very accents are in this reported speech; compare:

Michael (going to the door with men). And bagging your pardon, mister, what name will we call you, for we'd like to know?

Christy. Christopher Mahon.

Michael. Well, God bless you, Christy, and a good rest till we meet again when the sun'll be rising to the noon of day. (Act, I, p. 30).

The talk is the same, its rhythm has been perfected, and it has become an expression of character.

Synge was aware of the implications of his language. In the preface he supplied a program note for the first production which also served as public defense of the play:

In writing 'The Playboy of the Western World,' as in my other plays, I have used very few words that I have not heard among the country people, or spoken in my own childhood before I could read the newspapers . . . , Nearly always when some friendly or angry critic tells me that such or such a phrase could not have been spoken by a peasant, he singles out some expression that I have heard, word for word, from some old woman or child, and the same is true also, to central incident of the Playboy [that], was suggested by an actual occurrence in the west. ⁽¹⁵⁾

Scene seven is a transitional one. Pegeen is now left with Christy and Shawn for dramatic contrast, and then choice, which represents a stage in man's self-recovery. The scene conclusively settles the question of Pegeen's choice between them. There is a clear contrast between sterility and fertility, between Christy's "sniffing for a female wife" and Shawn, the "middling kind of scarecrow with no savagery or fine words in him at all." Christy seems to be thrown up, as it were by Nature herself, as the embodiment of the principle of renewal and fertility.

Scene eight enlists our concern for Pegeen's welfare with questions such as: will Christy do evil? Will he do good? Up to this point, Synge has given the scenes a slow expository tempo to prepare the audience for scene eight, in which Pegeen and Christy are left alone. This scene represents the climax of act one. In it we see the meeting of two lonely souls at the point of self-recovery.

But a paradox attaches to loneliness in drama. Loneliness is the very essence of tragedy, for the soul that has attained itself, or recovered itself, through its destiny can have brothers among the stars, but never an earthly companion, yet the dramatic form of expression— the dialogue— presupposes (if it is to be many-voiced, truly dialogical, and dramatic) a high degree of communion among these solitaries. The language of the absolutely lonely man is lyrical, i.e. monological; in the dialogue,

the incognito of his soul becomes too pronounced. It overloads and swamps the clarity and definition of the words exchanged. Such loneliness is more profound than that required by the tragic form, which deals with the relationship to destiny: loneliness has to become a problem unto itself, deepening and confusing the tragic problem and ultimately taking its place. Such loneliness is not simply the intoxication of a soul gripped by destiny and so made strong; it is also the torment of a creature condemned to solitude and devoured by a longing for community.

The play can be considered as the tragedy of freedom as contrasted with the tragedy of fate. In other words, what the play is about can be summed up in the question: how does Christy behave toward an act committed by him, for which he takes the full consequences and full responsibility upon himself, even if he is otherwise horrified by it?

Obviously, the problem raised in these terms cannot be comfortably accommodated with the principle of purely inner freedom, in which some philosophers who were contemporaneous with Synge, including Bergson, have tried to find the source of emancipation from destiny. A freedom of that sort is always theoretical and spiritual. It does not stand up to the test of fact. Thus, Synge takes the case of someone who has realized the absurdity of his life, who, after toiling, moiling, digging, dodging from dawn till dusk, with never a sight of joy or sport except only when he would be abroad in the dark night poaching rabbits on hills, "for I was a devil to poach, God forgive me (very naively), and I near got six month for going with a dung-fork and stabbing a fish." One day asks (why?). He does not simply remain content with imagining himself free, but emancipates himself by an exceptional act, albeit an atrocious one, because only an act of that kind can bring him final liberation from himself and the absurdity of his life. Thus, he kills his father or at least thinks he has killed his father, and this has significant bearing on the moral question.⁽¹⁶⁾ How to behave afterwards – whether to admit the deed and take his punishment or try to

escape— is another moral question, however, and Christy has elected to flee the imaginary peelers.

It is noteworthy of notice that when Christy arrives at the Flaherty shebeen eleven days later, frightened, exhausted, and filthy, he is uninterested in the ethical implications of his act. He is seeking only a haven. The moral consequences were no clearer to him than that he had killed someone, a crime for which he would unquestionably have to account to the abstract authorities; that the someone happened to be his father was of concern only to him. He had acted with cause; he had responded to a clearly intolerable situation in an unambiguously personal way. Only to the community, the outside world, does it take on any larger significance; the Mayo folk see it as an act of bravery, and to a publican in need of a heroic pot-boy, patricide is a good recommendation. Anyhow, man makes his progress by patricide.

Christy's crime presents two levels of the dramatic situation: his own resentment and subsequent revolt, and the isolated Irish peasant community's readiness to accommodate him. Christy's deep resentment toward his father, as well as his sense of alienation and frustration, become apparent in his first confidential conversation with Pegeen: "There wasn't anyone heading me in that place saving only the dumb beasts of the field" (Act I, p. 33). This revelation is followed by a piteous recital of the hardships he had suffered: hard work, deprivation, and the overbearing presence of his cursing, drinking father. We have the image of a young man, perhaps a bit shy and a bit confused on matters related to sex and society, trying to accommodate himself to a hard life on his father's farm. He is a poetic young man, given to spells of daydreaming, and lacking any opportunity for self-realization. But through his love to Pegeen he may begin the process of self-recovery.

All Synge's work complies with some such definition of the true tragic drama. Old Mahon's maltreatment of his son, Christy, is transformed into action that triggers

Christy's individuality. The motive to Synge's drama is in this resolute individuality of the characters in their wish to achieve distinction. All the fine people are lonesome people, and there is antagonism between their desire to be "a wonder" and the "lonesomeness" of life, between the ambition for self-realization and the nullity of circumstance. The poor souls are easily satisfied— Old Mahon with the distinction of having seven doctors writing out his sayings in a printed book; the Widow Quin with her load of dung and her right of turbary (if ever she got them); Dab Burke and the hesitant Michael with "a long life, and a quiet life, and a little taste of the stuff." The passing of life without fulfillment, the inexorable fading of beauty, the elusive quality of happiness, the agony of disillusion— these are the tragic undercurrents of the plays.

In the rhythm of natural life, the rhythm of unpathetic, natural growth and death, love is the point at which the dominant forces of life assume their most concrete and meaningful form. Yet, love as a pure force of nature, i.e., love as passion, does not belong to Synge's world of nature. Passionate love is too much bound up with the relationship between one individual and another, and, therefore, isolates too much, creates too many degrees and nuances; it is cultural. The love which occupies the really central place in Synge's world is love as marriage, love as union, love as the prelude to birth. Marriage and the family are vehicles of the natural continuity of life.

Pegeen confides to Christy that she, too, has objections to her father's behavior, though she had never thought to kill him – she would be afraid to do that. But she recognizes, with Philly, that the heart's a wonder, and knows, or thinks she knows in her ardent mind, what it may be capable of when blind rages are tearing it apart from within. More, she sees at once that Christy is a poet, and poets, she has always heard, are fine, fiery fellows with great rages when their temper is roused. A bond seems to be forming between the two lonely souls. Pegeen is attracted to the romance of Christy's crime, as well as to his masterful language; not only does he have a good

story to tell, but he tells it well, and Pegeen is quick to sympathize with him and to understand and appreciate his situation:

Pegeen: And it's that you'd call sport, is it, to be abroad in the darkness with yourself alone.

Christy: I'd be as happy as the sunshine of St. Martin's Day, watching the light passing in the north or the patches of fog, till I'd hear a rabbit starting to screech and I'd go running in the furze. Then, when I'd my full share, I'd come walking down where you'd the ducks and geese stretched sleeping on the highway of the road. (Act, I, p. 33).

This is a man for whom nature is not a background to life, but an inseparable part of his keenest experience.

Very soon Christy is laced securely in Pegeen's heartstrings, for he is a personable lad, and any girl would walk her heart out before she'd meet a young man who was his like for eloquence or any kind of talk at all. Thus, in their oblique courtship games, Pegeen manages him skillfully, alternately feeding his vanity with approval and rousing his anxieties by threats of desertion. Yet, she is no more satisfied with her identity than Christy is with his, and both begin to blossom in one another's idealized mirrors.

Scene nine, like scene seven, presents Christy's choice between Pegeen and Widow Quin. Now it is Christy's turn to choose, as Pegeen had to choose between Christy and Shawn in scene seven.

Through the ecstasy of their love, Christy and Pegeen are elevated into a sphere where time has stopped, but because of their mortal, organic limitations, they must fall back into the world of reality represented by Widow Quin, who comes in while the theme of their love reaches its crescendo. This scene makes apparent the conflict between Pegeen and Widow Quin. The conflict between ecstasy and pragmatism is

something like the distinct portraits of Pegeen drawn by Christy and the Widow Quin. Whereas Christy, in a famous image called from Gaelic love poetry, sees "the love-light of the star of knowledge shining from her brow", the Widow Quin can find only "a girl you'd see itching and scratching, and she with a stale stink of poteen on her from selling in the shop". These two contradictory yet equally accurate depictions of Pegeen exist simultaneously, and *The Playboy* validates both. Free of her tongue and ready with her hands, ardent in her loves and her sorrows, "fiery and magnificent and tender", Pegeen is the living embodiment of all that Synge loved in life.

Thus, before the evening has ended Christy has completed the second stage of his development: choice. For while the myth of the playboy remains static, and Christy tries desperately to live up to it, a real and organic change is taking place in his personality. At the end of Act, I Christy sums up his position:

It's great luck and company I've won me in the end of time – two fine women fighting for the likes of me – till I'm thinking this night wasn't a foolish fellow not to kill my father in the years gone by.

(Act, I, p. 38)

Synge, being concerned with form, as well as content, found great difficulties in writing Act II. "I half hope," he wrote "I have got over the weakness in my Second Act that has been worrying me so much".⁽¹⁷⁾ tried to get over "week situations by strong writing, but now I find it won't do".⁽¹⁸⁾ At last he managed to rewrite it. Act II is divided into fifteen scenes.

Scene, one shows us the progress of Christy's development. He has attained a level clearly beyond that achieved at the end of Act I. One sees him taking inventory, counting the Flaherty's material assets with possessiveness grown out of his recent recognition of his own worth. His stock-in-trade is evidently considerable. Thus, one

can say that in the second act the blossoming begins to pass rapidly on to the fruits of confidence in his victory in the games at the beginning of the third act.

In Act II Synge successfully uses stage directions and stage properties to assist him in relating the constituent scenes to the whole play. He uses stage properties as structural devices which carry the action from one point to another, link scenes, and foreshadow events of subsequent importance. Through these properties, Synge can achieve and express his theme of human suffering in life. The symbolically charges properties project into visual terms man's psychic state, dramatizing his inner condition. This method is a characteristic of expressionist drama. The rapid changes of clothing and frequent uses of mirrors show us that Christy fixes in his mind a desirable self-concept, demonstrated as well in his behavior, which has become over-confident and self-aggrandizing.

Scene two begins when Sara Tansey, that eager spirit, comes first thing in the morning to set her eyes on the playboy – just as she drove ten miles to see the man who bit the yellow lady's nostril. The first thing she comes across are his boots. First, she smells them:

Sara: That's bog water, I'm thinking; but it's his own they are, surely, for I never seen the like of them for whitey mud, and red mud, and turf on them, and the fine sands of the sea. That man's been walking, I'm telling you.

(Act, II, p. 40).

She is disappointed that the red color on the boots is not blood; however, no sooner has she decided that it is only bog water, than her limber girl's mind runs on anyway to paint the murderous boots in other pretty colors.

Scene two continues up to scene five where Christy and the village girls, as well as Widow Quin, drink with their arms linked. Pegeen comes in with a milk-can and stands aghast. They all spring away from Christy. Pegeen's apparent jealousy and her

abrupt dispatch of them, as well as the poignant love scene that follows, serve to reinforce Christy's new position. His heightened imagery of passion, like the increasingly mythical vision of his father-killing, recreates their personalities in more simplified, childlike, but idealized versions of both their love and of the world. Their speech is centered on the end of loneliness. Thus, under Pegeen's tutelage Christy becomes poet, lover, and man of action. She is drawn to him because, as Robin Skeleton has observed, "she is capable of that kind of violence to which Christy lays claim, and so she recognizes something of herself in him."⁽¹⁹⁾

In scene seven, Shawn Keogh, out of fear and terror, tries to bribe Christy 'with new hat,' 'my breeches with the double seat,' 'my new coat woven from the blackest shearing for three miles around' and 'half a ticket to the Western States' (Act II, p. 49). This also shows Christy's status as a man of action. Shawn confides to Widow Quin his fear and desperation:

Oh, Widow Quin, what'll I be doing now? I'd inform again him, but he'd burst from Kilmainham, and he'd be sure and certain to destroy me. If I wasn't so God fearing, I'd near have courage to come behind him and run a pike into his side. Oh, it's a hard case to be an orphan and not to have your father that you're used to, and you'd easy kill and make yourself a hero in the sight of all. (Act, II, p. 51).

This gets the greatest laugh of all in the theatre; indeed it is already a classic comic line, but the honor is all against Shawn.

While Shawn declines, Christy is by contrast no longer the foolish butt of the village girls' jokes but the object of their interest and adulation, and he is gratefully obsessed with the deed that made him so. For the first time, he clearly verbalizes his status:

From this out I'll have no want of company when all sorts is bringing me their food and clothing, the way they'd set their eyes upon a gallant orphan cleft his father with one blow to the breeches belt.

(Act, II, p. 52)

This speech marks a definite step in the making of the hero; he has reached the stage where he consciously recognizes the value of the story of his act. The story is the key to acceptance, even adulation, by the community. Thus, scene ten ends with a climax. But his overconfidence meets a comic reversal when his father appears in scene eleven and meets Widow Quin. So apt for comedy as this:

Widow Quin: I'd give the world and all to see the like of him. What kind was he?

Mahon: A small, low fellow.

Widow Quin: And dark?

Mahon: Dark and dirty.

Widow Quin: (considering). I'm thinking I seen him.

Mahon: (eagerly). An ugly young blackguard.

Widow Quin: A hideous, fearful villain, and the spite of you.

(Act, II, p. 54)

Comedy has just as much of a cathartic function as tragedy, in that it preserves laughter as dissociative behavior. But this distancing should not destroy the empathy that Synge uses as an effective element in his plays. He believes that the two should go together. Thus, after this comic scene, Christy's despair is evoked again. The speech of Christy, the poet, is a speech strong and sinewy, coming from the lips with a long unhesitating rhythm, and full of the color of the dramatist's mind:

Amn't I after seeing the love-light of the star of knowledge shining from her brow, and hearing words would put you thinking on the holy Brigid speaking to the infant saints, and now she'll be turning again, and speaking hard words to me, like an old woman with a spavindy ass she'd have, urging on a hill. (Act, II, p. 56).

There is no need for the textual directions to tell us that these words are spoken "in despair and grief". Despair and grief are in the very cadences. In any case, Widow Quin, as we have seen in the dialogue, intercepts Old Mahon and sends him off with a ruse.

But Widow Quin deserves a word here, at least she is important enough for Synge to give her the last word in Act II, as Christy is given the last word in Act I, and Pegeen in Act III. Her promises to Shawn to marry Christy and to Christy to obtain Pegeen are in conformity with the earthly and acquisitive values of her community. But once Christy decides on Pegeen, she returns to the role of the cynical comic widow, bargaining for what she can get, as she had done earlier with Shawn Keogh:

Christy: (with agitation) Will you swear to aid and save me for the love of Christ?

Widow Quin: (looks at him for a moment). If I aid you, will you swear to give me a right of way I want, and a mountainy ram, and a load of dung at Michaela's, the time you'll be master her? (Act, II, p. 57)

She is an integrated personality, in tune with nature and free of the superficialities of the other inhabitants of the village. She is a watcher of life, fundamentally alone, and she can appreciate dispassionately Christy's fine eloquence. She seems at one point to be closer to Christy than Pegeen could ever be, with a feeling of loneliness very like Christy's:

I'm above many's the day, odd in great spirits, abroad in the sunshine, darning a stocking or stitching a shift, and odd times again looking out on the schooners, hookers, travelers is sailing the sea, and I thinking on the gallant hairy fellows are drifting beyond, and myself long years living alone.

(Act, II, p. 56).

She is an interesting character, but Synge deliberately limits her attractiveness and gives her only this one moment of seriousness for two reasons: first, to preserve the

unity of action; second, to create a balance between comedy and tragedy. So, if her practicality makes her seem somewhat cynical and comic, she is the only person in the play capable of real sympathy: "Well if the worst comes in the end of all, it'll be great game to see there's none to pity him but a widow woman, the like of me has buried her children and destroyed her man" (Act II, p. 58).

Act three begins with the return of Jimmy Farrell and Philly Cullen in addition to Michael. They function as the chorus does in Greek drama. They come after a night of celebrating Kata Cassidy's wake. Christy is reported to have dominated all of the sports played at the wake and to be bragging incessantly of his "one single blow." This leads to the topic of skulls, and Old Mahon who has entered in the meantime, points boastfully to his own: "Lay your eyes on that skull, and tell me where and when there was another the like of it, is splintered only from the blow of a loy" (Act III, p. 60). This marvel is capped by the triumphant statement: "It was my own son hit me. Would you believe that?" (Ibid., 60).

Philly: And what way was it done?

Mahon: I'm after walking hundreds and long scores of miles, winning clean beds and the fill of my belly four times in the day, and I doing nothing but telling stories of that naked truth ... Give me a supeen and I'll tell you now.

(Act, III, p. 60).

The widow tries with partial success to convince them that Mahon is a raving lunatic and elicits from him a description of his son as "the fool of men, ... with old and young making game of him, and they are swearing, raging, kiking at him like a mangy cue" (Ibid., 62).

Outside, the exploits of the champion Playboy of the Western World are cheered to the echo, and the company stands on a beach to view the race. Here Synge uses the spoken stage direction as a means to extend the borders of the play by creating

additional scenes through description. The tendency to create such scenes is, as Herbert Howarth observes, characteristic of Synge's dramatic art.

The communication of the objective scene through dialogue is a striking skill of Synge's plays. No writer has reproduced pictures of the outer scene so sharply as this egocentric and apparently inward-looking man. It is, of course, common and relatively easy for a sensitive writer to put the thing observed, countryside or town, into descriptive prose, while the action halts and waits on it. Synge puts the country smells, sounds and sights, the streams running between rocks, into his dialogue, so that they belong to the action and go with it, not stop it or obtrude. ⁽²⁰⁾

Martin Lamm, in his *Modern Drama* (1952), describes Synge's technique as Elizabethan.

Synge studied Elizabethan drama in his youth, and avails himself of the Elizabethan technique of describing the setting of a scene in the course of the dialogue. He does not need the endless description of scenery to which contemporary dramatists generally resort. In a single line he can often indicate the whole poetic atmosphere of a play. ⁽²¹⁾

Howarth's and Lamm's comments are certainly germane to Synge's method in *The Playboy*. Scene five from the play will suffice to show how Synge uses the spoken stage direction to extend the borders of the play, and to increase the implications of the action. Meanwhile, Mahon acclaims the daring winner, but as the latter is brought forward on the shoulders of the others, he suddenly recognizes his son Christy. Mahon is restrained by the widow, persuaded that he is suffering from delusions and urged to flee the assault of the preying local youths of the village.

In scene ten Christy enters, in triumph, from the games and accepts his prize saying: "Thank you kindly, the lot of you. But you'd say it was little only I did this day if you'd seen me a while since striking my one single blow" (Act III, p. 66). The

confidence inspired by the adulation of the village has helped Christy to win at sports, and it seems to have invested him with the manhood denied him by his life at home. The radiant Pegeen hustles the crowd out, and Christy woos her in splendid poetic language.

Scene eleven immediately follows to give us another love scene with Pegeen. Having gained a series of victories over his father, Shawn, and finally the off-stage rides and carnival barkers, Christy again courts Pegeen in the flush of new vigor; disbelieving at first, she softens and yields to his poetic fervor:

If the mitred bishops seen that time, they'd be the like of the holy prophets, I'm thinking, do be straining the bars of Paradise to lay eyes on the Lady Helen of Troy, and she abroad, pacing back and forward, with nosegay in her golden shawl.

(Act III, p. 67)

Again Christy pictures himself to Pegeen: "squeezing kisses on your pickered lips, till I'd feel a kind of pity for the Lord God is all ages sitting lonesome in His golden chair" (Ibid., p. 67).

The consciousness of natural good brought by a Christy emerging almost from nature herself is contrasted, explicitly and implicitly, with the restraints of a church that has lost contact, in Synge's view, with natural good. The grounds for objection by a Catholic audience were much firmer than the mere mention of the word "shift". The kind of marriage Shawn can offer is "making a good bargain" with the formal approval of the ecclesiastical authorities. Christy offers Pegeen a match for which the approval of the Church, like its disapproval, is irrelevant. It is worthy of notice that Synge, himself, encountered a problem concerning his love of and marriage to Molly Allgood. She was a Catholic, and his mother was unhappy about this relationship.

But the Church, as an institution, is very strong and has the people in its grip. In addition to that, the people themselves are unwilling to recognize or even realize, in Synge's view, that they are alone in the cosmos.

The drunken Michael appears (scene twelve) singing ominously of escaped prisoners recaptured, congratulates Christy, and in the same breath announces the all-clear for Pegeen's wedding with Shawn. Pegeen now affirms her intention of marrying Christy, whose valiance and poetry outweigh Shawn's drift of heifers and his bull from Sneem. Shawn says "I'll not fight him, Michael James, I'd liefer live a bachelor, simmering in passions to the end of time, than face a lepping savage the like of him has descended from the Lord knows where" (Act III, p. 71).

The consent of Michael is soon obtained. Michael, standing between them says: "It's the will of God, I'm thinking, that all should win an easy or a cruel end, and it's the will of God that all should rear up lengthy families for the nurture of the earth. What's a single man, I ask you, eating a bit in one house and drinking a sup in another, and he with no place of his won, like an old braying jackass strayed upon the rocks? (To Christy.) It's many would be in dread to bring your like into their house for to end them, maybe, with a sudden end; but I'm a decent man of Ireland, and I liefer face the grave untimely and I seeing a score of grandsons growing up little gallant swearers by the name of God, than go peopling my bedside with puny weeds the like of what you'd breed, I'm thinking, out of Shaneen keogh. (He joins their hands.) A daring fellow is the jewel of the world, and a man did split his father's middle with a single clout should have the bravery of ten, so may God and Mary and St. Patrick bless you, and increase you from this mortal day" (Act III, p. 72).

At this point, which represents the climax of this act, Old Mahon comes back like a weasel tracing a rat. Christy, for a magnificent moment, disowns his father, then, the crowd turning against him, he falls into one of his less happy efforts, but still magnificent in its audacity: "It's himself was a liar, lying stretched out with an open

head on him, letting on he was dead": (Ibid., p. 73). Pegeen turns against him, and in a second he is abjectly piteous: "Let you save me from the old man" (Ibid., p. 73).

The crowd is now turned against Christy, and Pegeen turns against him: "And to think of the coaxing glory we had given him, and he after doing nothing but hitting a soft blow and chasing northward in a sweat of fear. Quit off from this ... I'm hard set to think you're the one I'm after lacing in my heart-string half an hour gone by" (Ibid., p. 73). Nature never framed a woman's heart of prouder stuff, except Lady Macbeth's than that of Pegeen Mike. "It's lies you told letting on you had him slitted, and you nothing at all" (Ibid., p. 73). It is characteristic of her proud heart that when her playboy proves not to be all that he had claimed and that she had thought him, he should at once be nothing. It is important to note that he tells no lies; he is guilty of embroidery only, and that not until he is flattered, by their evident admiration, into the belief that he has done something big.

He would do anything now to keep this image. There is nothing for it but another deed of desperation, and in a moment, he is flying at Old Mahon again with the lay. Christy tries to rise aggressively, perhaps achieving feats which will be recorded permanently in the memory of the folk. In this scene Synge uses the peasants as a chorus whose function is to give an orchestral background. Their emotion rises to a crescendo, and then falls to silence when Christy hits his father the second time. The deed fills the dramatic stillness.

One of the main characteristics of a hero is that it can extend in only one direction upwards. It begins now when enigmatic forces have distilled the essence from a man, have reduced him to his fundamental elements, and the progress of tragedy consists in his essential, true nature becoming more and more manifest. A life that excludes accident is flat and sterile, an endless plain without any elevations; the logic of such a life is the logic of cheap security, of passive refusal before everything new, of dull repose in the lap of dry common sense. Thus, after the games, when everything falls

lucky in Christy's hands, he has no thought but how to win Pegeen. Widow Quin cannot understand his predicament because she is the type who would be content with any sort of cheap security. She tells him that she could find him "finer sweethearts [than Pegeen] at each waning moon" (Ibid., p. 76), but, still, she cannot understand or appreciate the significance of his transformation and self-recovery. Only Pegeen, who has the same tragic nature, is capable of that: "Oh my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only playboy of the western world" (Ibid., 80). Thus cries Pegeen with dismay at the end of act three.

The villagers, led by Pegeen, draw back in horror from the killing which they had glorified so long as it happened in "a windy corner of high, distant hills." They have learnt, for the moment, "that there's a great gap between a gallows story and a dirty deed." Pegeen, because she is frightened, joins the villagers of Mayo in their fear and takes the lead part in taunting and scorching Christy's shins. William Fay recorded how he and his brother begged Synge to turn Pegeen into "a decent likeable country girl and to cut out the torturing of Christy with hot turf, "but, he adds," we might as well have tried to move the Hill of Howth as move Synge." ⁽²²⁾ Synge, in fact, knows what he is doing. By leaving this scene as it is he has three objectives related to his dramatic theory: first he wants Pegeen to function within the conventions of the White Goddess tradition. Like the archetypal temptress, she is inscrutable, cruel, and irresistibly fascinating to her lovers. Second, Synge is interpreting the phenomenon of alienation. He knows that one of its sources is a diminished view of one's own nature and environment; if one thinks of himself, with the naturalist's view of human nature, as an animal, surely he will behave like one. This is the state which people's feeling for one another is like. Thus, he writes:

Although these people are kindly towards each other and to their children, they have no feeling for the sufferings of animals, and little sympathy for pain when the person who feels it is not in danger. I have sometimes seen a girl writhling and howling with

toothache while her mother sat at the other side of the fireplace pointing at her and laughing at her as if amused by the sight.

A few days ago, when we had been talking of the death of President M'Kinley, I explained the American way of killing murderers, and a man asked me how long the man who killed the President would be dying ... and sometimes when I go into a cottage I find all the women of the place down on their knees plucking the feathers from live ducks and geese. (Works, II, p. 163).

Third, Synge, like all expressionists, is trying to make use of the phenomenon of empathy. So, he uses the language and themes that people use and are familiar with in their folklore. One of these themes is the deserted lover and the cruel girl:

Once I courted a damsel,

She's often in my mind,

But now, alas: she's proved unkind. ⁽²³⁾

These lines are part of plays about the hero-combat. They "are the remains of the oldest and most primitive (plays) left in this country."⁽²⁴⁾

Pegeen's cruelty settles Christy: "You're blowing for to torture me. That's your kind, is it?" (Act III, p. 78). It is the terrible shock of her betrayal of him which awakes him from his dreams. His belief in Pegeen is shattered, but this ultimately only strengthens his belief in himself. His thoughts are no more the girl who has had him "laced in her heartstrings", but for the playboy only, and his new-won reputation, and that he may yet have a gay march down to a gallant end.

The experiencing of the frontier between life and death is the awakening of the soul to consciousness. Where before he had thought his love, and the words he used to express it, originated with Pegeen, his inspiration, he can now see that it sprang from within himself. Thus, the progress of his soul's consciousness is given from and

traced through Christy's development from dependence on his father, through dependence on his first love, to a healthy and mature self-sufficiency. But he will continue to experience solitude and longing: the longing for selfhood, the longing to transform the narrow peak of his existence into a wide plain with the path of his life across it. The tragic experience, dramatic tragedy, is the most perfect, the only perfect fulfilment of this longing. But every longing fulfilled is a longing destroyed. Tragedy arises from longing.

In conclusion, one can say that the anguish and alienation from which man suffers, according to Synge, can be found in three causes: first, man's impoverished view of his situation and his readiness, and as a result hand over his freedom and will, second, man's unwillingness to realize that he is alone in the universe, and third, because of his impoverished conception of his own life and nature man submits to an absolute dichotomy between himself and his potentialities.

Notes

- (1) The lectures Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) delivered in 1840. On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History, blended mythology with metaphysics to produce an image of the ideal type of individual needed as the savior of mankind. The hero can take many forms: he can be a god (Odin), a prophet (Muhammad), poet (Dante and Shakespeare), priest (Luther and Knox), a man of letters (Johnson, Rousseau, Burns), or a political ruler (Cromwell and Napoleon). In fact, the hero can be "what you will, according to the kind of world he finds himself born into": his ever-varying persona results from the deeper needs of society. The hero is directed not by the "mechanical" needs of men, but by their "dynamical," unseen, mystical needs. Thus, all heroes have discerned "truly what the time wanted", and have led it "on the right road thither." In this sense, the hero is a gift from heaven, or as Carlyle puts it, a force of nature; his essential quality is "Original Insight" into the "primal reality of things." Because of the hero's firm contact with the "great Fact of Existence," he cannot lie. "He is heartily in earnest; an unconscious sincerity emanates from him turning his acts or utterances into "a kind of 'revelation'" which the ordinary, unheroic man is morally obliged to recognize and obey. For "all that is right includes itself in this of co-operating with the real tendency of the World."

Indeed, the proper feelings of ordinary men toward the heroes of their age are loyalty (which is "akin to religious Faith"), reverence, admiration, and "an obedience which knows no bounds." Hero worship, Carlyle significantly concludes, is a basic and indestructible tendency of human nature: it is "the one fixed point in modern revolutionary history, otherwise as if bottomless and shoreless."

As with Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, there has been a tendency in the twentieth century to view Carlyle's theory of the hero far too much in terms of recent political experience – that is, to think of the hero as a direct ancestor of fascism. But Carlyle, like Nietzsche, was essentially a philosopher of culture, not a political theorist.

- (2) J.M. Synge, *Collected Works*, Vol. 2 prose, ed. Alan Price (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 35.
- (3) P.P. Howe, *J.M. Synge: A Critical Study*, (New York: Greenwood, 1919), pp. 101-102.
- (4) Synge to Stephan McKenna, ed. Maurice Bourgeois, *John Millington Synge and The Irish Theatre*, (New York: B. Blom, 1965), p. 210.
- (5) Andrew Malone, *The Irish Drama* (London: Constable, 1929), p. 151.
- (6) J.M. Synge, "Program Note for *Playboy*." in *Collected Works*, V. II, p. 383.
- (7) E.H. Mikhail, ed., *J.M. Synge: Interviews and Recollections* (London and Basingstok: The Macmillan Press, 1977), p. 35.
- (8) Quoted from D.H. Green and Edward M. Stephens, *J.M. Synge* (New York: 1959), p. 265.
- (9) E.H. Mikhail, *Interviews and Recollections*, p. 76. In Paris Synge once said to W.B. Yeats, "We should unite stoicism, asceticism and ecstasy. Two of them have often come together, but the three never."
- (10) J.M. Synge, *Riders to the Sea and The Playboy of the Western World*. E.R. Wood, ed. (London: Heineman Educational Books, 1905, rep. 1982), p. 19. Subsequent Quotations from Synge's Play are from this edition.
- (11) P.L. Henry, "The Playboy of the Western World", in *Philologica Pragensia* (1965), p. 195.
- (12) *Ibid.*, p. 196.

- (13) L. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* ed. and trans. George Eliot (Moriam Evans), introduced K. Barth (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1957), p. 5.
- (14) W.A. Armstrong, "Synge's Communities and Dissenters," In *Drama and Society, Roman Themes in Drama*, No. 1. edited by James Remond, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 124.
- (15) *Works*, II, p. 363.
- (16) See Norman Podhoretz. "Synge's Playboy: Morality and the Hero," in *Essays in Criticism*, III (July 1952), pp. 337-344.
- (17) *Letters*, p. 225.
- (18) *Ibid.*, p. 225.
- (19) Robin Skelton, *J.M. Synge* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1972), p. 65.
- (20) Herbert Howarth, *The Irish Writers: 1880-1940*, Quoted from Parl M. Levitt's, *A Structural Approach to the Analysis of Drama* (Paris: Mouton and Co., 1971), p. 111.
- (21) Martin Lamm, *Modern Drama*, Karin Elliott, Trans. (Oxford, 1952), p. 305.
- (22) J.M. Synge, *Collected Works: Plays*, (Oxford, 1965), p. 89.
- (23) E.C. Cawte, Alex Helm, and N. Percocck, *English Ritual Drama: A Geographical Index*, (London: The Folklore Society Publications, 1967), p. 27.
- (24) *Ibid.*, p. 27.

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