A SHARE IN PAIN AND PASSION

THE WOMEN OF SYNGE'S PLAYS

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I am not a woman and I cannot judge of all your feelings, yet I know you have a profound impulse for what is peculiar to women. You realize that the forces which lift women up to a share in the pain and passion of the world are more holy than the vows you have made.

(When the Moon Has Set)

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REFERENCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from the writings of Synge are taken from *J. M. Synge: Collected Works*, General Editor, Robin Skelton (London: Oxford University Press, 1962-1968), referred to as the Oxford edition or *CW*.

Figures given in brackets at the end of each quotation refer to the relevant pages in *CW*, with quotations from *When the Moon Has Set*, *Riders to the Sea*, *The Shadow of the Glen* and *The Well of the Saints* being from Vol III, and those from *The Tinker's Wedding*, *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Deirdre of the Sorrows* being from Vol. IV. When passages from a play are quoted in chapters not dealing specifically with that play, the volume is also given; when Synge's poetry and prose are quoted, both volume and page numbers are given. Stage directions are underlined and placed either in square brackets (when quoted with speeches) or in inverted commas (when quoted separately).

A number of discrepancies exist between the Maunsel and Oxford texts, especially in *Deirdre of the Sorrows*; these are noted mainly where differences in interpretation could arise.

Several critics give shortened forms of the names of plays. These include:

Riders	- *Riders to the Sea*.
The Shadow	- *The Shadow of the Glen* (referred to by some writers as *In the Shadow of the Glen*).
Playboy or *The Playboy*	- *The Playboy of the Western World*.
Deirdre	- *Deirdre of the Sorrows*.

The following abbreviations are used in the body of the thesis:

Bourgeois - Bourgeois, Maurice. *John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre*. London: Constable, 1913.

Boyd, *Contemporary* - Boyd, Ernest A. *The Contemporary Drama of Ireland*. Dublin: Talbot Press, 1918.

Boyd, *Renaissance* - Boyd, Ernest A. *Ireland's Literary Renaissance*. Rev. ed. Dublin: Allen Figgis. 1968.

Corkery - Corkery, Daniel. *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature: A Study*. Dublin: Cork University Press and the Educational Co. of Ireland, 1931.

Coxhead - Coxhead, Elizabeth. *J. M. Synge and Lady Gregory*. "Writers and their Work," No. 149; London: Longmans, Green for the British Council and the National Book League, 1962.

Ellis-Fermor - Ellis-Fermor, Una. *The Irish Dramatic Movement*. 2nd ed. London: Methuen, 1954.

Gerstenberger - Gerstenberger, Donna. *John Millington Synge.* "Twayne's English Authors Series," No. 12; New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964.

Greene and Stephens - Greene, David H., and Edward M. Stephens. *J. M. Synge 1871-1909.* New York: Macmillan, 1959.

Harmon - Harmon, Maurice (ed.). *J. M. Synge Centenary Papers, 1971.* Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1972.

Henn - Henn, T. R. (ed.). *The Plays and Poems of J. M. Synge.* London: Methuen, 1963.

Howe - Howe, P. P. *J. M. Synge: A Critical Study.* London: Martin Secker, 1912.

Johnston - Johnston, Denis. *John Millington Synge.* "Columbia Essays on Modern Writers," No. 12; New York: Columbia University Press, 1965.

O'Connor - O'Connor, Frank. "Synge." In Lennox Robinson (ed.), *The Irish Theatre. Lectures Delivered during the Abbey Theatre Festival Held in Dublin in August 1938.* London: Macmillan, 1939.

Price - Price, Alan. *Synge and Anglo-Irish Drama.* London: Methuen, 1961.

Robinson - Robinson, Lennox (ed.). *The Irish Theatre. Lectures Delivered during the Abbey Theatre Festival Held in Dublin in August 1938.* London: Macmillan, 1939.

Saddlemyer - Saddlemyer, Ann. *J. M. Synge and Modern Comedy.* Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1968.

Skelton - Skelton, Robin. *The Writings of J. M. Synge.* London: Thames and Hudson, 1971.

Strong - Strong, L. A. G. *John Millington Synge.* "P. E. N. Books"; London: George Allen & Unwin, 1941.

The following abbreviations are used both in the body of the thesis and in the bibliography:

FR - *Fortnightly Review.*

MD - *Modern Drama.*

PMLA - *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America.*

TLS - *Times Literary Supplement.*

YS - *Yeats Studies.*

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

> More than any other thing I yearn to acquaint myself with the true personalities of these women - these bastard daughters of the Enduring Life - and perpetually I wander among them reading in their faces and their transient gesticulation the mysterious record of their divinity.[1]

Synge's plays contain some of the most arresting figures in modern drama, his characterization second only to his unique language, the most striking feature of his writing. Of the men, only Christy Mahon and Martin Doul stand out, but the women form a brilliant company usually overshadowing the other characters. Old or young, queen or doxy, heroine or foil, nearly all are vividly and vigorously drawn. Interest centres on Maurya and Nora Burke, while Sarah Casey, Mary Byrne and Deirdre of the Sorrows all dominate their men and the action, Mary Doul is as memorable as her more outgoing husband, and Pegeen Mike and the Widow Quin are as impressive as the Playboy himself.

The object of this thesis is to attempt an understanding of these women. Although no prominent critic has concentrated wholly on these figures, many have discussed them in varying degrees of detail from biographical, sociological and historical as well as from textual points of view. This thesis follows the last approach, agreeing with Raymond Williams's belief that Synge's plays

> need evaluation as texts, with a temporary suspension of interest in the wider cultural issues, save only those which the texts themselves raise. /Williams's italics/[2]

This has led to frequent, but necessary, quotation from the text in commenting on the characters. The opinions of all available critics, including lesser writers like Hayes and Tennyson, have

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[1] "/On a Train to Paris,/" CW II, 38, n. 1.

[2] Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Eliot (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952), p. 154.

been taken into account and referred to in the chapter on the critics;[3] on the other hand, important authors, such as Williams and Lucas, are not included here as their opinions are not relevant. But the views of all writers are considered in the other chapters where particular, as distinct from general, remarks on the various characters are noted. Spelling, punctuation and capitalization have been regularized.

Except for *When the Moon Has Set*, the order of plays is the same as that in the Oxford edition. Fragments and scenarios have been largely disregarded as they contain little of interest regarding characterization.

In dealing with Synge's women one cannot avoid paying a certain amount of attention to his men as well, for no figure exists in isolation, relationships playing an important role in revealing character.

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[3] A number of books on Synge cannot be obtained, but even the most substantial of these appear to be by minor European critics: Just Thorning, *J. M. Synge: En moderne irsk dramatiker* ("Studier fra Sprog-og Oldtidsforskning," No. 121, Copenhagen: n.p., 1921); Serafino Riva, *La Tradizione celtica e la moderna letterature irlandese: I: John Millington Synge* (Rome: n.p., 1937); Jan Sigurd Setterquist, *Ibsen and the Beginnings of Anglo-Irish Drama: I. John Millington Synge* ("Uppsala Irish Studies," No. 2; Uppsala: n.p., 1951).

Chapter 2

A SURVEY OF CRITICISM OF SYNGE'S CHARACTERS

> John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought
> All that we did, all that we said or sang
> Must come from contact with the soil, from that
> Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.
> We three alone in modern times had brought
> Everything down to that sole test again,
> Dream of the noble and the beggar-man.[1]

Of all the early critics of Synge, W. B. Yeats was the foremost, his praises and impassioned defence of his protégé's work forming the basis of much of Synge's initial reputation. In his criticism he stresses the "Irishness" of Synge's plays, and, in referring to The Playboy of the Western World in particular, says:

> It is the strangest, the most beautiful expression in drama of that Irish fantasy which overflowing through all Irish literature that has come out of Ireland itself . . . is the unbroken character of Irish genius.[2]

Yeats contends that although Synge's peasants are Irish, they are also universal - he has both "a preoccupation with individual life," and "a preoccupation with what is lasting and noble":[3]

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[1]W. B. Yeats, "The Municipal Gallery Revisited," The Collected Poems (2nd ed.; London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 369.

[2]Yeats, "J. M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time," The Cutting of an Agate, Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 337.

[3]Yeats, "Preface to the First Edition of The Well of the Saints," The Cutting of an Agate, Essays and Introductions, p. 303.

In "Collective Intellect: Yeats, Synge and Nietzsche," Essays and Studies 1973, XXVI, 95, Lorna Reynolds remarks that "Yeats, like everybody else, is wrong when he talks about Synge as a writer of peasant plays. Synge did not use peasants as characters. What Synge did was to write about a primitive community, that is, a community living in accordance with habits of thought and behaviour once characteristic of all the human race. His characters are the people found in such communities; fishermen, nomads (tramps and tinkers), holy men, lonely women, hunters, kings, queens, and warriors." In an earlier article, "The Rhythms of Synge's Dramatic Prose," YS,

> Mr Synge . . . has written of the peasant as he is to all ages; of the folk-imagination as it has been shaped by centuries of life among fields or on fishing-grounds. His people talk a highly coloured musical language, and one never hears from them a thought that is of to-day and not of yesterday.[4]

He says that Synge "made word and phrase dance to a very strange rhythm" which

> makes the people of his imagination a little disembodied; it gives them a kind of innocence even in their anger and their cursing.[5]

In a critical passage which anticipates "The Municipal Gallery Revisited," Yeats refers to the dreams of these people and those of their creator:

> Every writer, even every small writer, who has belonged to the great tradition, has had his dream of an impossibly noble life, and the greater he is, the more does it seem to plunge him into some beautiful or bitter reverie. Some, and of these are all the earliest poets of the world, gave it direct expression; others mingle it so subtly with reality that it is a day's work to disentangle it; others bring it near by showing us whatever is most its contrary. Mr Synge, indeed, sets before us ugly, deformed or sinful people, but his people, moved by no practical ambition, are driven by a dream of that impossible life.[6]

No. 2 (Bealtaine 1972), p. 53, Professor Reynolds describes peasants as "people living by the cultivation of the land without owning it." This reveals the basis of her misunderstanding. Surely, peasants are regarded by Yeats and most other critics as any rustics, any people living in the country, whether they work on the land or not.

[4]Yeats, "Samhain: 1905," The Irish Dramatic Movement, Explorations (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 183.

[5]Yeats, Preface to The Well of the Saints, Essays and Introductions, p. 300.

[6]ibid., pp. 303-304.

Charles Tennyson, a minor early critic, points out that Synge's characters undergo little development, "in spite of the humour, fire and subtlety with which the persons of the plays are drawn."[7] He says that the plays gain their effect from the imaginative treatment of a single idea, and that Synge employed "a great simplification of mechanism":

> He had to make each play revolve, as it were, round a fixed point (the one or two characters who are the clou of the idea), with an action simple and leisurely, serving only as an illustration, never as an end in itself.[8]

In 1912 the first books devoted mainly to Synge appeared: Francis Bickley's J. M. Synge and the Irish Dramatic Movement and P. P. Howe's J. M. Synge: A Critical Study. The first is a slight, largely introductory work which says little of importance, particularly with regard to the characters. All that Bickley mentions is that in the peasantry of the Aran Islands, Connemara and Wicklow - "perfect material for drama,"[9] - Synge saw that "the god and the beast were mixed in just proportions, corresponding to that juxtaposition of exaltation and brutality which figures in his theory of poetry."[10]

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[7] Charles Tennyson, "The Rise of the Irish Theatre," Contemporary Review, C (August 1911), 232-33.

[8] ibid., p. 233. Another minor critic, Richard Hayes, writing nearly fifty years later in his article "The Road to the Isles," - Commonweal, LXVIII (June 20, 1958), 302, - is also unimpressed by Synge's characters: "His sense of character, or complex human personality, was negligible; his moral sensibility strangely - shall one say, deliberately? - unsophisticated. He left to language the whole task, sought to make it ever copious and rich, 'fully flavoured as a nut or apple' . . . . "

[9] Francis Bickley, J. M. Synge and the Irish Dramatic Movement (London: Constable, 1912), p. 24.

[10] ibid., p. 25.

Howe acclaims Synge as the only name in English drama from Sheridan and Goldsmith to Shaw "that will go up amongest the greatest."[11] Although much of the book is merely expository, Howe reveals considerable insight at times, especially in his study of the characters and the form of the plays. He remarks on Synge's close attention to design and circumstantial detail -- the "intensifying touches that take their rise in character, but find their expression, not in dialogue, but in action,"[12] - and notes the complexity of Synge's work, "its subtle interweaving of evil and good, of beauty and ugliness,"[13] his delight in sharp contrasts and in surprise.[14] He says that "Synge rooted his art in reality,"[15] and adds:

> While Synge has the high simplicity of the elder dramatists, his care for character, and his insight into its subtle places, make him a modern also, in his ability to present those problems of character with which art is more and more concerned.[16]

Howe holds that these characters are individuals in that they do not all talk alike,[17] and finds that "it is their invincible need of illusion that gives to the people of these plays their love of distinction. [Howe's italics]"[18] The young people are seen as always striving, "while the old people, and the people cast in meaner mould, are easily satisfied."[19] Howe argues that all the fine people are lonesome,

> and the antagonism is between their will to be "a wonder," and the "lonesomeness" of life; between the ambition for self-realization and the nullity of circumstance. . . . The

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[11] Howe, p. 19

[12] ibid., p. 135.

[13] ibid., p. 144.

[14] ibid., pp. 146-47.

[15] ibid., p. 137

[16] ibid., p. 143.

[17] ibid., p. 178.

[18] ibid., p. 189.

[19] ibid., p. 190.

> passing of life without fulfilment, the ceaseless fading of beauty, the elusive quality of happiness, the agony of disillusion - these are the tragic undercurrents of the plays. . . .
>
> All of Synge's people have "a share of the desolation that is mixed everywhere with the supreme beauty of the world." . . . It is the lot of all Synge's people to awake . . . from a dream, to the reality, voiced by Deirdre, that "there's no safe place, Naisi, on the ridge of the world."[20]

Another early writer to laud Synge - "the greatest dramatist in English that our stage has known for a century"[21] - was Cornelius Weygandt in his Irish Plays and Playwrights of 1913. He remarks that

> while Synge does not reproduce the average Irishman, [he] is just as natively Irish in his extravagance and irony as the old folk-tale of the "Two Hags."[22]

Like Howe, Weygandt notes the individuality of the characters but adds that all attain universality because they "are so human that they are prototypes of men and women the world over."[23] But he seems to forget Nora Burke, Mary Byrne and Mary Doul in particular in saying:

> It is Deirdre alone of his men and women that is introspective at all, Deirdre - and Naisi when he is mastered by thoughts of home that will not down.[24]

Maurice Bourgeois' John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre of 1913 is the most important book of this period, although it purports to be "a biographical and sociological, rather than a purely literary interpretation of Synge's life-

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[20] ibid., pp. 195-97.

[21] Cornelius Weygandt, Irish Plays and Playwrights (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1966), p. 177.

[22] ibid., p. 15 [23] ibid., p. 195.

[24] ibid., p. 160.

work."[25] In noting that the prose essays are the raw material of the plays, Bourgeois considers that "the odd characters he /Synge/ meets are understudies for his future personages."[26] He finds that Synge is concerned more with the Irish countryfolk "as they represent a survival of the old-time Gael" than with those of contemporary Ireland; hence it is no wonder "that he should have turned to the ancient Gael himself" in his final play.[27]

Synge's "distinctly un-Irish" non-religious view of life is seen as having an artistic cause in "the desire to return to the relentless savagery of ancient paganism":[28]

> In a way the ancient heathendom may be said to survive in the uncontrollable temperament and passionate outbursts of the average Irish peasant of to-day; but this is only a superficial appearance; at bottom he is an ardently religious being, whose whole life is coloured by faith and belief - especially Catholic faith. This aspect of Irish mind is simply ignored by Synge . . . .[29]

On the other hand, Bourgeois does point out typically Irish features in the plays - for instance, the love of nature:

> . . . We know what potent influence nature's moods exercise over the changeful Irish heart, so that their power partly explains the development of the characters in Synge's plays and endows his descriptions of scenery with a peculiar dramatic efficiency.[30]

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[25] Bourgeois, p. vii. [26] ibid., pp. 95-96.

[27] ibid., p. 214. [28] ibid., p. 218.

[29] ibid., p. 219. Bourgeois (p. 90) notes this same failure to portray the Irish peasant's intense Catholic piety in the prose observations: "One would never suspect, on reading these essays, that the Irish country-folk are Christian worshippers whose religious feeling is often carried to an absurd excess of superstition and almost to fetishism. To Synge, the Irish peasant is a latter-day pagan, on whose old-time heathendom the Christian faith has been artificially and superficially grafted."

[30] ibid., p. 222.

The admiration of physical beauty, "which seems as much part and parcel of the Irish peasant's temperament as it was of the Greek consciousness,"[31] is also noted, and Bourgeois asks whether

> this feeling for beauty, this dread of uncomely age, [is] but a survival of the idea which suggested the conception of the Tir-na-nOg, the pre-Christian paradise of unfading youth.[32]

Like Yeats, he regards the way in which the plays bring out "the Gael's native imaginativeness" as a pre-eminently Irish characteristic. This life of the imagination, the "perpetual antagonism of Dream versus Reality"[33] is seen as the theme of all the plays:

> Take, for instance, Nora, the young wife married to an old husband, yet filled with an irresistible aspiration for youth; the ugly beggars in The Well of the Saints, brooding on physical beauty; Christy, persuaded by the villagers' praise into self-confidence. Further, mentally anticipated emotions are more vivid and "real" than actual feelings. Maurya feels more grief in her foreknowledge of Bartley's death than when his body is actually brought in; the two lovers in the Playboy spend their time and passion not in making love, but in describing the delightful way in which they will make love in the future.[34]

Although rejecting the idea that Synge was a "ghastly,

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[31] ibid.

[32] ibid., pp. 222-23. But Bourgeois is not original here. Shortly after The Playboy of the Western World was performed for the first time, and six years before Bourgeois' book was published, George Roberts remarked on this point in "A National Dramatist," Shanachie, II (1907), 60. John W. Cunliffe - Modern English Playwrights: A Short History of the English Drama from 1825 (New York: Harper, 1927), p. 137, - notes that Synge "was not haunted, as so many of the Celts and Latins are, by the fear of death; it was the fear of old age which is the constant terror of his characters."

[33] Bourgeois, p. 220.

[34] ibid., p. 221. Bourgeois, however, is once more making use of an idea first expressed by Roberts, op. cit., p. 59.

macabre creature,"[35] Bourgeois maintains that he has,

> in a certain sense, taken moral freaks and pathological cases as characters in some of his plays . . . . To him, life was not characteristic unless exaggerated, hypertrophied.[36]

He objects to the frequent blessing and cursing of the characters,[37] and, unlike Howe, is of the opinion that they all talk alike, despite geographical differences.[38]

Bourgeois believes the women are superior to their men,[39] but is obviously mistaken in saying that the women always take the initiative in love-making[40] - Martin Doul is the exception.[41]

In pursuing the oft-stated point of the universality of the characters, Bourgeois says that Synge's "literary cosmopolitanism" enabled him to

> express Irish life so completely that his peasant characters are lifted from the narrow boundaries of their petty Robinson-Crusoe-island provinciality into a kind of universal and dateless dreamworld which makes them representative of human nature everywhere.[42]

Unlike Bourgeois, who draws attention to "moral freaks," James A. Roy argues:

> His people have the average selfishness and the average kindness: they get drunk and repent, are brave and cowardly, clever and stupid.[43]

He adds that

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[35] Bourgeois, p. 61 [36] ibid., p. 62.
[37] ibid., p. 228. [38] ibid., p. 227.
[39] ibid., p. 223. [40] ibid.

[41] Colm, in _When the Moon Has Set_, is another exception, but Bourgeois did not have access to this play.

[42] Bourgeois, p. 63.

[43] James A. Roy, "J. M. Synge and the Irish Literary Movement," _Anglia_, XXXVII (1913), 145.

> nearly all have a narrow outlook on life, little book learning, no high aspirations, except the deeper natures among them who are obsessed with the sense of their failures and yearn everlastingly after the unattainable,[44]

and notes that no glamour surrounds these people, who "hold us as if by some mesmeric influence."[45]

In Ireland's Literary Renaissance, first published in 1916, Ernest Boyd poses the question of whether Synge really wrote realistic peasant plays: "In fine, Synge was a realist only in such a sense of the term as would embrace a Cervantes or the creator of Tartarin."[46] Synge's interest in the peasantry "was of a purely spiritual and intellectual order."[47] In The Contemporary Drama of Ireland (1918) Boyd regards Synge as both folk dramatist and symbolist, viewing The Well of the Saints as the only instance where Synge "appears to express the traditional revolt of the Celtic mind against the despotism of fact."[48] But in his earlier work, Boyd says that The Playboy of the Western World "stands in the same relation to the world of the Celtic imagination as Don Quixote did to the Spain of his day,"[49] and that the charm of the play "lies uniquely in its verbal and imaginative qualities."[50] In referring to The Tinker's Wedding in particular, Boyd refutes any charge that Synge is atheistic and anti-clerical; he is

> indulging rather that characteristic penchant for brutal, sardonic humour, for which the irreverences of the vagabond life of the roads supplied rich material.[51]

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[44] ibid.

[45] ibid., p. 144.

[46] Boyd, Renaissance, p. 333.

[47] ibid., p. 334.

[48] Boyd, Contemporary, p. 100.

[49] Boyd, Renaissance, p. 329.

[50] ibid., p. 326.

[51] Boyd, Contemporary, p. 98.

He is another critic to refer to the universality of Synge's characters: in Ireland's Literary Renaissance he talks of Synge's "human prototypes,"[52] and in The Contemporary Drama of Ireland writes:

> Cervantes and Synge both reconstructed imaginatively the moral and psychological elements of a race, so that their figures assume the significance of eternal human types.[53]

Much of the early criticism of Synge took the form of lavish praise, often in respect of the characters. But in his brief chapter on Synge in Old and New Masters of 1919, Robert Lynd suggests that Synge's language, not his characters or plots, is his greatest contribution to literature.[54] He notes Synge's preoccupation with death - his "imagination dwelt much among the tombs,"[55] - and believes that the laughter in the comedies springs not so much from an exuberant joy in life as from "excitement among the incongruities of a world that is due to death."[56] According to Lynd, Synge cannot be regarded as solely tragic or comic: "He is rather a tragic satirist with the soul of a lyric poet" whose "genius was a genius of decoration, not of psychology."[57]

In his survey of Synge criticism, Alan Price points out the harshness of St John Ervine's appraisal,[58] but he forbeurs to mention Ervine's comment on the characters, which, although largely ignoring the psychological side, does pay attention to

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[52]Boyd, Renaissance, p. 335. [53]Boyd, Contemporary, p. 106.

[54]Robert Lynd, Old and New Masters (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1919), p. 96.

[55]ibid., p. 95. [56]ibid.

[57]ibid. [58]Price, pp. 6-7.

their duality. In "Some Impressions of my Elders," Ervine remarks:

> Synge portrayed the Irish people faithfully as he saw them: he put in the element of poetry in the Celtic character, but he also put in the element of cruelty; he put in the wit and generosity, but he also put in the dullness and the greed; he put in the gallantry, but he also put in the cowardice; he put in the nobility, but he also put in the gross brutality.[59]

In a 1924 article, "Synge and Tragedy," Hugh I'A. Fausset notes that Synge does not "seek to suggest through tragedy any final reconciliation between man's aspirations and a callous universe."[60] He also points out that although the people are humble and the situations seemingly trivial, reality of characterization and intensity of language

> universalize what are petty, personal, and often absurdly pretentious claims and conceits, and . . . reveal to us even behind apparent farce what a profound drama may exist in the life of tramps and tinkers, if they are dowered with imagination.[61]

Fausset holds that

> it is their passion for the essential in feeling, their hunger always to be living in intense moments, that enslaves them to a perpetual consciousness of the passing of joy and the coming of sorrow. To such even the moment of realized glory is felt to be so precarious that its ecstasy is crossed with despair.[62]

He concludes:

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[59] St John Ervine, "Some Impressions of my Elders: Bernard Shaw and J. M. Synge," North American Review, CCXI (May 1920), 674-75.

[60] Hugh I'A. Fausset, "Synge and Tragedy," FR, n.s. CXV (February 1, 1924), 269.

[61] ibid.

[62] ibid., p. 271.

> His people stand at some mid-point between nature and intelligence. They have the burning force and transiency of the seasons, and yet they lack the earth's indifference. They are conscious of the indignity of the soul's defeat by the flesh; and yet to physical forces they at last succumb.[63]

In Dramatic Values, C. E. Montague deals mainly with Synge's speech and diction, but in doing so points out an important attribute of the characters. He says that Synge's people, who come to the feast of apt and picturesque diction not by the bookman's route but by that of the child,

> seem to be exploring, make experiments with similes, warm up and go on, rollickingly outdoing their own ventures, in a fever of inventive glee, as if the use of speech were a wonderful continent newly landed upon.[64]

Andrew E. Malone discusses Synge under the chapter "The Folk Dramatists" in his book, The Irish Drama.[65] Much of this section is derivative and that which is not is often inaccurate, his reading of nearly all the plays betraying a lack of familiarity with or a misunderstanding of the text. Malone sees Nora Burke as slamming the door upon her husband,[66] disregards the fact that the Douls build a new illusion at the end,[67] confuses Michael Byrne with his mother and says that the priest is thrown into the ditch,[68] and remarks on the "pitiful"

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[63] ibid., p. 273

[64] C. E. Montague, Dramatic Values (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1925), p.8.

[65] Andrew E. Malone, The Irish Drama (London: Constable, 1929), pp. 147-73.

[66] ibid., p. 149. [67] ibid., p. 151. [68] ibid., p. 153

ending of The Playboy of the Western World in which Christy "is thrown from his pedestal."[69] He regards Synge as a realist, with "nothing romantic in his work save his fantastic plots and exotic language,"[70] reads wide political and sociological significance into The Well of the Saints and The Playboy of the Western World, and, like Yeats, Bourgeois and Boyd, observes that the preference for dream over reality is the theme of both these plays.

Although Daniel Corkery's 1931 study, Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature, is perceptive with some deep insights into Synge's writing, it is, self-admittedly, parochial[71] - by an Irishman for the Irish. It is also chauvinistic and pedantic.

Corkery curiously holds that Synge is not a folk-writer because he does not attain to innocency,[72] and he regards Synge not as a conventional realist but as a "truer realist than such, inasmuch as he looked a little deeper into the life of things":[73] Synge "wrote of the virtues he loved - the grosser virtues - courage, high-heartedness, daring, rather than of the vices he despises . . . ."[74]

Corkery maintains that in Synge's work there is genuine emotion - "the result of admiration and even of pity" - and, like Boyd, draws a parallel with Cervantes:

> Like Cervantes, Synge had such a genuine feeling for reality that it would not allow him to soften the edges, but this presentation of his subject does not carry with it any contempt of his subject. . . . His sympathies were not with the exceptional; they were too overborne by the pressure of his heart for such a charge to be true.

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[69] ibid., p. 152. [70] ibid., pp. 152-53 [71] Corkery, p. vii.
[72] ibid., p. 78. [73] ibid., p. 92. [74] ibid.

> Where are the exceptional among his characters? They are no more exceptional than Molière's.[75]

Synge's apprehension of beauty is seen as "sudden, fierce, ravenous."[76] Like him, his characters, even while pursuing their visionary joys,

> which are seldom or ever much different from what Wordsworth spoke of as "animal movements," cannot for all that ever empty their speech of references to old age, the fading of beauty, the advent of grey hairs, or loneliness, and death. Fundamentally they are untameable souls, dark and melancholy by nature or boisterous and wild. However, at the moment they break upon our sight, they are as perfervidly and as excitedly in reaction from the greyness of the world as Synge himself was . . . .[77]

Corkery says that Maurya is the only character who is "not emptied of native content," or "morally irresponsible" - "she speaks by her soul."[78] Synge's other characters cannot be believed when they speak, in contrast with this "Demeter-like figure" who is the only one "not negative in its nature."[79] Martin Doul of The Well of the Saints, regarded as Synge's most abundant character, "may be taken as the fullest expression of Synge's very simple and very homogeneous philosophy of life":[80]

> And it is because Martin Doul is a more real and vivid personality than the Playboy, who is only a lyric boy, that this play has a more Gaelic feeling in it than The Playboy of the Western World.[81]

In comparing Christy and Pegeen with Martin and Mary, Corkery finds the young couple "inventions, with but little substance in them."[82] He remarks that Synge's feeling for character was simple - he did not seek "the subtleties, the inconsistencies,

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[75] ibid., p. 93. [76] ibid., p. 75 [77] ibid., p. 76
[78] ibid., p. 77 [79] ibid., p. 76 [80] ibid., p. 164
[81] ibid., pp. 164-65 [82] ibid., p. 173

the apparent contradictions that may lodge within the one cranium . . . ."[83] One of the most important passages on the characters should be quoted extensively:

> The rather boyish or even tomboyish types he chose accord with his own outlook on art and life: they suffer from no physical aches or pains, and are untroubled with conscience; only the natural virtues they are aware of. In none of them is any delicacy of mind, any willingness to deny themselves, any sensitiveness to the claims of the spirit as against those of the flesh. . . . "I wouldn't give a thraneen for a lad hadn't a mighty spirit in him and a gamey heart," says Pegeen in The Playboy of the Western World, and in these words she utters the whole law and the prophets as far as her creator is concerned. "But you've a fine bit of talk, stranger, and it's with yourself I'll go," says Nora Burke in The Shadow of the Glen, and if we add the fine bit of talk to the gamey heart, we have the type to which Synge gave all his affections - folk imaginative and adventurous. Nora Burke herself, the tramp in the same play, and indeed also the old man, her husband, there's something of the adventurous spirit in them all. They will not abide where they are. They must after the gamey heart and the poetry talk. In The Well of the Saints we find Martin Doul, his wife, although perhaps to a less degree, and Molly Byrne, to be all of the same kindred. Mary Byrne in The Tinker's Wedding in spite of her years is as game as ever she was: she breaks into ribald song, and would not surprise us if she broke into ribald dances as well. She might have mothered at least three-fourths of Synge's characters. The Playboy /sic/ at his entrance is immature; but perfected, what is he? - master of all fights from this! And his tongue has also learned a trick or two. Pegeen without her own gifts could of course never have brought such a transformation about. She is the child of Michael James, who might have fathered all that old Mary Byrne might have mothered. Deirdre is Pegeen's true sister and Owen, in the same play, true brother of the Playboy /sic/, with a little more of Old Mahon in him than has Christy, his true-begotten son.[84]

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[83] ibid., p. 100. Cf. infra, especially chapters 5, 8, 9 and 10, passim, for inferences to the contrary.

[84] Corkery, pp. 101-102. Corkery is mistaken in believing that even Dan Burke has "something of the adventurous spirit"; much of The Shadow of the Glen is taken up with the incompatibility of Nora and her husband, who is interested in neither "the gamey heart" nor "the poetry talk."

Corkery accuses Synge of remaining cold to the spiritual background of his subjects. His peasants are "emptied of their spiritual content," and, therefore, Synge does not deal with "the profound interests of their lives."[85] Corkery adds:

> It is not quite true to say that Synge's characters have no spiritual background. They are however allowed to have only a child's gaudy idea of the spiritual; which is little better than none. . . .The characters . . . are non-moral; when they refer to other worlds they speak for effect.[86]

They know nothing of "the rapture of self-sacrifice, the quality of mercy, the joy of reconciliation, the relief of forgiveness."[87] Synge's plays are of a classical nature, but they are not classics; the

> elimination of so much of the spiritual left a certain narrowness in them within which the human spirit cannot abidingly find sustenance of ease. If universality be felt as wanting to his creations, therein is the cause. His people, except those in Riders to the Sea, are inclined to be naturalistic rather than human, for it is human to practice [sic] inhibitions for the sake of ideas, to curb appetite by traditions, dreams, faiths well or ill-founded . . . . Synge's characters are incomplete, inasmuch as they lie outside this universal scheme of life. It is in this way they are freakish, and not in the poetry talk they indulge in nor in their want of practicality in human affairs.[88]

Frank O'Connor's lecture on Synge,[89] delivered at the Abbey Festival in Dublin in August 1938, relies much on his consideration of Corkery's views in which he finds certain weaknesses. O'Connor mentions the important point that in

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[85] ibid., p. 105.

[86] ibid. Corkery excludes Maurya again, however.

[87] ibid., p. 233. [88] ibid., p. 239.

[89] O'Connor, in Robinson, pp. 29-52.

making the characters of Deirdre of the Sorrows talk like the islanders of Riders to the Sea, Synge, like Yeats and Lady Gregory, reveals a certain class bias; the three are "virulently anti-middle-class."[90] With this in mind, it is surprising that O'Connor regards the weakness of The Shadow of the Glen as Synge's abandonment of

> his vow of Holy Poverty to send Nora off with the tramp - which is arbitrary and comes not out of life but literature - middle-class literature. Middle-class too is the scenery with which the tramp allures her . . . .[91]

But surely there is no implication of middle-class values in either Nora or the tramp at the end of the play. She is leaving conventional middle-class values behind in the form of Dan and the cottage.

In her chapter on Synge in The Irish Dramatic Movement,[92] Una Ellis-Fermor finds him "the only great poetic dramatist of the movement; the only one, that is, for whom poetry and drama were inseparable . . . ."[93] She sees a paradox in his genius in that he combines dramatic poetry with nature-mysticism, which "is in itself as nearly as possible incompatible with dramatic expression."[94]

Nature is viewed as a protagonist in The Shadow of the Glen and Riders to the Sea, "so filling the minds of the characters as to shape their actions, moods and fates."[95] It is the setting, "genially familiar,"[96] of The Tinker's Wedding and of The Well of the Saints, in which "the native Irish nature-worship breaks through"

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[90] ibid., p. 39. [91] ibid., p. 42.

[92] Ellis-Fermor, pp. 163-86.

[93] ibid., p. 163. For an opposing view, cf. Williams, op. cit., p. 165.

[94] Ellis-Fermor, p. 163. Cf. Williams, op. cit., pp. 157-58.

[95] Ellis-Fermor, p. 164. [96] ibid.

even in the saint.[97] In The Playboy of the Western World, nature is "a continual and surprising source of imagery and incidental reference throughout":[98]

> The "rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality" is revealed as much by the imagery as by the actions of the people.[99]

It is, once again, a poetic protagonist in Deirdre of the Sorrows:

> It is no ornament. It is woven deep. And in the moments of intensest passion it seems more essential than the passion itself.[100]

Una Ellis-Fermor regards The Playboy of the Western World, which is "perhaps essentially Irish in its material and so in its shape,"[101] as Synge's dramatic power at its ripest, and she remarks that

> here character is sometimes no more than the necessary foundation upon which situation can be built and dialogue as much occupied with the service of event and situation as with the revelation of character.[102]

In pointing out the universality of Synge's characters, Una Ellis-Fermor differs from such views as those of Corkery:

> The drama of Synge is severely, almost deliberately limited. In comedy he writes only of one kind of man, the peasant of the east or the west of Ireland. Yet he chooses so unerringly what is fundamental in the manners and motives of his people that his comedies, though local, are universal, though national, international.[103]

She notes "a curious absence of metaphysical or religious implication in the tragedies":

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[97] ibid., p. 167. [98] ibid., p. 164. [99] ibid., p. 171
[100] ibid. [101] ibid., p. 175. [102] ibid., pp. 175-76.
[103] ibid., pp. 184-85

> This puts his two tragedies in a peculiar position, for though their potency is unquestionable they have not what great tragedy almost invariably carries with it, the implication of resolution. They are splendid, isolated fragments of human experience, but the human spirit in them, though itself of a high poetic or imaginative quality, is unrelated to any other spiritual value. Even nature, a sympathetic half-human power, is not a divine power, and the plays leave in the mind a sense of unresolved pain that is hard to parallel except in so totally different a play as Marlowe's _Faustus_.[104]

L. A. G. Strong's slight monograph of 1941, _John Millington Synge_, pays much attention to the background and synopses of the plays, but his judgment is astute at times. He finds intensity the outstanding quality of Synge's work, saying that because Synge's people are able to exhibit their emotions without restraint, "a splendour of passionate and romantic life that has no parallel in the modern theatre"[105] results:

> The characters in his plays, during the short while they are before us, make the supreme gesture of their lives. They are their own epitome. All their past life, everything that has happened to them, leads up to the time we see them, when in a few significant words and actions they reach their consummation. Now we know all about them that there is to know: there is no future action of theirs that will not be an echo of this action, or something we can easily foresee.[106]

But Strong betrays a certain lack of perception, and apparently forgets about the unhappy effect of nature, particularly in _The Shadow of the Glen_ and _Riders to the Sea_, in saying that "nature is the solvent of human difficulties. In this transitory life, she is the only guide."[107]

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[104] ibid., p. 185. But Maurya of _Riders to the Sea_ is a Catholic who finds consolation through her religion; infra, pp. 79-80.

[105] Strong, p. 43. [106] ibid., p. 26. [107] ibid., p. 44.

While the majority of criticism of Synge's characterization was favourable until the 1940s, an opposite view was put forward by Ronald Peacock in 1946. In The Poet in the Theatre he comments:

> His characters certainly have liveliness - especially when compared with the artificially constructed persons of the contemporary problem dramatists. But they are the merest sketches; their vividness is that of suggestive line-drawings. Of his two most developed characters, Christy Mahon and Deirdre, the former subsists entirely on a single comic idea and the latter on a single lyrical aspiration.[108]

In The Thread of Laughter, Louis Kronenberger echoes views on Synge and the middle-class expressed by Frank O'Connor:

> There is something a little savage or brutal about his comedy because there is something a little savage or brutal about so many of his characters. Whether or not they are true peasants, they are never products of the squeamish bourgeois mind, the opportunistic bourgeois morality.[109]

Kronenberger, however, sees little evidence of the poetic in these characters:

> And as Synge will let nothing puritanic mar or soften their peasantlikeness, so in a pinch he will let nothing poetic mar it either. Their jokes, their pranks, their revenges are primitive and even gross, and childlike not in their innocence but in their malevolence.[110]

The past fifteen years has brought a significant increase in important Synge criticism,with several books devoted solely to his writings and others including substantial chapters on them. In The Irish Writers 1880-1940, Herbert Howarth

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[108]Ronald Peacock, The Poet in the Theatre (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946), p. 107.

[109]Louis Kronenberger, The Thread of Laughter: Chapters on English Stage Comedy from Jonson to Maugham (New York, Knopf, 1952), p. 282.

[110]ibid.

considers the relation of Moore, Lady Gregory, Yeats, AE, Synge and Joyce to Irish nationalism, particularly their reaction to Parnell's fall and how they modified and developed his legend in their work. There is little of importance regarding character in Synge, but Howarth does note that he combines reality and joy, "or at any rate reality and exhilaration."[111] He adds:

> There is an obvious sense in which he invests Mayo or the Wicklow glens with a vigour which is the antithesis of the drab reality and a compensation for it. . . .Synge doubled reality into surreality, giving Ireland what she lacked as well as what she showed him. But he did include what she actually showed together with what he imagined for her. His dialogue supplies images of aspirations, couched in what an Egyptian friend of mine used to call "hashish-poetry," and images drawn from harsh fact. It is a direct counter-poising of reality and dream.[112]

The lonesomeness of Synge's characters, noted by Howe in _J. M. Synge: A Critical Study,_[113] is examined by Ellen Douglass Leyburn in "The Theme of Loneliness in the Plays of Synge." She remarks that

> with all the joy and richness in Synge's perception of human life, there is mingled his tender awareness of the pitifulness of our human condition, which he always conceives in terms of loneliness.[114]

This is apparent in the desolateness of the settings, and it causes the sufferings which make the plots:

> Indeed, all of Synge's plots evolve out of the struggle to assuage the immeasurable loneliness of the spirit. The beauty of the action with its terror and pity grows almost

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[111] Herbert Howarth, _The Irish Writers 1880-1940: Literature under Parnell's Star_ (London: Rockliff, 1958), p. 220.

[112] ibid., p. 221.

[113] Howe, pp. 195-97; supra, pp. 8-9.

[114] Ellen Douglass Leyburn, "The Theme of Loneliness in the Plays of Synge," _MD,_ I (September 1958), 84.

> solely from this. Synge's characters are as innocent of an Aristotelian tragic flaw dramatically conceived as they are full of the flecks and flaws of human weakness poetically imagined. What leads them to suffering and to death is neither the hamartia of the Sophoclean hero nor the confusion of Galsworthy's victims of social forces. It is their longing for human companionship, for some other being to enter into theirs and help them break down the isolation into which they were born.[115]

She adds that certain characters move from loneliness to loneliness, and it is these who seem the most tragic:

> The action in the Playboy and Deirdre, which comes from the struggle against loneliness, pushes the characters into a greater loneliness. The deep longing of the human spirit to be united with another spirit goes unappeased.[116]

The authoritative biography, J. M. Synge 1871-1909, by David H. Greene and Edward M. Stephens, was published in 1959. Although literary criticism is largely neglected, as would be expected in a work of this nature, the Irish element in Synge's plays and, by implication, in his characters, is pointed out:

> . . . His work more than that of any of his contemporaries comes closer to achieving the assimilation of the Gaelic past which the Irish Renaissance stood for. Whether he was dramatizing a tragic fact or incident of violence in contemporary Irish life, exploring the applications of ancient folk tale or heroic myth, or merely describing in unpretentious language the daily life of the tinker, the farmer or the fisherman, he was interpreting the traditional life of Ireland. It is to him more than to any other Irishman writing in English that we go for an insight into this life.[117]

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[115] ibid., p. 85. [116] ibid., p. 89

[117] Greene and Stephens, p. 302.

In 1913, Maurice Bourgeois saw the "perpetual antagonism of Dream *versus* Reality"[118] as the theme of Synge's plays; in 1961, Alan Price made this the subject of his study *Synge and Anglo-Irish Drama*, examining the tension between dream and actuality in all of Synge's writings:

> It occurs in various shapes, but they are all aspects of a basic tension between life and death, between an intuitive, imaginative outlook and a materialistic, mercenary outlook, between grace and physical progress, between loveliness and desolation. Mingled with this tension is an ever present and deep awareness both of close links between Man and the natural world and also of the mutability of life and beauty.[119]

Price notes that

> only in *The Playboy* does the power of the imagination make dream and actuality one, and accordingly this play is the richest and most joyous that Synge wrote.[120]

In most of the plays, prose works and poems,

> the dream is invariably overcome by actuality. Hence the tragic undertones, the sombreness and the awareness of mutability pervading Synge's work.[121]

Price regards death as the predominant subject of the poems in which, as in the plays and translations, two main attitudes are evident:

> . . . That the dream of love alone can make life worthwhile, but that once this dream is shattered, death is the only resort, and that for those who have not experienced deep love, nor been awakened to actuality, any sort of life is better than death.[122]

He says that Synge's characters are not only "instinct with life, recognizably human and authentic," but also "big enough to be types or symbols of humanity,"[123] and observes:

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[118] Bourgeois, p. 220; supra, p. 11.

[119] Price, p. 20. [120] ibid., p. 216. [121] ibid.

[122] ibid., p. 109. [123] ibid., p. 64

> All the sympathetic figures in Synge's plays are driven by an impossible dream; each, with a single-minded, intense, almost child-like longing to become "a wonder" is continually reaching out for a finer and fuller life. Imagination is creative in each of them, and it gives them a vision of some good beyond the poverty or drabness or terror which surround them; towards that vision, that dream, they strive.[124]

Price remarks that the reason for the inhumanity of the universe and time defeating dream and spirit is that Synge's figures are all closely linked to the world around them:

> There is little that is ideal or transcendent in their dreams, they have no religious vision of a new Jerusalem nor any political vision of an earthly Utopia; they are truly children of nature and the love and happiness and beauty of which they dream is in terms of this world, and particularly of the natural world, here and now; their paradise is the continuation in unchanging fullness of joys they have experienced partially and momentarily in this life. But nature is not God; she may lead to God and she is a source of loveliness and solace for human beings but she is also harsh and ugly, and Synge's figures in staking all on her are bound to lose in the end.[125]

In her 1962 survey, J. M. Synge and Lady Gregory, Elizabeth Coxhead notes that Synge's

> natural gift for securing the friendship and the confidence of women . . . helped his imagination to create the brilliant galaxy of feminine portraits in his plays.[126]

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[124] ibid., p. 216.

[125] ibid., pp. 216-17. Cf. B[rendan] Ke[nnelly], "John Millington Synge," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th ed.; XXI (1971), 567: "Synge has at once a tragic view of man as time's victim, pathetically powerless when pitted against the forces of a hostile universe; and an ebulliently comic view of man as a being who, because he is forced to realize his own inadequacy, creates a new and vital world in his imagination. In both tragedy and comedy Synge is obsessed by the transfiguring power of imagination: his characters seek refuge in it, are transformed by it, and are immortal because of it."

[126] Coxhead, p. 9. Cf. also "The 'Ascendancy' Writer,"

She says that "many of Synge's figures carry symbolic overtones,"[127] and finds the essence of Synge in his description of the "strange men with receding foreheads"[128] of the Aran Islands: "laughter interpenetrated with desolation, 'man as an angel inhabiting the body of a beast.'"[129] She remarks:

> Synge is often accused of pessimism, and this play /The Well of the Saints/ instanced as an example of it, but except in the sense that all agnostics must feel life and beauty to be ephemeral, I do not think it is an accusation he deserves. His characters are finally doomed, as we all are, but while they live, they relish life. There is nothing in them of our contemporary pessimism, which affects to regard life as boring and futile and death as a release. "There's nothing more the sea can do to me," says Maurya, and Deirdre echoes it with "In the grave we're safe surely," but only after they have put up a tremendous struggle to keep the life that is so rich and sweet.[130]

Synge's characterization is praised by Ronald Gaskell in his 1963 study of the writer's realism, in which he says that Synge "brings back to us the reality of the body."[131] He points out that in naturalistic drama, reality rarely includes more than the mind and the emotions of the figures, and "character is commonly defined by intelligence, profession, habits, interests, tastes; more crudely, as in O'Casey, by tricks of speech."[132]

TLS, July 2, 1971 , 750: "And he had, whatever simple people may have said afterwards under pressure from Dublin enemies retailing stories of scandalous plays performed far away, the gift of friendship and sympathy; with the young, with the very old, and - perhaps this is the most significant thing of all - with the women." On the same page, the writer of this article says: "Synge has really only one primary theme: the ironies, and in particular the verbal ironies, of the relationships of men and women."

[127] Coxhead, p. 14.

[128] Synge, The Aran Islands, CW II, 140.

[129] Coxhead, p. 11. [130] ibid., p. 17.

[131] Ronald Gaskell, "The Realism of J. M. Synge," Critical Quarterly, V (Autumn 1963), 242.

[132] ibid., pp. 242-43.

But, Mr Gaskell maintains,

> in Synge there is almost nothing of this. Since his concern is the whole person (including the body) his conception of character is dynamic: energy counts for more than the marks left by the struggle towards self-determination. Synge, in short, is a dramatist of passion, not of the will; hence his memorable characters are always women - Pegeen, Deirdre, Maurya. Like other naturalistic dramatists, he gives his characters firmness by opposing one to another, but the opposition, as in Pegeen's quarrel with the widow, is of energies rather than traits. Synge is interested in Pegeen as a woman, not just in what makes her different from other women, because he is interested in the total reality of his characters.[133]

Gaskell says that this reality is defined by a "realization through their senses of the world about them" and also of each other.[134]

In 1963 T. R. Henn edited and introduced The Plays and Poems of J. M. Synge. He stresses the quality and range of Synge's irony and pity throughout, regarding his world as "narrow and profound," and "concerned with emotions that are few and simple."[135] Henn, who argues that Yeats owed much to Synge, remarks:

> Both saw the brutality of peasant life, in sex, drink and blasphemy; but Synge's view of sex is tempered by an Edwardian reticence, while Yeats (with Blake in mind) seems to attach to it a steadily mounting significance. Yeats does not handle drink; Synge is constantly aware of the "grey poteen" . . . in his fishermen. Both are concerned with "wildness" . . . as manifesting an energy which has been stifled by convention and religion.[136]

At the end of the general introduction Dr Henn remarks:

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[133] ibid., p. 243.
[134] ibid.
[135] Henn, p. 10.
[136] ibid. p. 309.

> . . . Perhaps Synge is also a preacher, agnostic and a-moral, whose text (as Yeats said) is the living world. It is a world which concerns the tragedy of the common people, and particularly of women; yet its tragedy may be dissolved or accented, momentarily, by laughter, and imagination nourished by its humour. In that world the extremities meet to illumine, however intermittently, the human situation.[137]

Another book devoted entirely to Synge, Donna Gerstenberger's John Millington Synge, appeared in 1964. Professor Gerstenberger notes that there is no restoring of social order, "no righting of the balance which nature and society demand," in the plays,[138] and because of the conflict in most of them they cannot be regarded as folk drama.[139] In remarking that Synge is not seen to best advantage as a nature writer, she appears to disagree with Una Ellis-Fermor:[140]

> . . . Synge never offers, in his major work, nature for its own sake, as an end in itself. Nature is usually invoked for the contrast it provides to human society, for the comment the life of nature makes about the restrictive life of man in society. Synge had a deep feeling for nature and an equally strong awareness of nature's symbolic values to the artist for an expression of a total universe, but to label Synge as a nature writer is to limit him in the same way as those critics who would see him as a local writer or as a folk dramatist.[141]

Throughout this work Professor Gerstenberger emphasizes that

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[137] ibid., pp. 20-21. [138] Gerstenberger, p. 72.

[139] ibid., p. 41. Professor Gerstenberger (p. 44) does say, however, that Riders to the Sea may be viewed as such, "for there is none of the conflict here between the needs of the individual and the restrictive demands of society," but she qualifies this statement earlier (pp. 41-42) by saying: ". . . It is so much more than this that the label becomes as meaningless in context as it is inaccurate in the case of the comedies."

[140] Cf. Ellis-Fermor, p. 163, and passim; supra, pp. 21-22.

[141] Gerstenberger, pp. 135-36.

> Synge's intention was to criticize all that limits man, all that seeks to bind him to rigid codes of conduct and behaviour, and especially that rigidity of thought which makes possible the (often hypocritical because unnatural) modes of narrow conduct which he found everywhere in society. And Synge's scene provided him with the pervasive presence of the Catholic Church just as certainly as it provided him with the shadows of the glen or the wild sea off the coast of Ireland.[142]

Therefore, she points out, Synge's "rebellion against 'tyrannies on human kind'" should not be regarded as coming from an anti-Catholic bias.[143] In a passage which reflects on the characters, she says:

> The _lived_ life is, for Synge, the natural life - the expressive, the vigorous life, in which man's best conclusion is his acceptance of the whole with its risks, instead of the safely hedged part which society seeks to substitute for the whole. /Donna Gerstenberger's italics/[144]

Donna Gerstenberger says that part of the wholeness of Synge's vision is his stressing "a statement of the opposites which make up the sum of man's experience,"[145] and if man does achieve a momentary beauty, "there is always a cost to be paid in human suffering."[146] She adds:

> He insisted upon a realistic assessment of man's life and the struggle which he felt it to be in the face of an alien universe and a vigorously beautiful but nonetheless indifferent nature. As Synge saw it, man's difficulties in such a universe were multiplied by his insistent attempt to impose his own rigid codes of behaviour upon the world. This judgment is the source of the unique fusion in Synge's plays of the primitive world, the world of nature, and a social commentary that drama has ordinarily relegated to an urban, mechanized world. The primitive and the natural

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[142] ibid., pp. 68-69. [143] ibid., p. 67. [144] ibid., p. 41.
[145] ibid., p. 25. [146] ibid.

> provide a meaningful structure for understanding the intensely basic nature of the conflicts and the lies which man has imposed upon himself.[147]

Except for the interpretation of Riders to the Sea, Denis Johnston's John Millington Synge is a light and disappointing work. Certain assumptions are startling and even absurd, for instance:

> Apart from the uncalled for complication, the play /The Tinker's Wedding/ is basically an expression of the mother-in-law joke . . . .[148]

> Deirdre is not Synge's creation. She is an earlier bard's woman - if indeed she is a woman at all and not a transvestite.[149]

In referring to The Shadow of the Glen in particular, he is mistaken in saying that it is not likely that the characters greatly appreciate the scenery;[150] Professor Johnston appears to have forgotten about the tramp whose sensitivity to nature embraces such an appreciation. His view of religion and death in Synge's plays appears to be more considered and he makes the significant point that

> Synge's characters treat both religion and death with an air of brash familiarity that sometimes is mistaken by Protestants for irreverence. But it is actually an expression of the fact that the Catholic faith is accepted with the same familiarity as dinner.[151]

But this is not wholly true: Maurya's regard of either can hardly be called brash.

In J. M. Synge and Modern Comedy, Ann Saddlemyer repeats some of Una Ellis-Fermor's views on the influence of nature in

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[147] ibid., p. 136. [148] Johnston, p. 26. [149] ibid., p. 43.
[150] ibid., p. 12. [151] ibid., p. 8.

Synge's writings [152] and, in referring to the characters, adds:

> Nature attracts - yet repels, heightens yet depresses, strengthens yet enfeebles, enriches yet deprives, releases yet binds. For these strong simple people whose wisdom reaches back into the folk-imagination of the past and yet whose emotions are almost childlike in their spontaneity, nature is the one dependable reality in a world which restlessly hovers between the ecstasy of fulfilment and the tragedy of oblivion. [153]

Professor Saddlemyer observes that conflict takes two forms in the plays: in external nature the struggle is "between the beauty and joy of life and youth and the ugliness and sorrow of old age and death"; [154] the second conflict is in the soul of man and is "between the illusion and the reality, and his constant efforts to reconcile the two." [155] She adds that nature "symbolizes power, wildness, and a dreadful joy" to man;

> the "common week-day kind of" life man has built around him symbolizes ugliness, boredom, decay, and eventually an unhappy death. . . . Humanity, art and nature are inextricably bound in the conflict between the real and the ideal. [156]

The latest book by a single author to be devoted entirely to Synge's work is Robin Skelton's The Writings of J. M. Synge. This, the first major criticism of the complete Syngean canon to be based on the definitive Oxford edition, pays much attention to the examination of early drafts of the plays as well as to other hitherto unpublished material. Professor Skelton remarks [157] that most of Synge's themes were in his mind before the turn of the century - the conflict between reason and emotion, the love of simplicity and of "wonders," and the distrust of

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[152] Cf. Saddlemyer, passim; Ellis-Fermor, passim; supra, pp. 21-22.

[153] Saddlemyer, p. 14. [154] ibid., p. 13. [155] ibid., p. 13.

[156] ibid., pp. 13-14. [157] Skelton, p. 16.

philosophy. He says that by Synge's combining his anti-clericalism "with something approaching nature mysticism," the "conventional Christian attitudes and shibboleths could be derided" while "the spiritual element in man could still be emphasized and praised."[158] Skelton regards Synge as "less concerned with naturalism than almost all his followers," and "intent upon the creation of universal myth from particular experience"; his work is international "for he tackled fundamental crises of the human spirit":[159]

> In all Synge's drama, after When the Moon Has Set where the themes are conscicously presented by the hero, the characters embody or exemplify attitudes and principles of universal significance. They are thus, every one of them, to a greater or lesser extent, ironic creations, for they are unaware of their own cosmic significance as exemplars and embodiments, while struggling desperately to achieve lesser dignities. Deirdre of the Sorrows is the only exception to this rule.[160]

In one of the most original comments on the plays, Skelton describes Riders to the Sea, The Shadow of the Glen and The Tinker's Wedding (regarded as completed in that order)[161] as a trilogy:

> In all three there is the conflict between folk belief and conventional Christian attitudes. In all three we are shown a woman trapped by circumstances, and in each one we are presented with a different aspect of her predicament. . . . In all three cases conventional ideas of the "big world" are challenged, and the play's central figure feels herself the victim of forces she cannot control. . . .
>
> Not only do these three plays have thematic links, they also form a kind of progression. As we proceed from Riders to the Sea, through The Shadow of the Glen to The Tinker's

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[158] Skelton, pp. 22-23. Cf. Boyd (Contemporary, p. 98) who denies that Synge is anti-clerical; supra, p. 13.

[159] Skelton, p. 173. [160] ibid., p. 124.

[161] ibid., pp. 41, 53, 65.

> Wedding, the age of the central female character diminishes and the psychological complexity of the drama increases.[162]

Skelton labels these plays, with The Playboy of the Western World, "shanachie plays,"[163] all of which have "a central female character who is the voice of the play's energy."[164] He finds that in all Synge's completed plays from The Shadow of the Glen,

> he presented a central character animated by a desire for the zestful enjoyment of life's pleasures and anxious at the passing of time and the inevitable approach of death. These characters are afflicted by an inability to avoid taking the long view even while emphasizing the possible delights of the present.[165]

He says that Synge "took up the cause of individual freedom and celebrated the anarchy of the passionate heart wherever he could find it,"[166] and that in The Shadow of the Glen, The Tinker's Wedding and The Well of the Saints "we are made to applaud the reasons of the heart rather than those of the head or the social conventions."[167] Like Donna Gerstenberger, Skelton regards Synge as believing in "individualism," distrusting conventional idealism and relishing those who stand up for their right to their vision:

> In every play he completed, with the possible exception of the first, he shows individuals asserting their "right" to be "blind" to realities that torment them and to protect and defend the vision that sustains their belief in their own human dignity, and in the perfectibility of their world.[168]

On the whole, early critics of Synge concentrated on biographical, sociological and historical factors as well as on the text, with both the universality and the Irishness of his people being stressed, whereas since 1960 critics have turned more

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[162] ibid., p. 56. [163] ibid., p. 56. [164] ibid., p. 57.
[165] ibid., p. 61. [166] ibid., p. 171. [167] ibid., p. 20.
[168] ibid., p. 101.

to textual examination. Certain salient features in the overall approach to Synge's characters are evident: writers have commented on their religious outlook, their relationship to nature and to each other, their loneliness and fear of transiency, their dreams and efforts to combat reality through imagination, their poetry, and their desire for self-expression. Synge's women, rather than his men, share these conditions and attributes.

Chapter 3

THE WAVERING NUN AND THE MADWOMAN: SISTER EILEEN AND MARY COSTELLO

Pigeons are cooing along the eaves
Grey flies are wooing their like on the leaves;

White-hood sisters sit at their prayer
With dronings that beat at my breast with the air;

The dust and the pavement are hot to my skin,
"Rise, little sisters, and let me in,

"You who are fragrant, and cool, and white,
Sisters of Mercy, to love is delight!"[1]

When the Moon Has Set deals with the concept that harm is caused by strict adherence to a religion which imposes restrictions alien to one's nature. A woman's love of a man must supersede her emotionally and sexually frustrating bondage to her church, according to Colm, Synge's mouthpiece in the play.[2] The nun, Sister Eileen, has a choice: to continue a celibate and sterile life or to reject this, accept Colm and fulfil what he considers to be her essential womanhood.

That Sister Eileen uses a different door from the one through which Colm enters in the beginning symbolizes their opposite attitudes to life. He desires her and wants her to adopt his belief; hence, the connotation of his hope that she will not miss her way: "Perhaps if she sees the door open she will turn back."(157)

Colm, who is shown the fine bow Sister Eileen has made, admits that the nun is "clever with her fingers."(159) Appropriately, the bow is for the old man's coffin; Sister Eileen's calling demands asceticism and a denial of sexual gratification,

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[1]"Notre Dame des Champs," CW I, 28.

[2]Cf. Skelton, pp. 18, 21. Being such a medium for the author's beliefs, the play poses some problems in interpretation. Colm's views (and by implication those of Synge) are incompatible with those of the Catholic Church, his understanding of the Religious Life appearing slight. But as criticism is based on the text, the approach here necessarily concentrates largely on Colm's attitude.

of propagation and, consequently, of an involvement in the processes of life as seen by Colm. Her work with the dead is stressed by Bride:

> Wait till your honour sees the way she has the room beyond, with fine flowers in it, and white candles, and grand clothes on the bed, and your poor uncle lying so easy with his eyes shut you'd be thinking it was an old man in his sleep.(159)

To Colm, the nun, a nursing sister occupied with the dying and the dead, leads an emotionally sterile existence. Her prototype, Mary Costello, also "reared with the nuns,"(161) appears to be drawn to the dead as Colm found her in the Glan-na-nee graveyard where his uncle is to be buried. It is significant that he, who embraces life sexually, was lost; there is no room for death or sterility in his approach to life.

In remarking on the beautiful night on her arrival, Sister Eileen reveals her appreciation of nature, and, although she has no intention of relinquishing her vows at this point, her conversation with Colm is symbolic, presaging her later action:

> SISTER EILEEN. I was out for a little while getting flowers for your uncle's room, but I did not find many they were so broken with the rain.
>
> COLM. Then you saw what a change the rain has made among the trees.
>
> SISTER EILEEN. It has ended the spring. I was just thinking what a difference there is since I arrived here three months ago, with the moonlight shining everywhere on the snow.(163)

The period spent in Colm's company has awakened her to the beauty and joy of life; it is summer now, the start of Sister Eileen's own life of fruition. Because these flowers have been broken by the rain, the archetypal symbol of life and fertility, they cannot be put in the place of death. The moonlight shining on the snow of three months past betokens celibacy: both the moon and the snow are symbols of chastity, a condition which Sister Eileen

renounces later.[3]

In the discussion about the dead man's relationship with mad Mary, Sister Eileen says:

> He wanted to marry her although she was beneath him, but when it was all arranged she broke it off because he did not believe in God.(165)

The two young people react differently to this decision. The nun supports it: "She did what was right. No woman who was really a Christian could have done anything else."(165) Colm, who disagrees, tells her: "I wish you had seen her tonight screaming and crying out over the bogs."(165) The nun, of course, prefers not to see Mary Costello raving: "I have seen your uncle for three months and his death today. That is enough."(165) Sister Eileen's calling has taken her away from the forces of life; apparently she is not wholly content but this is where she believes her work to lie. Mary Costello's rejection of an invitation to fulfil an essential part of her needs has led to wretchedness, as Colm is quick to remind the nun:

> It is far from enough if it has not made you realize that in evading her impulses this woman did what was wrong and brought this misery on my uncle and herself.(165)

The madwoman's resolution, which caused not only her own suffering but also her beloved's torment, ruined two lives. But Sister Eileen refuses to agree with Colm that Mary's decision was immoral. Bride tells her:

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[3]Malachy McLaughlin ("The Works of J. M. Synge," unpublished Master's thesis, University of Cape Town, 1970, p. 50) sees the moon as the "Great Goddess" of fertility, according to ancient symbol. But, paradoxically, the moon has been regarded as the symbol of both chastity and fertility, depending on the particular ancient belief and context. Here its white light is emblematic of coldness and celibacy. (Synge does not use the moon in the same symbolic way in later plays.)

> It's lonesome you'll be leaving the lot of us behind you, and you after bringing a kind of a new life into this house was a dark quiet place for a score of years, and will be dark again maybe from this mortal night.(167)

Sister Eileen has the potential to impart happiness and lead a full emotional and sexual life, but by adhering to her vocation she is denying herself all this.

Colm, who needs her to help him satisfy his own inclination to consummate life in the way he deems right, sets Sister Eileen's choice before her:

> We must talk about it till I make you decide with your whole mind whether you will obey the earth, or repeat the story of the mad woman and my uncle.(169)

He regards the nun's clinging to the demands of her religion as weakness, not spiritual strength:

> You shall not go till I have said what I have to say. Then if you are weak enough to give up your share of what is best in life, you may go where you will.(169)

In asking him to let her go Sister Eileen picks up the crepe bow - a rejection of life. She expresses her view: "It is only those who do the will of God who are happy; that is all I know."(169) But this begs the question of what the will of God is. Appropriately at this point a "burst of hysterical laughter is heard outside, and then a sob and a scrap of singing."(169) Mary Costello has arrived. She, who did what she believed to be the will of God, has experienced torture, misery and madness, and asks:

> What right have the like of you to be walking out through the world and looking on us when it isn't any harm we're doing? What right have the nuns I'm saying to be meddling with the world?(171)

She regards Sister Eileen's kind of religious devotion as incompatible with a full knowledge and understanding of life,

which she herself cannot attain. Mary warns the nun not to heed the clergy:

> It's well I know you've no call to mind what the priests say, or the bishops say, or what the angels of God do be saying, for its little the like of them knows of women or the seven sorrows of earth.(171)[4]

The woman is distracted not only at having spent so much of her life without love but also at having her motherhood frustrated:

> I was afeard it was my little children . . . for if I was never married your honour, and have no children I do be thinking it's alive they must be if I never had them itself. . . . There are five children, five children that wanted to live, God help them, if the nuns and the priests with them had let me be . . . .(171-73)

She can neither forget her barrenness nor forgive the nuns and priests for their part in her condition. Her existence centres on these children who never were but who might have been:

> But I wouldn't like them to begin to die on me, for I'm not like all the rest of you . . . and it's queer things I do be seeing the time the moon is full.(173)

Mary's longing is worst at full moon, the time associated with lunacy.

The madwoman, who is given the nun's crucifix on asking for it, is grateful: "May the Almighty God reward you Sister, and give you five nice children before you die."(173) Mary, who is aware of the cause of her state, was unable to free herself from the bonds of conventional Christianity - she would not marry a "non-believer." The crucifix is the token of her continued

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[4] This attitude to the clergy's lack of understanding life is echoed in varying degrees in the representation of figures of formal Christianity in Riders to the Sea, The Well of the Saints, The Tinker's Wedding and The Playboy of the Western World.

enslavement - even though she has lost her own she begs another. She could not marry Colm's uncle because it would have meant the sacrifice of her faith, but by retaining it she has betrayed her drive to life and procreation. She, who does not want Sister Eileen to make the same error, wreck two more lives and prevent the gift of life from being endowed on her children, has only her religion and her dreams of what could have been. The crucifix is her sole concrete companion:

> I'll be going now I'm thinking, for I've a long way and this will be keeping me company in the dark lane through the wood. God save you kindly the two of you. There's great marrying in the world but it's late we were surely, and let yourselves not be the same.(173)

Sister Eileen's surrender of this symbol of her marriage to the Church is her first action towards relinquishing her vows. Her taking the rings heralds her acceptance of the impulse to a fuller life.

Colm's proposal embraces the essence of his belief and that of the play - the only acceptable life is that of vibrancy and vigour:

> Another voice has cried out to you. In a few years you will be as old as she is. There will be divine nights like this night and birds crying in the heather, but nothing will reach you, as nothing reaches my uncle at the other side of the hall. . . .I am not a woman and I cannot judge of all your feelings, yet I know you have a profound impulse for what is peculiar to women. You realize that the forces which lift women up to a share in the pain and passion of the world are more holy than the vows you have made. . . . Before this splendour of the morning you cannot lie. You know that the spirit of life which has transfigured the world is filling you with radiance. Why will you worship the mania of the saints when your own existence is holier than they are. People renounce when they have not power to retain; you have power and courage. . . . I implore you to use them.(175)

Sister Eileen does not decide easily. She, who arrived at the house committed and dedicated to her vocation, has seen the effect that strict cleaving to her religious scruples could have,

and she shows an awareness of the emotional life as understood by Colm. Although her outlook has changed she is uncertain: "I don't know what to do," she tells him. "You are giving me such pain and yet. . . ."(175)[5]

Colm appeals to her through nature and her innate sense of life:

> There is the first note of the birds. . . . When the sun comes over that ridge I will ask you to be my wife. . . . You cannot refuse. The trees might as well refuse to grow fragrant and green when it is May, or the birds to sing before the dawn. . . . There are the larks, and the wrens. . . . You have half an hour. . . . I will not touch you. . . . I will not try to persuade you. It is quite unnecessary. The world will persuade you.(175)

Sister Eileen discards her habit, which suggests celibacy, for a dress of green, which indicates nature, life and fecundity. She renounces one way of offering herself to God for another,[6] and "reaches the window just as the red morning light sweeps into the room."(175) The moon, the emblem of chastity,

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[5]This is contrary to Malachy McLaughlin's assertion (op. cit., p. 49) that Sister Eileen "steps out of her habit and into the green, bejewelled dress that Mary had once bought for herself, with no emotional crisis whatever. No surprise, no conflict, no self-castigation or even self-interrogation, no impassioned persuading and anguished hesitation."

[6]Cf. St Thomas Aquinas, "The Sacrament of Matrimony," The Summa theologica, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Provinces, Vol. XIX (2nd and rev. ed.; London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1922), p. 81: "Human nature has a general inclination to various offices and acts . . . . But since it is variously in various subjects, as individualized in this or that one, it inclines one subject more to one of those offices, and another subject more to another, according to the difference of temperament of various individuals. And it is owing to this difference, as well as to Divine providence which governs all, that one person chooses one office such as husbandry, and another person another. And so it is too that some choose the married life and some the contemplative." He explains later (p. 85): "For if the motive for the marriage

has set; the sun, the symbol of life, and, like the rain, fertility, has risen.[7] By accepting emancipation and the world of Colm, Sister Eileen is being faithful to herself and to life. Colm says: "You cannot tell me why you have changed. That is your glory."(177) But both know why she has decided to give up her vows. They believe that "without love this world would be a loathsome sandhill, and a soul without love is not a great deal better. . . ."(177)[8]

Sister Eileen, who, having left her veil in the room with the dead man, is prepared to fulfil Colm's vision of life, adopted as her own, observes: "I seem to be in a dream that is wider than I am. I hope God will forgive me. I cannot help it."(177) But this is a world of reality. The urge to live with Colm and to enjoy the glory of life is too strong to be thwarted. His reply is apt: "How many people ask to be forgiven for the most divine instant of their lives. Let us be wiser than they are."(177)

Significantly, in wedding her as a worshipper of nature, Colm fails to mention the moon, the symbol of celibacy:

> Here is the ring that was the sorrowful heirloom of my uncle. Give me your hand. I, the male power, have overcome with worship you, the soul of credulous feeling, the reader of the saints. From our harmonized discord new notes will rise. In the end we will assimilate with each other and grow senseless and old. We have incarnated God, and been a part

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act be a virtue, whether of justice that they may render the debt, or of religion, that they may beget children for the worship of God, it is meritorious."

[7] Once more Malachy McLaughlin (op. cit., p. 50) is mistaken in her interpretation, based on the moon as a fertility symbol: "When the moon has set, it will have passed its crescent stage - at which Eileen now stands - and have reached maturity, ready to set, that is to be formally established in the enjoyment of its own perfection - as Eileen will be when married to Colm."

[8] Colm overlooks the fact that there is love in the Religious Life.

> of the world. That is enough... . . In the name of the Summer, and the Sun, and the Whole World, I wed you as my wife.(177)[9]

Greene and Stephens remark:

> Like all his early work the play is full of a deep and haunting sense of death, and no matter how eloquently the hero preaches his doctrine of the joyful life, the atmosphere of death, madness and decay which saturates the action is never dispelled.[10]

This view would seem mistaken as Colm and Sister Eileen both choose life and joy, but in accepting it one must take into account the sentence, "In the end we will assimilate with each other and grow senseless and old."[11] They are turning to a fertile existence now but this will lead to decline, senility and, eventually, death.

At the end Sister Eileen, like Colm, is opposed to her earlier asceticism which led to her "evading her impulses" and denying herself union with the forces of life. She is the first of Synge's women to turn her back on the past, but, unlike many of the others, is dominated by a man and "is little more than cardboard."[12] Although she is devoted to her spiritual existence at first, under Colm's influence she is able to make the decision to be true to nature, free herself from restrictions, and face joy

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[9] This parody of the conventional marriage ceremony has not been blessed by the Church and cannot be accepted by a Roman Catholic. By renouncing her vows, Sister Eileen decides to serve God in another way, but by accepting the marriage as such it seems that the former nun is disregarding her religion entirely; this and not the discarding of her vocation is possibly the reason for her asking God to forgive her.

[10] Greene and Stephens, p. 115. Although the version of _When the Moon Has Set_ referred to in this book is earlier than that in _CW_, the theme and central incident are the same.

[11] Cf. Deirdre of the Sorrows' decision to relinquish joy for this very reason; infra, chapter 9, passim.

[12] Skelton, p. 18.

and the consummation of a secular life. In relinquishing her asceticism she opens the door to the veneration of life and, with regard to Colm's outlook, passes from being one of those "unhealthy women . . . who scorn the rules of life and the beauty that is possible and only possible within them."(172)

Chapter 4

A WOMAN OF PATHOS: MAURYA

> The maternal feeling is so powerful on these islands that it gives a life of torment to the women. Their sons grow up to be banished as soon as they are of age, or to live here in continual danger on the sea; their daughters go away also, or are worn out in their youth with bearing children that grow up to harass them in their own turn a little later.[1]

Riders to the Sea is the play most influenced by Synge's experiences on the Aran Islands; the protagonist, Maurya, can be described accurately as "a type of the women's life upon the islands."[2] She endures the anguish of all such women in her ever-present fear that the sea will claim her men, and constantly clings to the common hope that it will deliver them sound. The sea, the agent of the drama,[3] surrounds them in "immemorial malignity,"[4] and, in their particular situation, they can never escape it. Una Ellis-Fermor regards the sea, or nature, as the protagonist of the play:

> . . . It is not an alien thing responsible only for event, but something to which they have grown so akin that their familiarity with its ways takes all astonishment, all horror from their fate. It is the sea that is the real theme of the play and sometimes the human characters seem there only to reveal by their responses what its nature is . . . .[5]

Such is its mystery, power and fixity, that it is never referred to as anything but "the sea";[6] there is no personification, no

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[1] The Aran Islands, CW II, 108.

[2] ibid., p. 136. In The Aran Islands, however, this description refers to a young mother who has identified a drowned man as her brother. Cf. Boyd, Renaissance, p. 322; Gerstenberger, pp. 50-51. Several critics remark on the universality of Maurya and her lack of individuality and character: cf. Howe, p. 58; Corkery, pp. 106, 141; Denis Donoghue, "Synge: Riders to the Sea. A Study," University Review, I (Summer 1955), 56; Price, p. 191; Coxhead, p. 15.

[3] Cf. Donoghue, op. cit., p. 54. [4] Corkery, p. 136.

[5] Ellis-Fermor, p. 169. Cf. also Corkery, p. 140. But, surely, the sea is the antagonist and Maurya the protagonist. Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 53.

[6] Thirteen times in all. Maurya does mention the "Bay of

adjective, no synonym and no euphemism. Its presence is implied throughout, both in the conversation of the characters and in the objects that surround them in the cottage. Visible here are oil-skins and nets - the concrete images always associated with the sea.[7] The nets are the means to catch fish in order to sustain the islanders but, in suggesting entrapment,[8] they have a macrocosmic implication:[9] just as the men net the fish that live in the sea, so the sea captures the fishers who live off it. Professor Donoghue regards the white boards standing by the wall as "a representation of sea-death."[10] The spinning-wheel connotes the wheel of fate, of the characters' destinies being worked out to an inevitable conclusion.[11]

Cathleen's spinning as well as her kneading is an archetypal action;[12] she, too, is typical of the island women. Henn says that the sisters "seem to have a sacrificial-prophetic function, like Antigone and Ismenê."[13] They, and their mother, remind Donna Gerstenberger[14] of the three fates of mythology, except that the women of Riders to the Sea are unable to exercise any control.

The initial words of the girls draw attention to their

Gregory of the Golden Mouth,"(21) but this is merely a localization. Cf. Corkery, pp. 140-41.

[7] Cf. Thomas F. van Laan, "Form as Agent in Synge's Riders to the Sea," Drama Survey, III (February 1964), 354; Gerstenberger, pp. 45-46.

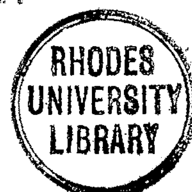
[8] Cf. Errol Durbach, "Synge's Tragic Vision of the Old Mother and the Sea," MD, XIV (February 1972), 366-67.

[9] Donna Gerstenberger (p. 46) contends that "in every aspect of his play, Synge has introduced the microcosm-macrocosm relationship. The cottage kitchen is a small world which contains the puny attempts of man to make a home of the large, alien world of the sea."

[10] Donoghue, op. cit., p. 53. [11] Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 46.

[12] Cf. van Laan, op. cit., p. 354.

[13] Henn, p. 37. [14] Gerstenberger, p. 46.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mother who remains the focus of the play throughout:[15]

NORA. . . . Where is she?

CATHLEEN. She's lying down, God help her, and maybe sleeping, if she's able.(5)

Donoghue notes that the relationship between the Catholic and the pagan is one of the most significant of the dramatic tensions in the play - "the tension between orthodox, institutional religion and the implacable power of the sea."[16] He adds that in Cathleen's saying "She's lying down, God help her" and in Nora's subsequent mention of the young priest, Synge is "fixing the spiritual orthodoxy of his characters, establishing the religious Catholic associations of the people."[17]

The priest has given Nora "a shirt and a plain stocking were got off a drowned man in Donegal," (5) and she, the messenger and helper, conveys his instructions to Cathleen who appears to be in charge of domestic chores:

> "If it's Michael's they are," says he, "you can tell herself he's got a clean burial by the grace of God, and if they're not his, let no one say a word about them, for she'll be getting her death," says he, "with crying and lamenting."(5)

It appears that Maurya will suffer whether Michael's fate is known or not. A second son, Bartley, is mentioned and when Cathleen asks her sister whether the priest will stop him going to the horse fair, Nora's answer is significant:

> "I won't stop him," says he, "but let you not be afraid. Herself does be saying prayers half through the night, and the Almighty God won't leave her destitute," says he, "with no son living."(5)

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[15] Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 51; Van Laan, op.cit., p. 355; Cleanth Brooks and Robert B. Heilman, Understanding Drama: Twelve Plays (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), Appendix, p. 26.

[16] Donoghue, op. cit., p. 52. [17] ibid.

Maurya, of course, is left destitute.[18] The priest's youth is seen to imply both a lack of experience and a naïve faith in the protective power of God.[19]

As she is the elder sister and, probably, has had more experience in coping with similar situations, it is appropriate that Cathleen advises against opening the bundle - "Maybe she'd wake up on us, and come in before we'd done,"(7) - and decides to hide it from Maurya until they have identified the clothing. They are successful in their victory over Maurya's lack of awareness just as, it is seen later, Bartley is over her will and the sea is over her way of life.[20]

Maurya's first words betray her concern with niggling details and her peevishness, brought on by worry: "Isn't it turf enough you have for this day and evening?"(7) she asks Cathleen, who is quick to find an adequate answer:

> There's a cake baking at the fire for a short space . . . , and Bartley will want it when the tide turns if he goes to Connemara.(7)

Maurya is distressed:

> He won't go this day with the wind rising from the south and west. He won't go this day, for the young priest will stop him surely.(7)

The old mother, who evidently finds a kind of consolation in repeating "He won't go,"[21] is trying to convince herself that Bartley will stay and that she will not have to worry about him. Maurya calls on the priest for comfort but it has been seen that she cannot put trust in him to provide aid and consolation.

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[18] Cf. Johnston, p. 23.

[19] Cf. Skelton, p. 50; Paul M. Levitt, A Structural Approach to the Analysis of Drama (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 87.

[20] Cf. van Laan, op.cit., pp. 356-57; William W. Combs, "J. M. Synge's Riders to the Sea: A Reading and Some Generalizations," Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters, L(1965), 600-603

[21] Cf. Levitt, op. cit., p. 89.

Nora tells her mother that Bartley will arrive soon because "the tide's turning at the green head."(7) The turning tide is mentioned four times, and, although this feature is a common, practical consideration in setting out to sea and indicates that the motion of the sea governs the islanders' actions, it also suggests that Bartley is impelled to leave now; it is as if the sea claims a life at every turn, at every ebb and flow, and, it is learnt, now it is Bartley's turn to be its victim.[22]

Bartley, described as "speaking sadly and quietly"(9) on his entry, appears sorrowful not only because of the uncertainty of Michael's fate and the burden of acting as the only man left in the family, but also because of the compulsion of his life on the sea. As soon as he is given "the bit of a new rope," (9) Maurya tries to hinder his going:

> You'd do right to leave that rope, Bartley, hanging by the boards. . . . It will be wanting in this place, I'm telling you, if Michael is washed up tomorrow morning, or the next morning, or any morning in the week, for it's a deep grave we'll make him by the grace of God.(9)

But Maurya's prime concern is not the burying of Michael's corpse, it is the saving of Bartley's body.[23] She cannot reveal this yet, however, and must find other excuses to stop him leaving. Price remarks:

> Maurya, in fact, is severely handicapped in this crucial struggle. If she describes the dangers of the journey fully, she will distress the girls further, perhaps unnecessarily, and she may provoke Bartley into going in order to show that she is wrong and that he is not a coward, particularly as other men are attempting the trip, and the priest has not forbidden it.[24]

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[22] Una Ellis-Fermor (p. 169) says: "The phrase 'when the tide turns' runs through the first five minutes of the dialogue like a prophecy."

[23] Cf. Price, p. 183

[24] ibid., pp. 182-83.

But Bartley, who needs the rope as a halter, says he must go because "the fair will be a good fair for horses I heard them saying below."(9) In throwing back his words Maurya twists them as she does throughout their exchange:[25]

> It's a hard thing they'll be saying below if the body is washed up and there's no man in it to make the coffin, and I after giving a big price for the finest white boards you'd find in Connemara.(9)

This reveals the necessity of having a man in the family - he is the only one who can fulfil certain requirements; it also shows the importance Maurya attaches to a good burial. Ironically, it is when Bartley is drowned, that there is no man in the household to make a coffin. Maurya's response to Bartley's mention of the unlikelihood of the body being washed up is based both on the perception of nature and, more probably, on superstition:

> If it isn't found itself, that wind is raising the sea, and there was a star up against the moon, and it rising in the night.(9)

She uses sound argument in her fight to prevent Bartley from going and tries to make him see their situation in perspective: the need of a son against the desire for material possessions, the importance of life weighed against the insignificance of commercial gain:[26]

> If it was a hundred horses, or a thousand horses you had itself, what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where there is one son only?(9)

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[25]Price (p. 183), remarks: "This gives a kind of versicle and response quality to the speech which is peculiarly elevated and potent, making an incantation or ritual for approaching death, and seeming symbolical of thousands of similar scenes."

[26]Cf. Price, p. 183

Bartley cannot accept this interpretation of priorities, but he also cannot refute his mother's question. He has no answer and, apart from his final blessing, ignores her, addressing his instructions, such as selling the pig, to his sisters. But Maurya continues the conflict: "How would the like of her get a good price for a pig?"(9) This, like the making of a coffin, is a man's job and is all the more reason why Bartley should stay.[27] When he says, "It's hard set we'll be from this day with no one in it but one man to work,"(9) Maurya again echoes and plays upon his words, but she abandons her battle of obliquity and, continuing to appeal through the family tie, challenges him directly:[28]

> It's hard set we'll be surely the day you're drown'd with the rest. What way will I live and the girls with me, and I an old woman looking for the grave?(11)

She calls on his sympathy this time and refers to her condition, but to no avail and she knows that she has lost this struggle. Thomas F. van Laan comments:

> Her defeat in this epitome of the main battle with the antagonist is total. Thus, through this aspect of his form, pre-enactment, Synge succeeds in showing how pertinent to the play's meaning is her ultimate defeat. The epitome also brings into sharper focus her weakness in the face of opposition, and since Bartley represents an opponent who is familiar and visible rather than awesome and mysterious, what is weakness and ineffectualness in the epitome must be abject helplessness in the action as a whole. Finally Bartley's aloofness, his complete disregard for Maurya's feelings, and his apparent indifference to her existence help Synge present in the concrete terms of the theatre some of the characteristic attributes of her invisible antagonist.[29]

The clash is between two views of life. Maurya, who is prudent, and even selfish in trying to prevent her son from bringing her more grief, mainly wants to save him from harm:

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[27] Cf. Levitt, op. cit., pp. 91-92. [28] Cf. Price, p. 184.

[29] Van Laan, op. cit., p. 357. Cf. also Gerstenberger, pp. 53-54.

she is the mother who places life above livelihood. Bartley is rash but must risk the journey for the sake of his manhood as well as of his family: he is the son who believes that he must pursue his means of earning a living in order to sustain his mother and sisters.[30] In repeating, "I must go now quickly,"(9,11) Bartley reveals both that he has to leave to catch the hooker and also that he is bound to sail; even though this journey is not primarily that of a fisherman, the sea still plays a part in providing for the family as Bartley must cross it to get to the fair. He is driven by necessity. If he remains, the family loses its only adequate source of income but they also do if he is drowned, and if the horses are lost with him.[31] The two attitudes are embraced in the speeches of Maurya and Cathleen. Maurya is the cautious old woman who condemns the young man's lack of consideration and who tries to act against an antagonistic sea: "Isn't it a hard and cruel man won't hear a word from an old woman, and she holding him from the sea?"(11) Cathleen is the idealistic girl who betrays impatience with the old woman and who appreciates the practical side of Bartley's action:

> It's the life of a young man to be going on the sea, and who would listen to an old woman with one thing and she saying it over?(11)[32]

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[30]Cf. Donoghue, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

[31]Levitt, (op. cit., pp. 115-16) points out the "cruel and pervasive irony" in the elemental reversal of"the rider who goes to the sea in order to live, only to die." Cf. also T. R. Henn, The Harvest of Tragedy (London: Methuen, 1956), p. 202.

[32]Price (p. 184) says: "Cathleen's words embody the outlook of those islanders who still have the hope that life may be bearable, even enjoyable; she is youth, courageously and confidently facing a life which the old woman, who has greater knowledge and experience, and who is shattered in spirit now wishes to reject."

It is noteworthy that both use the third person here. Although this is Anglo-Irish usage and part of Synge's style, it also underlines the universality of the situation, the notion that this family stands for all families in a similar predicament.

This conflict between mother and son, this clash between outlooks, is denied by Sherman who maintains that Maurya makes no effort to struggle against her situation; he says that she merely sits "patiently, passively, receiving the tidings of disaster," and that there is "no act of the will turning against destiny . . . ."[33] Gassner, too, is mistaken in finding Riders to the Sea "static drama":

> Women receiving the clothes of one drowned man and the corpse of another, and a mother keening over her drowned son - that is all the action there is in Riders to the Sea. . . . Nothing by way of plot and conflict occurs.[34]

Maurya relinquishes hope when Bartley goes out, and she prophesies:

> He's gone now, God spare us, and we'll not see him again. He's gone now, and when the black night is falling, I'll have no son left me in the world. (11)

This contrasts with the repeated "He won't go"(7) earlier, and stresses her present despair; it also looks forward to her resigned remark, "They're all gone now,"(23) when her foreboding is realized. The image "when the black night is falling" is significant as it suggests the dismal existence that will descend upon Maurya when she is bereft of her lost son. The tension between religion and superstition is revealed in Cathleen's

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[33] Stuart P. Sherman, On Contemporary Literature (London: Grant Richards, 1923), pp. 209-210. Cf. also Frank Wadleigh Chandler, Aspects of Modern Drama (New York: Macmillan, 1914), p. 263: "In Riders to the Sea, there is no struggle between human wills."

[34] John Gassner, The Theatre in our Times: A Survey of the Men, Materials and Movements in the Modern Theatre (New York: Crown Publishers, 1960), p. 219. Cf. also Levitt, op. cit., p. 108. Donna Gerstenberger (p. 52) refutes Gassner's statement.

scolding of her mother for not returning the blessing in the name of God, and for sending Bartley out "with an unlucky word behind him." (11) In raking the fire aimlessly Maurya acts almost like an automaton, which is in keeping with her present helplessness. This behaviour is the result of her total defeat by Bartley and, through implication, by the sea. Now the mother is a hindrance to normal household process and takes the turf away from the cake. Cathleen and Nora's vehement reaction on realizing that they have forgotten Bartley's "bit of bread," serves as a relief of their own anxiety, their own tension,[35] even though they believe he is correct in going. Nora cries that Bartley will be "destroyed" because of going hungry, and Cathleen echoes her. Donoghue remarks that

> from here on, the simple idea of hunger takes on the deeper overtones of real destruction, gathering these implications until the word is used at last by Cathleen in this sense alone.[36]

The dichotomy between religion and superstition is apparent once more when Cathleen contrives to get her mother out of the cottage by sending her off with the bread:

> Let you go down now to the spring well and give him this and he passing. You'll see him then and the dark word will be broken, and you can say "God speed you," the way he'll be easy in his mind."(13)

Maurya stands unsteadily and walks slowly; this is both physical weakness and reaction to her lost battle. As she goes, supported by Michael's stick, Maurya comments on her, and her fellow islanders', situation:

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[35] Cf. Price, p. 185

[36] Donoghue, op. cit., p. 56. Cathleen's final use of this word is when Maurya relates her vision; the girl keens: "It's destroyed we are from this day. It's destroyed surely."(19)

> In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old. (13)

Her misery is not because she has outlived her time; it is because she has outlived her sons.[37]

The difference between the two girls is revealed again when Nora goes to the ladder as soon as her mother leaves. Cathleen, who has insight acquired through extra experience, is cautious and stops her:

> Wait, Nora, maybe she'd turn back quickly. She's that sorry, God help her, you wouldn't know the thing she'd do.(13)

They proceed to examine the clothing which they find difficult to identify. It is learnt that Bartley is wearing Michael's other shirt; his own is saturated with salt, suggesting the great hold the sea has on him. The girls find "a bit of a sleeve was of the same stuff,"(15) but Cathleen remarks:

> It's the same stuff, Norah; but if it is itself aren't there great rolls of it in the shops of Galway, and isn't it many another man may have a shirt of it as well as Michael himself?(15)

The inference here is that Michael has shared the fate of many other men - once again, a member of this family is seen to be a prototypal figure.[38] As at the beginning of the play, concern is for Maurya's feelings. When Nora is sure of the identity of the clothing, she cries:

> It's Michael, Cathleen, it's Michael; God spare his soul, and what will herself say when she hears this story, and Bartley on the sea?(15)

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[37] Johnston (p. 18) points out that "it is not Bartley's death over which we must grieve, nor even the death of Man. Everybody must die sooner or later - a fact which, as a rule, is a matter for congratulation rather than the reverse. 'Sooner or later' is the operative word [sic] of the statement here, and the pity of the play is that in this community the young tend to go before the old."

[38] Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 49.

The elder girl replies:

> Ah, Nora, isn't it a bitter thing to think of him floating that way to the far north, and no one to keen him but the black hags that do be flying on the sea?(17)

Although "black hags" can refer to birds, they also call to mind witches, and this reveals Cathleen's superstition.[39] Nora adds wretchedly:

> And isn't it a pitiful thing when there is nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher, but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking?(17)

The sea is thorough in its claims and man is no match for it. The sisters decide to keep their knowledge from Maurya in order to give her temporary respite from grief, if possible. Cathleen's skill in evasion comes to the fore when she tells Nora to keep her back to the door to prevent Maurya from seeing that she has been crying.[40] The old woman enters and is too grief-stricken to explain the reason for her condition to her daughters at first. She prolongs the tension by recalling a dreadful incident:

> I've seen the fearfullest thing any person has seen since the day Bride Dara seen the dead man with the child in his arms.(19)

This depiction appears to reveal the hold of superstition on the family, as does the girls' horrified reaction: "Uah."(19) After this, Maurya describes her vision which occurred while saying a, presumably Catholic, prayer, and during the account she ejaculates: "The Son of God spare us, Nora!"(19) Cathleen refutes her mother's allegation of having seen Michael, but Maurya persists:

> I'm after seeing him this day, and he riding and galloping. Bartley come first on the red mare; and I tried to say "God speed you," but something choked the words in my throat. He went by quickly; and "the blessing of God on you," says he, and I could say nothing. I looked up then, and I crying, at the grey pony, and there was Michael upon it - with fine clothes on him, and new shoes on his feet.(19)

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[39] Cf. Skelton, p. 46 [40] Cf. Price, p. 176.

This, the central speech of the play, comprises the image which underlines the title: all men are riders to the sea, to death. Maurya's Catholicism is evident in her attempt to bless; superstition is apparent in her failure to do so, in the "something" choking the words in her throat. But this is possibly a premonition - subconsciously she knows that it is too late to bless Bartley, for his fate has been ordained.

Skelton says that Maurya "is so astonished by the spectre of Michael that she cannot give Bartley her protective blessing,"[41] but adds later that

> it is, indeed, Maurya's lamenting Bartley's going down to the ship that prevents her from giving her blessing and thus causes his death.[42]

But whether Maurya blesses Bartley or not makes no difference at all.[43]

Biblical allusions in the description of Michael and the grey pony seem quite probable. He symbolizes the Death on a pale horse of Revelation.[44] His "fine clothes" and "new shoes" can also be seen as a reference to a passage later in this book: "And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean."[45] He is one of

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[41]Skelton, p. 47.

[42]ibid., p. 49. Cf. also Seán O Súilleabháin, "Synge's Use of Irish Folklore," in Harmon, p. 30; Combs, op. cit., pp. 601-602, 605.

[43]Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 47: "Bartley's death is for Maurya at this moment an accomplished fact, and she withholds from him the loaf which she has taken to the spring well to give him."

[44]Revelation 6:8. All references are to and quotations from the Authorized Version of the Bible. Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 47; Skelton, p. 48; Henn, p. 39; Levitt, op. cit., pp. 98-99.

[45]Revelation 19:14. Cf. also Revelation 19:8: "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." Although

the dead, and Maurya's revelation is that she sees him as such; she comes to realize the inevitability and universality of man's lot, exemplified by her two sons - one alive, but soon to be dead, the other dead, but "alive" on another plane. Maurya sees, in short, "a vision of death and the promise of life to come."[46] Although this vision might be based in Christianity, heed should be taken of Henn's note[47] that the resurrection image is common to many religions.

The next exchange throws more light on the religious character of Maurya:

> NORA. Didn't the young priest say the Almighty God won't leave her destitute with no son living?
>
> MAURYA [in a low voice, but clearly]. It's little the like of him knows of the sea.

Here, Maurya is disparaging the priest rather than Catholicism; she realizes that it has been futile to pin her hopes on him,

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these allusions are interesting and add to the religious atmosphere, care must be taken that they are not pushed too far. Revelation 19:8 refers to the Bride of Christ (the Glorified Church), and Revelation 19:14 to the saints. Maurya thinks of her sons as souls in purgatory needing the prayers of the Church rather than as saints in heaven offering the prayers of the Church. Remembering this caution, cf. Revelation 19:11: "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war." With this and the other passages in mind, one is tempted to ask: "Does this make the 'resurrected' Michael a Christ figure?" But it must be admitted that the implication, which would entail making Maurya a Mary and her daughters the women of Bethany and Magdala, would be strained, and no such symbols could be adduced in Bartley and the young priest. Even with the more judicious allusions, similar references cannot be found in Bartley on a red mare. Levitt (op. cit., p. 84) mentions other Biblical allusions as well, but they are inordinately tasked.

[46] Levitt, op. cit., p.99.

[47] Henn, The Harvest of Tragedy, p. 203

because he cannot comprehend the awesome power of the sea which appears omnipotent and the source of law, the controlling influence in her life.[48] The young priest, who is inexperienced and ineffective, notably never crosses the threshold of the cottage to exercise his office.[49]

Up to this point, the impression has been that Maurya has lost two sons. It is only now that it is learnt that they are the seventh and eighth of her menfolk to die in the sea.[50] She lists her losses:

> I've had a husband, and a husband's father, and six sons in this house - six fine men, though it was a hard birth I had with every one of them and they coming to the world - and some of them were found and some of them were not found, but they're gone now the lot of them. . . . There were Stephen, and Shawn, were lost in the great wind, and found after in the Bay of Gregory of the Golden Mouth, and carried up the two of them on one plank, and in by that door.
>
> . . . .
>
> . . . There was Sheamus and his father, and his own father again, were lost in a dark night, and not a stick or sign was seen of them when the sun went up. There was Patch after was drowned out of a curagh[51] that turned over.(21)

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[48]Cf. Johnston, p. 20; Donoghue, op. cit., pp. 52-53.

[49]Levitt (op. cit., p. 88) states that Synge stresses the ineffectualness of religion in contest with nature: "Ironically, the priest speaks of knowing God's will, but as it will turn out, he knows little about the sea and those who live by it. Throughout the play, Synge seems to be saying that to these islanders religion is effectively served when it refrains from pretending to cure and, instead, enlists its power to relieve. Religion cannot dispel the persistent sea, but it can provide an anodyne to the victims of it." Cf. also Levitt, pp. 99-100.

[50]When Maurya says, "It's hard set we'll be surely the day you're drowned with the rest,"(11) she does not indicate who "the rest" are.

[51]This spelling is used throughout _CW_. Henn (p. 326) notes that the word can be spelt as either "curragh" or "curagh."

Michael and Bartley are following the others. Although nobody has confirmed their deaths to Maurya, she has no doubt that they are lost.

Maurya's "fall," her reversal in fortune, is more striking when all the implications are considered. In The Aran Islands, Synge mentions a dispute among the island men about their wives. He concludes that "it appeared that the greatest merit they see in a woman is that she should be fruitful and bring them many children."[52] Maurya fulfilled this function, particularly by bearing sons, because daughters cannot be effective breadwinners - hence, the relative unimportance of the two unmarried girls. She had eight men, six sons, to look after her, and seemed safe from a destitute old age. But she has always suffered - even the births were "hard." Now her efforts have been reduced to nothing. The sea, mother nature, the force of life, has claimed the fruits of her motherhood and reduced her, as it were, to barrenness.

Maurya's fate is similar to that of Euripides' Hecuba[53] and Lorca's Mother.[54] These three women all suffer an accumulative loss - "affliction on affliction."[55] They are impotent against the power which destroys the sons whom they

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[52] CW II, 144. This and the passage quoted earlier (supra, p. 50; CW II, 108) are two of the examples which, as Corkery (p. 137) says, "tell us why the principal figure in the play is rather a mother crying out over her drowned children than a wife crying out over her drowned husband."

[53] Cf. Euripides, Hecuba and The Trojan Dames in The Tragedies of Euripides, trans. R. Potter, Vol. II (London: J. Mawman and others, 1814).

[54] Cf. Federico García Lorca, Blood Wedding in Three Tragedies, trans. James Graham-Luján and Richard L. O'Connell (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books in association with Secker and Warburg, 1961).

[55] Hecuba, in Euripides' Hecuba, l. 204. (Potter translation, p. 178.)

created and who, in turn, helped them live. The male line dies, leaving them desolate.[56]

The wretched Maurya describes the scene when the body of Patch was brought home:

> I was sitting here with Bartley, and he a baby, lying on my two knees, and I seen two women, and three women, and four women coming in, and they crossing themselves, and not saying a word. I looked out then, and there were men coming after them, and they holding a thing in the half of a red sail, and water dripping out of it - it was a dry day, Nora - and leaving a track to the door.(21)

Although this is a personal reminiscence it has a wider implication, as connoted by the parenthetic "it was a dry day, Nora," which in itself suggests the dryness of barrenness: the old woman breaks off from her narration to make a remark to her youngest child who is being initiated into the grief experienced so often by her mother and, evidently, by all older island women.[57] The image of dripping water accompanying the body, carried on something always associated with the sea, suggests resolute pursuit, as if the sea is striving to keep its victim.[58]

As Maurya finishes relating this incident, it is visualized as the old women enter, followed by men carrying another body - Bartley's. Such is the cyclical repetition of death-birth-death and now only death-death-death that the long dead and the recent dead are blurred in Maurya's recollection of suffering.[59] When Patch was brought in, Bartley, the baby, was on her knee - a life to replace a death; now when Bartley, the corpse, is brought in Maurya has no replacement. Because of the stupor caused by blow upon blow,[60] she loses sense of

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[56] Cf. Gerstenberger, pp. 51-52.

[57] Cf. Price, p. 188.

[58] Cf. van Laan, op. cit., p. 359.

[59] Cf. Levitt, op. cit., p. 85; Price, p. 187.

[60] Cf. Storm Jameson, Modern Drama in Europe (London: Collins, 1920), p. 215.

time - all the deaths are the same: "Is it Patch, or Michael, or what is it at all?"(21) In the same vein, Maurya realistically points out the sameness of the drowned men's fate:

> There does be a power of young men floating round in the sea, and what way would they know if it was Michael they had, or another man like him, for when a man is nine days in the sea, and the wind blowing, it's hard set his own mother would be to say what man was in it.(23)

Maurya regards the sea as littered with dead men, not only hers but also those of all mothers.

Nora, the initiate, describes the bearing of the latest body in the same way as her mother has;[61] repetition underlines universality: "They're carrying a thing among them and there's water dripping out of it and leaving a track by the big stones."(23) Apparently this is her first such experience, just as it is Maurya's last. Nora and her sister share the generic condition of the island women. The daughters ensure the perpetuation of the cycle[62] - it is part of "the eternal nature of things."[63] The women are "psychologically speaking, the victims of the situation."[64] They who are economically dependent, are aware of the physical danger that the men must face, but cannot prevent their actions or delay their deaths. Nora and Cathleen face "a life of torment" and, it is presumed, will also bear children "to harass them in their own turn a

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[61] Cf. Corkery, p. 143; Henn, The Harvest of Tragedy, p. 262; Donoghue, op. cit., p. 56; Levitt, op. cit., p. 103.

[62] Cf. Price, p. 188; Durbach, op. cit., p. 368.

[63] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietsche, The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music, trans. Clifton P. Fadiman, p. 209; in Nietsche, The Philosophy (New York: The Modern Library, n.d.).

[64] Malcolm Pittock, "Riders to the Sea," English Studies, XLIX (October 1968), 446.

little later."[65]

At first, Cathleen does not realize whose body it is: "It's Michael, God spare him, for they're after sending us a bit of his clothes from the far north."(23) She gives her mother the clothes, and Maurya gets concrete proof at the same time of the death of her last two sons. A woman describes Bartley's death: "The grey pony knocked him over into the sea, and he was washed out where there is a great surf on the white rocks."(23) Bartley's death has been precipitated by the grey pony, but it is the sea, nevertheless, that has claimed him and that has acted as executioner.[66] The sea has not waited for its victim this time but, in hungering for him, has reached out to devour him. Van Laan observes:

> Maurya's vision even suggests that Michael in some way has helped the sea accomplish its act of destruction: the antagonist enlists its victims as agents in the crushing of new victims. The weirdness of Bartley's death demonstrates quite emphatically that the antagonist is not merely impassive and aloof, destroying that which disturbs its domain. In taking Bartley, it shows itself to be an active pursuer.[67]

This is in keeping with the notion of the sea following the bodies to the cottage.

Maurya is described as kneeling at the head of the table on which are the corpse and the clothes; this is the man's position but there is no man in the household to assume it. She begins her great lament and is described as evidently

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[65] The Aran Islands, CW II, 108; supra., p. 50.

[66] Cf. Johnston, p. 22. Skelton (p. 48) observes that Poseidon, god of the sea, created the horse; therefore horse-farmers must be regarded as his servants. But this does not follow: Poseidon was a Greek god; allusions to classical mythology are illogical in considering Riders to the Sea.

[67] Van Laan, op. cit., p. 359.

not seeing those around her at first, as if others are not important. She is concerned with herself:

> They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me. . . . I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other.(23-25)

The omnipresence of the sea and its power are evident in the description of its surrounding Maurya - the surf in the east and in the west - and in the violent sound it makes. But Maurya does not dread it any longer and is relieved. The sea is powerless against her because she has no more men to sacrifice and need worry no more. Maurya experiences a kind of pleasure in being beyond the reach of the sea, a condition caused by the death of her loved ones:[68]

> I'll have no call now to be going down and getting Holy Water in the dark nights after Samhain, and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening.(25)

The Holy Water that Maurya sprinkles over Bartley's body and Michael's clothes has ambiguous implications: it is connected with both Catholicism and paganism. She gets it after Samhain, which is November Eve; this is not only All Saints' Eve but

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[68] Cf. Bourgeois, p. 167; Corkery, p. 141; Ellis-Fermor, p. 169; Price, p. 189; Donoghue, op. cit., p. 57; Levitt, op. cit., p. 107. Arthur Ganz - "J. M. Synge and the Drama of Art," MD, X(May 1967), 66-67 - says: "This startling sigh of relief at being released from involvement with the pain of existence which we find here in one of Synge's earliest works is a remarkable anticipation of the sense of ease with which in his last play Deirdre suicidally decides to return to Ireland 'where there'll be a rest for ever, or a place for forgetting.'" Cf. CW IV, 233.

also the time that the "black hags that do be flying on the sea," demons and ghosts abound.[69] Holy Water is employed in Catholic ceremony, but it is also "so often used as a magical element in Irish folk practice."[70]

Maurya admits to praying to "the Almighty God," but now she finds that her prayers for the living have been futile:[71]

> It isn't that I haven't prayed for you, Bartley, to the Almighty God. It isn't that I haven't said prayers in the dark night till you wouldn't know what I'd be saying; but it's a great rest I'll have now, and it's time surely. It's a great rest I'll have now, and great sleeping in the long nights after Samhain, if it's only a bit of wet flour we do have to eat, and maybe a fish that would be stinking.(25)

Although, when she describes her revelation, Maurya says that she "won't live after them,"(21) she does expect to survive her sons for some time, as is evident in her picture of a dismal future. The "great rest" is not death yet but the period when, although she will suffer physically, her mind will be at ease. This, however, does not necessarily indicate that she has desired peace of mind through the way in which it has come about.

Maurya is implicated in the deaths of her sons: she who created is the original contributing factor to the final destruction because the birth-death process is the universal

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[69] Cf. Charles Squire, Celtic Myth and Legend, Poetry and Romance (London: Gresham, n.d.) pp. 40 and 408; Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees, Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales (London: Thames and Hudson, 1961), pp. 89-90 and 165.

[70] Súilleabháin, op. cit., p. 29. Skelton p. 51, says that "the Holy Water is much more the magical water of pre-Christian belief than the water blessed by the priest." Cf. also Gerstenberger, p. 47.

[71] Even though she has found prayer to be of no avail for the living, Maurya is described as crossing herself and continuing to pray under her breath.(25)

reality.[72] She is the victim of her own act and is caught in a circle of irony: because she procreated she has suffered, and now that the fruits of her generation have been destroyed she suffers no longer.[73]

Cathleen turns to an old man for help in making the coffin:

> Maybe yourself and Eamon would make a coffin when the sun rises. We have fine white boards herself bought, God help her, thinking Michael would be found, and I have a new cake you can eat while you'll be working.(25)

The bread, the staff of life,[74] originally meant for Bartley and, in effect, becoming a viaticum not delivered,[75] now is offered to the old but living men who make his coffin.[76] The fusion of

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[72] Cf. Durbach, op. cit., p. 369.

[73] In "Riders to the Sea: Reappraised," Texas Quarterly, XI (Winter 1968) 145, Ryder Hector Currie and Martin Bryan pursue the idea of Maurya as a destructive force and say that she hungers for the destruction of her men; it is this that is "at the heart of their self-sacrifice." But relief when she is suffering no more is vastly different from a certain triumph at their death. Currie and Bryan (p. 146) ingeniously trace the name Maurya to a fusion of the mythological Morrigan, the great mother, and Mara, the nightmare figure, thus explaining Maurya's dual and destructive inclination. But Maurya is a form of the Celtic Maureen, meaning "dark"; cf. Flora Haines Loughead, Dictionary of Given Names with Origins and Meanings (Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark, 1958) p. 195. Marya [sic], according to Flora Haines Loughead (p. 194) is from the Hebrew Mary, appositely meaning "bitter tears: bitter water." But there is no indication that Synge chose this name with such a specific intention.

[74] Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 47.

[75] Cf. Henn, p. 328; Malachy McLaughlin, op. cit., p. 116.

[76] Evidently some men do escape the sea; but these men are required for dramatic propriety and to present the vital information about the lack of nails.(26)

references to and possessions of the living and the dead is evident throughout the play:[77] the two horsemen, one dead and the other on his journey to death, are described; Bartley, the living, puts on the shirt of Michael, the dead; the rope to lower the coffin for Michael is used to halter the horse for Bartley, and, most probably, will be used to lower the coffin for him; Maurya, the mother, uses the stick of Michael, the son, who can support her in no other way now. All these point to the universality of the lot of mankind; underlining the Michael-Bartley image is that of "the dead man with the child in his arms"(19) - death has a claim on all life, even on the new-born child.

When it is found that there are no nails to make the coffin, a man remarks: "It's a great wonder she wouldn't think of the nails, and all the coffins she's seen made already."(25)[78] This stresses the pathos of the situation. Maurya has seen many coffins made but has forgotten the nails because it is a man's job to remember them;[79] she, who has always had someone to rely on before, has nobody now.

Cathleen remarks that "It's getting old she is, and broken,"(25) and, in answer to Nora's naïve comment that Maurya was fonder of Michael, says:

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[77] Cf. Henn, The Harvest of Tragedy, p. 202; Henn, pp. 39-40; Van Laan, op. cit., pp. 360-62; Gerstenberger, p. 49; Levitt, op. cit., p. 94; Durbach, op. cit., p. 370.

[78] Donoghue (op, cit., pp. 53-54) says that "the white boards take on the clear implications of the death of Christ." He adds: "This is one of the moments in the play in which the purely human suffering of Maurya and her family is related to the religious orthodoxy within which they live. The Crucifixion is here a kind of middle event between the death of Bartley and the force which caused that death, a force which has no human associations whatsoever."

[79] Cf. Levitt, op. cit., p. 106.

> An old woman will soon be tired with anything she will do, and isn't it nine days herself is after crying, and keening, and making great sorrow in the house?(25)[80]

Maurya is old but there is some doubt whether she is broken. She appears as such only after being defeated in her spirited struggle against Bartley; she is awe-struck, not broken, after her vision. Now she has no reason to fight the sea or her sons any more; she is defeated in one way, but in accepting death as the pre-condition of life and in turning to her religion, she attains strength which enables her to go out from herself to the world, to see herself as one of many, to include herself and her dead in the whole of mankind. Maurya realizes that all are "riders to the sea," all are drawn irrevocably to death:[81]

> MAURYA [puts the empty cup mouth downwards on the table, and lays her hands together on BARTLEY'S feet] They're altogether this time, and the end is come. May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul, and on the souls of Sheamus and Patch, and Stephen and Shawn [bending her head] . . . . and may He have mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of everyone is left living in the world. . . . Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of the Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely. . . . What more can we want than that?. . .No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied.(27)

Maurya is resigned to her fate, to the fate of all the living,

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[80] Van Laan (op. cit., p. 362) notes that in these two speeches, Cathleen alters the specific reference to the general application. This is in keeping with the notion of Maurya as representative not only of the island women but also of all women. He adds (p. 362) that "Maurya projects only age and defeat, memory and capitulation." But this does not take into account her conflict and final acceptance.

[81] Cf. Durbach, op. cit., pp. 371-72.

and in acceptance she gains "a sympathy with the world."[82] In her final comprehension, she transcends querulousness and pettiness, and regards life and death in wider terms, within the greater scale of humanity, but this comes when the foundation and purpose of her secular existence have gone.

By putting the empty cup mouth downwards on the table, Maurya shows that she has no more need of the Holy Water - even though there is nothing left for her to use.[83] Price says that Maurya has reached a position where "the comforts of organized religion are of no avail."[84] But if these comforts are useless, why does she continue to pray? Van Laan regards Maurya's action as visually representing "the defeat of Christianity as part of the total defeat."[85] Maurya, however, has not relinquished her Catholicism, but has come to a deep acceptance of death, eternal life and the will of God. Christianity is not defeated.

The majority of critics regard Riders to the Sea as a tragedy and Maurya as the tragic protagonist.[86] But in most

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[82]"Étude Morbide, or 'An Imaginary Portrait,'" CW II, 30.

[83]Cf. Henn, p. 328; Gerstenberger, pp. 47-48; Skelton, p. 52.

[84]Price, p. 188. [85]Van Laan, op. cit., p. 364.

[86]For interpretations of Riders to the Sea as a tragedy, main references and discussions can be found in Bickley, op. cit., p. 36; Weygandt, op. cit., p. 178; Howe, p. 58; Bourgeois, pp. 159, 161-62, 166, 170; Boyd, Renaissance, p. 322; Boyd, Contemporary, p. 96; Corkery, p. 108; O'Connor, in Robinson, p. 43; Ellis-Fermor, p. 179; Strong, p. 29; V. S. Pritchett, In My Good Books (London: Chatto & Windus, 1942), p. 158; Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama (4th ed.; London: Harrap, 1947), p. 405; Alan L. Brown, "John Millington Synge (1871-1909)", London Quarterly and Holborn Review, CLXXV (January 1950), 46; John Gassner, Masters of the Drama (3rd ed.; /New York/: Dover Publications, 1954), p. 556; Gassner, The Theatre in Our Times, p. 538; Howarth, op. cit., p. 239 (he quotes James Joyce); Collins, op. cit., p. 291; Price, pp. 181, 189, 191; Coxhead, p. 15; Henn, pp. 37-38; Johnston, p. 18; Gerstenberger,

cases the word "tragedy" is used loosely and not qualified, the writers apparently taking the tragic quality for granted.

Several critics have mixed reactions to the tragic potentiality of Riders to the Sea: Yeats finds that for all "its mood of Greek tragedy," it is "too passive in suffering";[87] Figgis says that it is of a "new order of tragedy," but continues that "it is, perhaps, not so much tragedy as a fragment of life set in the atmosphere of tragedy";[88] Storm Jameson, who evidently cannot decide, first says that "Riders to the Sea comes as near to tragedy as a play may, and yet be not tragic but only very pitiful," then calls it a tragedy, and concludes that it is "high drama, almost high tragedy";[89] Sherman takes a contrary view and says that it is not a tragedy because it is not a drama - "it might with more propriety be called a tragic idyl [sic]";[90] Malone talks about its tragic effect but remarks that it is "tragic in the current journalistic sense rather than in the Aristotelian";[91] Williams calls it "a tragic fragment,"[92] and "a descriptive tragedy,"[93] but then says that "the emotion of the work is pathetic rather than tragic";[94] and Pittock describes the play as "the tragedy of a community,"[95] but concludes that it is a mixture of tragedy and melodrama.[96]

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pp. 44-54; Combs, op. cit., pp. 602-603; Levitt, op.cit., pp. 84-116; Ann Saddlemyer, "Deirdre of the Sorrows: Literature First . . . Drama Afterwards," in Harmon, p. 91; Skelton, pp. 49-50; Durbach, op. cit., pp. 363-72.

[87] Yeats, "J. M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time," Essays and Introductions, p. 336.

[88] Darrell Figgis, "The Art of J. M. Synge," FR, n.s., XC (November 1, 1911), 1060.

[89] Storm Jameson, op. cit., p. 215.

[90] Sherman, op. cit., p. 209.

[91] Malone, op. cit., p. 150

[92] Williams, op. cit., p. 157.

[93] ibid., p. 159.

[94] ibid., p. 160.

[95] Pittock, op. cit., p. 446.

[96] ibid., p. 449.

Only a few writers deny outright that either Maurya or the play is tragic. Barrett H. Clark argues that one must see the struggle against forces in a tragedy and that this is lacking in Riders to the Sea.[97] Fausset, who calls it "perhaps the most relentlessly melancholy and yet the least tragic of his plays,"[98] says that the

> one-sided conflict is pitiful beyond words, but humanity is too dwarfed a participater [sic] in the contest, the ideal is too slenderly opposed to the natural for tragedy of a high significance.[99]

In his study of Riders to the Sea, Donoghue says that it is not a tragedy: "to see the play is to feel a pathetic rather than a tragic experience."[100] He contends[101] that it is not built on the "classic" lines of tragedy, in which the hero, or the soul, moves from "purpose" through action or passion to a final perception or a new awareness; Donoghue adds that Maurya's action is frustrated because the scales are too heavily weighted against her, purpose cannot be formulated, and the play ends in her acceptance rather than in positive perception. He quotes Leavis's description of the tragic experience,[102] and maintains that on the basis of this view Riders to the Sea does not constitute such an experience:

> firstly, because Maurya's acceptance which ends the play has in it nothing of the positive "willing adhesion of the individual self to something other than itself"; secondly, because there is in the play no significant equivalent of

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[97] Barrett H. Clark, The British and American Drama of To-day Outlines for their Study (New York: Henry Holt, 1915), pp. 192-93. Cf. also Barrett H. Clark, A Study of the Modern Drama (New ed.; New York: Appleton, 1928), p. 340.

[98] Fausset, op. cit., p. 268. [99] ibid., pp. 268-69.

[100] Donoghue, op. cit., p. 56. [101] ibid., pp. 56-57.

[102] F. R. Leavis, "Tragedy and the 'Medium,'" in The Common Pursuit (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952), pp. 130-32. Cf. Donoghue, op. cit., p. 57.

> "the valued," and thirdly, because in the final analysis the play does not give "the sense of the heightened life." We may even add a fourth reason, that Maurya's sufferings are determined by forces which do not include her will or her character.[103]

But Donoghue's argument appears to be faulty. Is not Maurya's "purpose" to combat the sea - in this instance through Bartley? Does she not act by struggling against him? The "scales" against Oedipus are equally heavily weighted. Does she not reach a new awareness, a new consideration, of life, of the inevitability of its end? Her will and character, her refusal to accept the necessity of Bartley's going at first, certainly do play a part in her sufferings. Surely, there is "willing adhesion of the individual self to something other than itself," in her resorting to Catholic ceremony. Is "the valued" not life itself, as well as a life after death, as well as the force she recognizes as God? The "sense of heightened life," as such, might appear to be missing, but Leavis says:

> The sense of heightened life that goes with the tragic experience is conditioned by a transcending of the ego - and escape from all attitudes of self-assertion. Escape, perhaps, is not altogether a good word, since it might suggest something negative and irresponsible. Actually the experience is constructive or creative, and involves a recognizing positive value as in some way defined and vindicated by death.[104]

At the end Maurya stops insisting upon her temporal rights, and she turns to the eternal and to God. Paradoxically, in accepting another norm of tragedy, it is just all this which denies her tragic status. The obviating factor is her Catholicism.

Tragedy deals with the irremediable.[105] Steiner contends:

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[103] Donoghue, op. cit., p. 57.

[104] Leavis, op. cit., pp. 131-32.

[105] Cf. Howarth, op. cit., p. 289.

> Tragedies end badly. The tragic personage is broken by forces which can neither be fully understood nor overcome by rational prudence. This again is crucial. Where the causes of disaster are temporal, where the conflict can be resolved through technical or social means, we may have serious drama, but no tragedy.[106]

I. A. Richards says:

> It is essential to recognize that in the full tragic experience there is no suppression. The mind does not shy away from anything, it does not protect itself with any illusion, it stands uncomforted, unintimidated, alone and self-reliant.[107]

He adds:

> Tragedy is only possible to a mind which is for the moment agnostic or Manichean. The least touch of any theology which has a compensating Heaven to offer the tragic hero is fatal.[108]

This denies the possibility of a Christian tragedy.

The question is whether Maurya is Catholic and shares Catholic belief implicitly. The ambiguity in her attitude is evident throughout the play in which Catholic and pagan elements are inextricably mixed. Pittock argues that

> when this pagan superstition does come into conflict with the community's Christian belief it shows itself to have the stronger hold.[109]

Van Laan remarks that the Christian elements in the play "are numerous, and all suggest inadequacy and defeat."[110] Elizabeth Coxhead maintains that

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[106] George Steiner, The Death of Tragedy (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 8.

[107] I. A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism (2nd ed.; London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1926), p. 246.

[108] ibid.

[109] Pittock, op. cit., p. 447. [110] Van Laan, op. cit., pp. 363-64.

> although she calls on the Christian God, Maurya is not a straight portrait of an Aran woman, who would have found more direct comfort in her religion. The forces which have brought her beyond despair are those which bludgeon the protogonists in a Greek tragedy.[111]

Henn says that "the resolution of the play rests upon a resignation that is more stoic than Christian,"[112] an opinion echoed by Skelton[113] and Levitt.[114] In turning to Maurya's last words, Currie and Bryan say that they "have nothing to do with Christian resignation,"[115] and Gaskell comments:

> That Christianity is hardly even a hope for her has been made clear. . . . The prayer at the end, then, is only accidentally Christian; but it is essentially religious.[116]

But, just as Catholic elements dominate the central speech in the play, Maurya's revelation, such features are equally prevalent in the final words. Although one cannot ignore the possibility of the recitation being merely automatic, an unthinking following of habit and convention, this does not detract from Maurya's personal acceptance of her religion. There are no superstitious, no pagan, attributes here; their absence implies that Maurya has relinquished her hold on them and has affirmed the principles of Catholicism. "They're all together this time," she says at the end - not "They're all gone now." The whole speech is not only couched in traditional Catholic forms of prayer but also comprises a definite statement of Catholic belief in purgatory. In saying that "the end is

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[111] Coxhead, pp. 15-16. Cf. also Bourgeois, p. 167; Johnston, p. 20.

[112] Henn, p. 37. [113] Skelton, p. 51.

[114] Levitt, op. cit., pp. 104 and 107. Cf. also Chandler, op. cit., p. 264.

[115] Currie and Bryan, op. cit., p. 146.

[116] Gaskell, op. cit., p. 245. Cf. also Ellis-Fermor, p. 165; supra, pp. 22-23.

come," Maurya is referring not only to the end of her anguish and the end of the lives of her sons, but also to spiritual consummation: she understands that she must submit to the will of God. And He is, throughout this passage, the "Almighty God" - even though the sea apparently is the omnipotent power in this life. Her prayer for the souls of everybody presupposes a Catholic belief; she implies that it is God who controls the spirit, the life after death, which is why she must be content with the end of this life - all that can be expected is burial: "What more can we want than that?" asks Maurya. "No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied."(27)[117] At the end of the play she is satisfied, because she accepts her Catholicism without reservation. According to Skelton,

> that Maurya finds no comfort or hope for all her observances is the dark message of the play, which ends as a cry, not against God, but against the principle of mortality.[118]

But Maurya does find comfort and hope because of her observances; there is no final cry against "the principle of mortality," there is a cry to God, for she regards Him as embodying mercy in the after-life. She is beyond suffering not only because there is nobody left to worry about but also because, in accepting the tenets of Catholicism, she has no cause to suffer. Heroic in her struggle against the sea at first,[119] Maurya develops to find compensation in her Catholic religion, she is reconciled to it, and because of this and her belief in a life to come, she believes that her condition will be remedied. It is for this reason that Maurya can be regarded not as a figure of tragedy but only as one of great pathos.

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[117] Cf. Isaiah 53:11: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."

[118] Skelton, p. 51.

[119] Cf. Bourgeois, p. 160; Brown, op. cit., p. 46.

Chapter 5

A WOMAN FRUSTRATED: NORA BURKE

> [Synge's] Woman of the Glen, as melancholy as a curlew, [is] driven to distraction by her own sensitiveness, her own fineness . . . .[1]

> Synge of course made no effort to create a fine and sensitive woman . . . . What he created was a piece of naturalistic flesh and blood, wearing her lusts upon her sleeve, a being all appetite and no faculty, a woman . . . full of physical courage, daring and bold.[2]

No other play by Synge, except _The Playboy of the Western World_, caused as much dissension and conflict in early critical interpretation as _The Shadow of the Glen_, with the subject of dispute tending to centre on the protagonist, Nora Burke.[3] Most adverse criticism saw her as a "strumpet"[4] or a "somewhat frivolous young wife" suspected of "goings-on with a young neighbour,"[5] and moral patriots viewed the play "as a hideous slander upon Irish womanhood."[6]

Arthur Griffith, editor of the _United Irishman_, called attention to the supposed source of the play: "It is a staging of a corrupt version of that old-world libel on womankind - the 'Widow of Ephesus,' . . ."[7] In both works, a wife turns to

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[1] W. B. Yeats, Preface to _The Well of the Saints_, _Essays and Introductions_, p. 300.

[2] Corkery, p. 125. [3] Cf. Greene and Stephens, pp. 143-49.

[4] Arthur Griffith in the _United Irishman_; quoted by Greene and Stephens, p. 177.

[5] Joseph Holloway, Diary of Friday, September 4, 1903, _Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre: A Selection from his Unpublished Journal, Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer_, ed. Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 25.

[6] Boyd, _Contemporary_, p. 93.

[7] Griffith, _United Irishman_, October 17, 1903; quoted by Greene and Stephens, p. 148; cf. also Skelton, p. 54. The Widow of Ephesus tale is in Petronius, _The Satyricon_, trans. Paul Dinnage (London: Neville Spearman, 1957), pp. 114-17.

another man for company shortly after her husband's "death," but similar tales are found in the literature and lore of many nations.[8] The Aran islander Pat Dirane told Synge of his own purported experience of a husband acting dead to trap his wife with her lover.[9] Although this story formed the basis of The Shadow of the Glen, Synge's play is not a mere dramatic transcription of it, and, unlike Pat Dirane's peasant woman, Nora Burke is a complex character.[10] Elizabeth Coxhead contends:

> To the folk-teller, the wife was a villainess to be exposed, but the humane and sophisticated Synge with his background of European culture is entirely on the side of the wife, bound in the all-too-common Irish peasant institution of a loveless marriage, and stifled by the mists and dreariness of the lonely glen. His Nora is a free spirit, sensitive to beauty, and his moral is the wickedness of trying to keep such a one caged."[11]

Synge sets the scene in the "last cottage at the head of a long glen in County Wicklow";(31) even before the action starts, one is given to understand the desolation of the place. Nora is described as "a much younger woman,"(31)[12] indicating the disparity in age between her and Dan, and possibly suggesting the lack of contact and gap in understanding between the two. Loneliness is one of Nora's distinguishing features, motivating

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[8] Cf. Weygandt, op. cit., p. 168; Bourgeois, p. 156; Lady Gregory, Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography (New York: Putnam, 1913), pp. 110-11; Malone, op. cit., p. 149; Corkery, p. 123; F. L. Lucas, The Drama of Chekhov, Synge, Yeats and Pirandello (London: Cassell, 1963), pp. 168-69; Gerstenberger, pp. 34-35; Johnston, p. 14.

[9] Cf. CW II, 70-72; CW III, 254; Greene and Stephens, p. 175.

[10] Cf. Corkery, p. 126; Skelton, p. 59.

[11] Coxhead, p. 14. Bourgeois (p. 149) argues: "The 'moral' of The Shadow of the Glen - if there is any such thing - is probably that a woman has a right to follow the man her soul inclines to. But this interpretation . . . would be totally untrue to Synge's non-didactic methods . . . ."

[12] This description appears in the typescript possessed by the University of Texas; cf. CW III, 31, n. 1.

much of her behaviour - she is physically isolated and socially starved. Ellen Douglass Leyburn remarks that she "is conceived wholly in terms of loneliness; and it is from her struggles against this loneliness that the plot emerges."[13]

Nora, who shows herself to be sensitive and prey to a wandering imagination brought on by the effect of the environment, is seen as practical and realistic at first: her initial action when the tramp knocks is to pick up the stocking with money and put it in her pocket - the act of a prudent person, because she does not know who is at the door.[14] She appears hospitable in inviting the tramp to "come in out of the rain,"(33) and explains her situation:

> He's after dying on me, God forgive him, and there I am now with a hundred sheep beyond on the hills, and no turf drawn for the winter.(33)

As Henn remarks, although "God forgive him" is a pious ejaculation, overtones or ambiguities are suggested here: "forgiveness, not for sins only, but for dying and leaving her alone."[15] Nora's next speech implies that she has not been entirely content in her relationship with her husband, for she "half-humorously"

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[13]Ellen Douglass Leyburn, op. cit., p. 85. Seamus Deane ("Synge's Poetic Use of Language," in Harmon, pp. 140-41) finds that The Shadow of the Glen "offers us two morphemes as base words - . . . we have 'lonesome' and its opposing word 'queer,' each occurring more than a dozen times in the brief text. The opposition is . . . resolved by an intermediate term 'afeard' which occurs with the same frequency. We can then read the play as showing that the queer (which may mean mad or wonderful) are the victims of loneliness which they fear, the loneliness of lost beauty, for a lost hero like Patch Darcy, the loneliness of old age and of death."

[14]Henn (p. 31) notes that the tramp is a link between the glen and the outside world, and also regards him as the central figure of the play. But, surely, it is Nora's predicament that is most important, and it is about her that the action revolves.

[15]ibid., p. 321.

refers to his oddity: "He was always queer, stranger, and I suppose them that's queer and they living men will be queer bodies after."(33)[16]

The superstitious side to Nora appears now: she cannot tidy or lay out the body because Dan has "put a black curse"(35) on her if she touches him. In the conversation with the tramp, she tells him that her husband "was an old man, and an odd man, stranger, and it's always up on the hills he was, thinking thoughts in the dark mist."(35) The stolid Dan, who, ostensibly, is concerned only with material things, is not immune from the common impression caused by his surroundings. The epithet is significant: dark connotes evil, and also implies the peasants' inability to penetrate the mist and their failure to overcome its effect.[17]

A certain slyness now lends complexity to Nora's character - she is not quite as fine as Yeats believes: she entreats the tramp to touch Dan in order to discover whether he is cold, but the tramp is sufficiently sagacious, and superstitious, to refuse. This request is after Nora has appeared to be all hospitality and compassion in inviting him inside.

Griffith,[18] Corkery[19] and Skelton[20] in particular have commented on the sexual element in Nora; the first

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[16]Henn (p. 26) says that the recurrent "queer" in the play "has overtones of the fey, the supranatural, as well as of derangement of the mind."

[17]In saying that the hero of The Shadow of the Glen, "the perfect picture of a mood," is not man but nature, Strong (p. 27) betrays a misunderstanding of the play. Nature is the insidious influence.

[18]Cf. Greene and Stephens, pp. 149, 177; supra, p. 82; infra, p. 90.

[19]Cf. Corkery, p. 125; supra, p. 82.

[20]Cf. Skelton, pp. 58-60; infra, pp. 86-87, 89, 92-93.

connotation of this comes when she says:

> Maybe cold would be no sign of death with the like of him, for he was always cold, every day since I knew him - and every night, stranger . . . . (35)

This coldness is sexual as well as physical, and is linked with the appearance of Dan: he seems to be dead in both respects.[21] But this does not point to any immorality on Nora's part: desiring coition with her husband is different from the act of copulation with somebody else; her mere reference to frustration in this marital relationship does not make her a "loose" woman.[22]

Nora, whose loneliness is gradually revealed, mentions her physical isolation: "How would I go out into the glen and tell the neighbours and I a lone woman with no house near me?"(37) The tramp's speech which follows her repetition of this fact, seems to contain symbolic elements:

> And I was thinking, and I coming in through the door, that it's many a lone woman would be afeard of the like of me in the dark night, in a place wouldn't be as lonesome as this place, where there aren't two living souls would see the little light you have shining from the glass.(37)

The "little light" can be taken to symbolize Nora's sensitivity, her awareness of values other than the material; it is the light that tries to combat the dark mist associated with Dan. The only two people to have noticed it, it is learnt, are Patch Darcy and the tramp;[23] there are not "<u>two</u> living souls" /italics

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[21] In the fragment <u>The Lady O'Connor</u>, the heroine, who is in a similar position to that of Nora, describes her husband as "half a monk."(III,212)

[22] Skelton (p.59) says: "We are not told explicitly that she is adulterous or promiscuous. It is, however, beautifully implied."

[23] Although Nora admits having known "a power of men,"(49) it is not implied that they were all aware of this sensitivity.

added7 any more as Darcy is dead.

Nora says that she has remained indoors because of her isolation, not fear: "I'm thinking many would be afeard, but I never knew what way I'd be afeard of beggar or bishop or any man of you at all."(37) Skelton[24] regards this as revealing a degree of self-conceit and sexual aggressiveness. It is the first but there is no indication that it is the other. Nora admits that "it's other things than the like of you, stranger, would make a person afeard."(37) These "other things" are not only the dead and the supernatural, but, it is revealed, also loneliness, decay, mortality and, more concretely, the environment. In his denying that he is "easily afeard," the realistic tramp shows his perception of nature's awesome element of disproportion:

> Is it myself, lady of the house, that does be walking round in the long nights, and crossing the hills when the fog is on them, the time a little stick would seem as big as your arm, and a rabbit as big as a bay horse, and a stack of turf as big as a towering church in the city of Dublin? If myself was easily afeard, I'm telling you, it's long ago I'd have been locked into the Richmond Asylum . . . . (37)

This passage introduces talk of Patch Darcy, who is referred to later as "the man went queer in his head the year that's gone."(47) Darcy, who knew the countryside well and "would walk through five hundred sheep and miss one of them and he not reckoning them at all,"(47) ran raving into the hills, a victim of the overpowering malevolence of his surroundings.[25] If Darcy, "a great man," was overcome, it is implied that Nora,

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[24] Skelton, p. 59.

[25] He succumbed to the effect of the environment, not to "the loneliness of life," as maintained by Ganz, op. cit., p. 59. Donna Gerstenberger (p. 39) holds that Darcy had control over the natural elements, but she adds that "Synge intends to suggest that his madness came from excess, largeness, courage, daring - a madness to be opposed to the meanness and smallness

who readily admits her dread of the environment, is in danger of having her sanity threatened.[26] The tramp, however, has conquered his fear, realizing that his imagination must be kept in check for him to continue to enjoy nature and to avoid the fate of Darcy. Nora's comment that "there were great stories of what was heard at that time, but would anyone believe the things they do be saying in the glen?"(39) implies that

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of the 'sane' world which believes 'a bit of a farm' and a good price for lambs make up the sum of existence. Patch Darcy is a hint of that ideal of the poet in The Playboy of the Western World - 'fine, fiery fellows with great rages when their temper's roused' - the free extraordinary personality which is associated with the poet and the man of extravagant gesture as well as with the man of physical prowess . . . ."

[26]In his Wicklow article, "The Oppression of the Hills," (CW II, 209) Synge describes the coercive atmosphere of the glens which exerts its spell on all who are in the area: "Among the cottages that are scattered through the hills of County Wicklow I have met with many people who show in a singular way the influence of a particular locality. These people live for the most part beside old roads and pathways where hardly one man passes in the day, and look out all the year on unbroken barriers of heath. At every season heavy rains fall for often a week at a time, till the thatch drips with water stained to a dull chestnut and the floor in the cottages seems to be going back to the condition of the bogs near it. Then the clouds break, and there is a night of terrific storm from the south-west - all the larches that survive in these places are bowed and twisted towards the point where the sun rises in June - when the winds come down through the narrow glens with the congested whirl and roar of a torrent, breaking at times for sudden moments of silence that keep up the tension of the mind. At such times the people crouch all night over a few sods of turf and the dogs howl in the lanes.

" . . . This peculiar climate, acting on a population that is already lonely and dwindling, has caused or increased a tendency to nervous depression among the people, and every degree of sadness, from that of the man who is merely mournful to that of the man who has spent half his life in the madhouse, is common among these hills."

Such people are those of The Shadow of the Glen.

the people of the glen have wild fancies evidently caused by their situation, and they cannot be relied upon to give truthful or objective reports. The glenswoman admits to receiving Darcy:

> God spare Darcy, he'd always look in here and he passing up or passing down, and it's very lonesome I was after him a long while . . . , and then I got happy again - if it's ever happy we are, stranger - for I got used to being lonesome.(39)[27]

She has adapted because she is used to her lonely way of life, but her most intense feeling is conveyed in the parenthetic "if it's ever happy we are, stranger." Nora is realistic enough to know that she can never be completely happy, no matter which life she chooses or which is forced upon her.

Counterpoised to Darcy is the subject of Nora's next enquiry - "a young man with a drift of mountain ewes, and he running after them this way and that."(39) Evidently amused at the tramp's description, she says:

> I'm going a little back to the west, stranger, for himself would go there one night and another, and whistle at that place, and then the young man you're after seeing - a kind of a farmer has come up from the sea to live in a cottage beyond - would walk round to see if there was a thing we'd have to be done, and I'm wanting him this night, the way he can go down into the glen when the sun goes up and tell the people that himself is dead.(39-41)

This, it is discovered, is a lie: Nora wants the young man's company; his conveying the news is of secondary importance. She insists on going herself and leaves the tramp with a talisman against evil spirits:

> There's the needle, stranger, and I'm thinking you won't be lonesome, and you used to the back hills, for isn't a

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[27] Skelton (p. 59) reads a sexual connotation into these words, saying that the passage shows Nora's "sexual hunger and frustration."

> dead man itself more company than to be sitting alone, and hearing the winds crying, and you not knowing on what thing your mind would stay?(41)

Nora, who is so lonely that she can suggest finding a kind of solace even in the company of a corpse, realizes that her surroundings can drive both her and anybody else mad. The personification of the wind, which underlines her fear, adds to the impression of mournfulness and eeriness.

After Dan resurrects himself, as it were, he curses his wife and then betrays some admiration for her:

> Ah, the devil mend her . . . Do you hear that, stranger? Did ever you hear another woman could whistle the like of that with two fingers in her mouth?(41-43)

His telling the tramp that Nora is a bad wife - "a bad wife for an old man"(43) - points to an important aspect of the play: the loveless marriage. J. B. Yeats was the first critic to refer to Nora's condition as representing an attack on this "most miserable institution,"[28] and not as showing "adultery as a feature of Irish rural life."[29] Nora serves as an example of the practice of "business before passion" which leads to the frustrated relationship of youth, with its delight in life, and old age, with its restrictive sobriety.[30] Because of this

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[28]J. B. Yeats, United Irishman, October 31, 1903; quoted by Greene and Stephens, p. 149. Cf. also Bourgeois, p. 146.

[29]Griffith, editorial comment on J. B. Yeats's view, in the United Irishman, October 31, 1903; quoted by Greene and Stephens, p. 149.

[30]This feature of Irish life is stressed throughout The Vanishing Irish: The Enigma of the Modern World, ed. John A. O'Brien (London: W. H. Allen, 1954): men, when they do marry, marry late, and women see marriage as a guarantee of a stable old age; a childless, miserable life for both not infrequently results. In the chapter on "Postponed Marriage and Permanent Celibacy" in his recent study, The Irish: Emigration, Marriage and Fertility (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 139-72, Robert E. Kennedy, Jr. also pays close attention to this characteristic. Stephen Gwynn - Irish Books

incompatibility, Nora is a bad wife for Dan and he is a failure as her husband in all ways but that of providing domestic security.

When she enters with Michael, the young man is described as "innocent."(45) This innocence is important as it minimizes the sexual aspect of their relationship. Greene remarks that

> there is nothing in the play which indicates that Nora's interest in Michael Dara is sexual. She is broken with loneliness and oppressed by the gloom that lies all around her. He is merely an emotional outlet, an escape for her.[31]

Significantly, Nora only asks Michael to look at Dan, not touch him; apparently, as she knows Michael, she hesitates to have the curse put on him, but he refuses even to go over to the body. Nora turns to the tramp:

> Will you drink a sup of tea with myself and the young man, stranger, or /speaking more persuasively/ will you go into the little room and stretch yourself a short while on the bed. I'm thinking it's destroyed you are walking the length of that way in the great rain.(45)

This underlines the unlikelihood of the accuracy of a sexual interpretation of Nora. She does not want the tramp to be with her and Michael, but, instead of asking him to stay in the kitchen while she and the young man go through the door to discuss their private affairs, she suggests that he goes to the bedroom. Although she is the "lady of the house" and could order the tramp out, she does not; on his refusing to go because of the wake, she

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and Irish People (Dublin: Talbot Press, n.d.), p. 9 - remarks: "Irish peasants seldom marry for love, they never murder for love; but they marry and they murder for land." Cf. Bourgeois, p. 146; Boyd, Contemporary, p. 94; Greene and Stephens, p. 153.

Corkery (p. 133) says that The Shadow of the Glen has no purpose, "it does not warn against the mating of youth and age" - an interpretation in accordance with Synge's view in his preface to The Tinker's Wedding (CW IV, 3) that "the drama, like the symphony, does not teach or prove anything."

[31] David H. Greene, "The Shadow of the Glen and the 'Widow of Ephesus,'" PMLA, LXII (March 1947), 234. Cf. also Boyd, Renaissance, p. 321.

prefers to ignore him.[32]

When Michael comments on the tramp's being a poor tailor, he retorts:

> If it's a poor tailor I am, I'm thinking it's a poor herd does be running back and forward after a little handful of ewes the way I seen yourself running this day, young fellow, and you coming from the fair.(47)

Michael admits his problem:

> It's no lie he's telling, I was destroyed surely . . . They were that wilful they were running off into one man's bit of hay, and tumbling into the red bogs till it's more like a pack of old goats than sheep they were . . . Mountain ewes is a queer breed, Nora Burke, and I'm not used to them at all.(47)

Skelton regards the sheep imagery throughout the play as suggestive of sex. He says that "goats are proverbially lecherous, and the juxtaposition of the phrase 'mountain ewes' with the name of Nora is suggestive,"[33] and finds Nora's response equally significant:

> There's no one can drive a mountain ewe but the men do be reared in the Glen Malure, I've heard them say, and above by Rathvanna, and the Glen Imaal, men the like of Patch Darcy . . . .(47)

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[32] This underplaying of the sexual implication of Nora and Michael's relationship is even more apparent when comparing this scene to the similar one in Pat Dirane's story (The Aran Islands, CW II,72): "The young man went in and the woman sat down to watch the dead man. A while after she got up and 'Stranger,' says she, 'I'm going in to get the candle out of the room; I'm thinking the young man will be asleep by this time.' She went into the bedroom, but the divil a bit of her came back.

"Then the dead man got up, and he took one stick, and he gave the other to myself. We went in and we saw them lying together with her head on his arm." Cf. also Boyd, Renaissance, p. 321; Boyd, Contemporary, p. 94; Price, p. 119; Gerstenberger, p. 35.

[33] Skelton, p. 59.

Skelton says that it is impossible not to regard Patch Darcy, whom both Nora and the tramp admire, as

> the "herd" who had shown himself most capable of controlling that wild "mountain ewe," Nora, and keeping her from other men's "oats" and "hay."[34]

Although the sheep references and imagery could have several connotations, they imply life itself and the attitude towards it rather than sex each time. Nora says that Dan "stiffened himself out the like of a dead sheep";(35) "stiffened," admittedly, has phallic connotations, but not in this context where the operative word is "dead." The tramp says that he

> was passing below on a dark night the like of this night, and the sheep were lying under the ditch and every one of them coughing, and choking, like an old man, with the great rain and the fog . . .(39)

He also tells Nora that

> it's fine songs you'll be hearing when the sun goes up, and there'll be no old fellow wheezing the like of a sick sheep close to your ear.(57)

Where is the sexual implication here?

Dan suspects Nora of unfaithfulness and turns her out not after she has revealed a string of affairs but after she has spoken of her dissatisfaction with him and her yearning for the company of others - the "others" happening to be younger men; her loneliness after Darcy's death stemmed from the absence of his companionship not of his sexual attributes.[35] Dan is jealous

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[34] ibid., p. 60. Donna Gerstenberger (pp. 38-39) says: "Patch Darcy was a good shepherd, an able man with the mountain ewe, the animal which causes Michael Dara such symbolic and actual difficulties." But she does not explain what these "symbolic" difficulties are.

[35] Nora does not confess to the tramp that she "had been in love with the deceased Patch Davey [sic]," as maintained by Gassner, Masters of the Drama, p. 556.

of her attraction to these men, but his decision to order her off also lies in his realization that he is inadequate and that the difference between them cannot be reconciled. Sexual connotations can be found in Nora's "wanting" Michael and in her admitting to him that she is "after knowing" many men. But why must one look for a double meaning here when other evidence is to the contrary?[36]

Nora agrees with Michael that, paradoxically, because of her isolation and utter loneliness, she has been acquainted with many men; she has sought their friendship to assuage her misery in solitude:

> It's in a lonesome place you do have to be talking with someone, and looking for someone, in the evening of the day, and if it's a power of men I'm after knowing they were fine men, for I was a hard child to please, and a hard girl to please /she looks at him a little sternly/, and it's a hard woman I am to please this day, Michael Dara, and it's no lie, I'm telling you.(49)

Evidently, she longs most for company at the end of the day before Dan returns and when she has, probably, finished most of her household chores. Her warning that she is hard to please

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[36]Bourgeois (pp. 148-49) comments: "Nora is certainly the most vitally arresting figure. Hers is less the love-yearning of the woman who knows the world sexually than the poetic desire for the something new or exciting which may relieve the oppression of solitude. . . . The shattered ideals and thwarted aspirations of all humanity speak through her as she sits an inscrutably sad woman above the ruins of the world."

Donna Gerstenberger (p. 35) notes that "the innocence of the character of Nora Burke makes it clear that it is not sexual conquest she seeks, nor mere security any longer, but, instead, human companionship and imaginative fulfilment."

The role of Nora on the stage has caused differences in interpretation both in acting and in criticism: Bourgeois (p. 148, nn. 2 and 3) remarks that Maire O'Neill played Nora as a woman "who knows the world sexually," whereas Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh stressed her "poetic desire"; on the contrary, Greene and Stephens (p. 153) say the latter's interpretation infuriated the audience, which would suggest that she emphasized the sexual aspect, and that Molly Allgood /Maire O'Neill/ "toned down the heroine's sexual ebullience and emphasized her simple humanity."

seems to have some foundation in that she has already spoken of her discontent with Dan; but, again, this is not to be taken as connoting the sexual, because she has never been easily satisfied, even as a child.

In describing her reason for marriage - security - another facet of Nora's character is suggested: her fear of old age:

> What way would I live and I an *old* woman if I didn't marry a man with a bit of a farm, and cows on it, and sheep on the back hills? /Italics added/(49)

Michael immediately considers the economic aspect of marriage, but Nora continues:

> I do be thinking in the long nights it was a big fool I was that time, Michael Dara, for what good is a bit of a farm with cows on it, and sheep on the back hills, when you do be sitting, looking out from a door the like of that door, and seeing nothing but the mists rolling down the bog, and the mists again, and they rolling up the bog, and hearing nothing but the wind crying out in the bits of broken trees were left from the great storm, and the streams roaring with the rain?(49)

Nora regrets her marriage not merely because of her choice of partner but also because of her environment. She considers only the unfavourable aspects of the glen, a place of perpetual mist where even the trees cannot flourish.

Michael does not understand her and is uneasy because he has "heard tell it's the like of that talk you do hear from men, and they after being a great while on the back hills."(49) Nora's talk is in keeping because she, too, has been "a great while" in the shadow of the glen. Now she reveals that she, like so many of Synge's heroines, constantly reflects on the passing of beauty and the approach of old age:[37]

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[37] She is not "a flighty girl" as contended by Gratton Freyer, "The Little World of J. M. Synge," *Politics and Letters*, I (Summer 1948), 9.

> Isn't it a long while I am sitting here in the winter, and the summer, and the fine spring, with the young growing behind me and the old passing, saying to myself one time, to look on Mary Brien who wasn't that height . . . , and I a fine girl growing up, and there she is now with two children, and another coming on her in three months or four . . . .(49-51)

The reference to child-bearing suggests that Nora's maternal drive, not merely her sexuality, is frustrated. All that Michael does is continue counting the money. Nora continues:

> And saying to myself another time, to look on Peggy Cavanagh, who had the lightest hand at milking a cow that wouldn't be easy, or turning a cake, and there she is now walking round on the roads, or sitting in a dirty old house, with no teeth in her mouth, and no sense, and no more hair than you'd see on a bit of a hill and they after burning the furze from it.(51)

" Nora," says Henn, "sees Peggy Cavanagh and Mary Brien as symbols both of the time that awaits her, and of the time that passes her by."[38] Again, all that Michael is concerned with is not Nora's unhappiness and fear of incumbent age but Dan's money. "That's five pounds and ten notes, a good sum, surely!"(51) he says, and promptly talks about marriage. Michael, whose lack of response to Nora's deepest feelings is no recommendation, wants to marry her for the same reason as she married Dan;[39] he has said enough to make her realize that he is of "the commonest sort of clay,"[40] a Dan Burke in embryo.[41] Nora experiences a certain relief after her husband's "death" - she believes that she is free now. Why should she subject herself to a life with someone who seems to be moving in the

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[38]Henn, p. 23. Later (p. 33) he says that these "shadow-figures," together with the one of Patch Darcy, "reach out into universality beyond the remote world of the glen."

[39]Cf. Bourgeois, p. 148; Henn, p. 32.

[40]Corkery, p. 125.

[41]Cf. Price, p. 122; Gerstenberger, p. 35.

same direction as him? One of the reasons she has for deciding to spurn Michael's proposal is her aversion to the notion of ageing:

> Why should I marry you, Mike Dara? You'll be getting old, and I'll be getting old, and in a little while, I'm telling you, you'll be sitting up in your bed -- the way himself was sitting - with a shake in your face, and your teeth falling, and the white hair sticking out round you like an old bush where sheep do be leaping a gap.(51)

This is Nora's picture of old age and, in particular, of Dan and of the man Michael will be. She understands that life with a younger man will not free her from the entrapment of time:[42] "God forgive me, Michael Dara, we'll all be getting old, but it's a queer thing surely."(53) Skelton observes that

> she does not think of marriage to a young man as being likely to produce children, but sees it as an abandonment of whatever youth and exuberance she has left.[43]

There is no indication that Nora is about to respond to Michael's gesture in putting his arm about her just before Dan sneezes. The young man turns to her for help: "Get me out of it, Nora, for the love of God. He always did what you bid him, and I'm thinking he would do it now."(53) Although Dan has been brooding on Nora's suspected infidelity, she evidently has a way with him.[44] She asks the tramp: "Is it

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[42]Bourgeois (p. 222) says that "Nora will not wed Michael Dara because old age will tarnish her beauty." But the reasons are that she is aware that he is a younger Dan Burke and that marriage will prevent neither from growing old.

[43]Skelton, p. 61. Johnston (p. 16), however, says that "the play offers no justification for any fear of old age."

[44]Corkery (p. 128) comments: "Here is a backward glance into the married life of the old man and the young wife for which nothing in either character prepares us. It is perhaps the only touch in the play with genuine human feeling in it." But he has disregarded Nora's assertion that she is a "hard woman. . . to please,"(49) implying a possible shrewishness in her.

dead he is or living?"(53) Howe[45] points out that Nora turns to him rather than to Michael. This implies that she realizes that Michael is incapable of handling the situation and also that she is conscious that he has little to offer her in any way. The tramp, who has refrained from interfering until now, suddenly defends Nora after Dan orders her to leave:

> It's a hard thing you're saying, for an old man, master of the house, and what would the like of her do if you put her out on the roads?(53)

This suggests his growing attraction to her; his sympathy with her moods and fears makes his final invitation to accompany him all the more credible. Dan taunts his wife, aggravating her agony by throwing back her own words:[46]

> Walk out now, Nora Burke, and it's soon you'll be getting old with that life, I'm telling you; it's soon your teeth'll be falling and your head'll be the like of a bush where sheep do be leaping a gap.(55)

When Nora eventually looks at Michael, all he can suggest timidly is "a fine Union[47] below in Rathdrum."(55) But Dan contradicts him with what seems to be grudging admiration: "The like of her would never go there."(55)[48] Dan envisages Nora's end but she retorts angrily with some of the spirit that has been suggested:

> What way will yourself be that day, Daniel Burke? What way will you be that day and you lying down a long while in your grave? For it's bad you are living, and it's bad you'll be when you're dead.(55)

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[45] Howe, p. 50 [46] Cf. Corkery, p. 126

[47] The workhouse; cf. Henn, p. 324.

[48] Cf. "The People of the Glens," CW II, 217: "In Wicklow, as in the rest of Ireland, the union, though it is a home of refuge for the tramps and tinkers, is looked on with supreme horror by the peasant. The madhouse, which they know better, is less dreaded."

Price remarks on the compassion of Nora's next words:[49]

> Yet, if it is itself, Daniel Burke, who can help it at all, and let you be getting up into your bed, and not be taking your death with the wind blowing on you, and the rain with it, and you half in your skin.(55)

Indeed, this wifely admonishment does seem compassionate but it is only superficially so. Is it not also guile? Nora does not want to sacrifice her domestic life, and her appearing concerned about his welfare, an attitude not evinced before, is not improbably an attempt to make Dan forgive her. He is not fooled: "It's proud and happy you'd be if I was getting my death the day I was shut of yourself."(55) The tramp proposes that Michael might take her, but she responds: "What would he do with me now?"(55) Skelton says that the tramp "acts as the focal sensibility of the play" and "forces Nora into full understanding of her situation by saying of Michael, 'Maybe himself would take her.'"[50] But Nora already knows that Michael, who is, after all, mainly interested in her money, could not live with her while she is still married. The tramp does not understand yet and says that the herd could give her "the half of a dry bed, and good food . . . ."(55)

When they both realize that they must leave the cottage, the tramp attempts to encourage Nora with the prospect of "a grand morning."(55) But she has no illusions about her future:[51] "What good is a grand morning when I'm destroyed surely, and I going out to get my death walking the roads?"(55) The tramp persists in his efforts to soothe her by pointing out the advantages of a life in the open.[52] In promising to take care

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[49]Price, p. 121. Henn (p. 28) says that Nora "has kept a half-humorous flicker of maternal tenderness for the old man."

[50]Skelton, p. 58. [51]Cf. Henn, p. 27.

[52]Price (p. 124) remarks that the influence of the environment upon both Nora and the tramp is intense, but they react in different ways: "Nora has never known any landscape except that

of her, he "blathers" about "grand evenings" and "wild nights" she will experience in escaping the monotony of her present existence; he tells her that she will not have to make herself old just by "looking on each day and it passing . . . by," and mentions the fine bird songs that will not be "talk of getting old" or like the sound of a wheezing old man. Nora is still not convinced however: "I'm thinking it's myself will be wheezing that time with lying down under the Heavens when the night is cold,"(57) she tells him, but she elects to go with the tramp (instead of by herself) because of his "fine bit of talk."

Corkery finds it hard to reconcile Nora's acceptance of the tramp's offer

> with the woman who a few minutes before could not brook the idea of growing old without a bit of a farm, and cows on it, and sheep on the back hills.[53]

He adds that "she takes to the road as if she had never indulged the Irish peasant's dream of stability and comfort."[54] But does she? Nora tries cunning to win her way back, and when she realizes the futility of this she predicts being "destroyed"

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which oppresses her. Against its power she has tried to build barriers: a home with Dan; later, friendship with Patch, with others, now with Michael. But all in vain: the marriage is barren in every sense; Patch has gone mad and died; Michael fails her; and lonely and horrified, she gropes against hostile forces in a seemingly endless gloom.

"The tramp provides the way out. He knows nature in her many different moods and settings, and through patient and ardent intercourse has achieved a certain harmony with her, in which wonder and awe are mingled with understanding and love." Cf. also Ellis-Fermor, p. 168.

[53] Corkery, p. 126.

[54] ibid. Cf. Price (p. 125) who disagrees with Corkery. Corkery (p. 127) says later, however: "In her we find no trace of this scorn for the peasant's dream of everlasting stability. What we do find is the dream itself, four square and well set."

while tramping around the countryside. On her leaving for the outside world, ironically under the tramp's protection, as earlier he sought hers to escape it for a while,[55] there is no indication that her desire for domestic security, for property, has diminished.

Greene and Stephens[56] say that Nora goes with dignity; but this quality is not evident as she defends her behaviour, assails Dan for his trick, and foresees nothing but wretchedness for him:

> You think it's a grand thing you're after doing with your letting on to be dead, but what is it at all? What way would a woman live in a lonesome place the like of this place, and she not making a talk with the men passing? And what way will yourself live from this day, with none to care you? What is it you'll have now but a black life,Daniel Burke, and it's not long, I'm telling you, till you'll be lying again under that sheet, and you dead surely.(57)

Dan, however, expects no hardship in life without Nora, and he and Michael are content to drink to each other's health.[57]

Critics have equated Synge's Nora Burke of The Shadow of the Glen with Ibsen's Nora Helmer of A Doll's House. Elizabeth Coxhead[58] says that the two Noras slam the door on the loveless marriage, and Malone[59] is equally mistaken in saying that they slam it on their husbands. A. E. Morgan[60] also notes a similarity between the two, but Lucas remarks more accurately that Nora, "like her namesake in Ibsen, walks out of house and home to liberty," but, he adds, "in this case, instead of marching out, she is driven out."[61] Donna Gerstenberger contends:

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[55] Cf. Lucas, op. cit., p. 186. [56] Greene and Stephens, p. 154.

[57] Cf. Johnston, pp. 14-15. Henn (p. 27) makes the point that convention is on Dan's side and Michael is relievêd to have escaped threatened violence and the obloquy of the seducer.

[58] Coxhead, p. 14. [59] Malone, op. cit., p. 149.

[60] A. E. Morgan, Tendencies of Modern English Drama (London: Constable, 1924), p. 159.

[61] Lucas, op. cit., p. 170.

> It is interesting to note . . . that Ibsen's _A Doll's House_, in which the heroine (also a Nora) rebels against a stereotyped role as wife and mother, challenged middle-class preconceptions about marriage in exactly the same way as Synge's play.[62]

Boyd, on the other hand, says:

> This is no "doll's house" whose door is banged by feminine revolt; Nora Burke is not an intellectual sister of her Scandinavian namesake. She is just a solitary woman, whose human instinct craves the adventure of freedom and youth.[63]

Weygandt compares Nora Burke with another woman in Ibsen - she "is in a way a peasant Hedda Gabler";[64] both are regarded as selfish and wilful, but they are also "fine women and human."[65]

Bourgeois can find "no clear explanation of the exact psychological motive why the glenswoman goes off with the tramp";[66] however, such a motive is not relevant. Cunliffe says, wrongly, that she goes off "by her own choice,"[67] and Barnett states that the tramp's lyricism "inspires her to break away from the hope of dull old age with her husband and lover."[68] On the contrary, Nora has no alternative but to go. It is quite clear: she

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[62] Gerstenberger, pp. 33-34. [63] Boyd, _Renaissance_, p. 321.

[64] Weygandt, op. cit., p. 168. [65] ibid., p. 175.

[66] Bourgeois, p. 153. But he says earlier (p. 151): "Tramp life . . . may be taken as expressive of the poetic revolt against settled existence, as the free escape into some ideal dreamworld of the artist who finds the daily fare of life unbearably insipid and wearisome." He also considers (p. 148) that Nora will enjoy her new kind of life.

[67] John W. Cunliffe, _English Literature in the Twentieth Century_ (New York: Macmillan 1934), p. 108. In _Modern English Playwrights_ (p. 139) Cunliffe says that Nora "is one of the most sympathetic examples of the rebellious woman of the modern drama . . . ."

[68] Pat Barnett, "The Nature of Synge's Dialogue," _English Literature in Transition 1880-1920_, X (1967) 120.

cannot help herself.[69]

Contrary to Una Ellis-Fermor's view, Nora experiences no reconciliation, no "conversion from the terrified repudiation of nature."[70] Donna Gerstenberger, who remarks that Nora has no choice, adds that she accepts her fate with the tramp, knowing "that however difficult this new world may be, it will be better than that she leaves behind";[71] but Nora is not at all certain that her "new world" will be a better one. The tramp is not "a password to happiness," as seen by Greene,[72] nor is Nora "susceptible to the romance of the open road."[73] Ann Saddlemyer notes that "in following the tramp, Nora is obeying a higher moral law, the call of her own nature";[74] but, in effect, Nora is obeying only Dan's order. Weygandt, who takes a more cynical view than most critics in this case, says that Nora's fate is ironic because she "but begins a new life, freer for the moment than her old life, but promising, in the end, only the old dull round."[75] Johnston is accurate in observing that Nora "escapes, yet she resents being turned out,"[76] and that she and the tramp

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[69]Cf. W. B. Yeats, Preface to The Well of the Saints, Essays and Introductions p. 305. Yeats says that Nora "does many things without being quite certain why she does them," and "she feels an emotion that she does not understand. . . . She is intoxicated by a dream which is hardly understood by herself, but possesses her like something half remembered on a sudden wakening."

In echoing Yeats, Henn (p. 28) remarks that "the complexity, the essential femininity of Nora's character is such that she herself does not understand it."

[70]Ellis-Fermor, p. 168. O'Connor (Robinson, p. 42) finds the allure of the scenery "middle-class"; supra, p. 21.

[71]Gerstenberger, p. 41.

[72]David H. Greene, "The Shadow of the Glen," PMLA, LXII, (March 1947) 235.

[73]ibid., p. 234.

[74]Ann Saddlemyer, "'A Share in the Dignity of the World': J. M. Synge's Aesthetic Theory," The World of W. B. Yeats, ed. Robin Skelton and Ann Saddlemyer, (Rev. ed.; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967), p. 216.

[75]Weygandt, op. cit., pp. 175-76. [76]Johnston, p. 15.

go off together, "not necessarily to a life of sin but to one of liberty."[77] A valid opinion comes from Ganz who comments that the tramp's rhetoric does not really answer any of the questions posed by Nora:

> When she and the tramp walk out of the cottage, leaving behind them the blind acquisitiveness of Dan and Michael, they cannot in reality walk out into the world of beauty where age and decay are obliterated by fine songs and the rising sun - that world which has been envisioned by the tramp. They can, in fact, only walk out on to the roads of Ireland where beauty, as Nora seems to recognize, is as much subject to destruction as it is in the cottage."[78]

Several critics have commented on the tragic element in The Shadow of the Glen. Boyd calls the play "a characteristic tragedy in miniature,"[79] and Howe talks about Nora's "personal tragedy."[80] Henn[81] points out that the play is neither comedy nor tragedy but has elements of both, Skelton[82] refers to it as tragi-comic, and Corkery says:

> In his elaboration of the character of the woman, Nora Burke, Synge introduced so many elements that were contrary to the spirit of the comedy that one scarcely knows whether to call his play tragic or comic.[83]

He adds that the melancholy in Nora "conflicts with the mood of the tale; it is this incongruity that keeps the play swinging between comedy and tragedy."[84] In disagreeing with Corkery, Price comments:

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[77] ibid., p. 14.

[78] Ganz, op. cit., pp. 60-61.

[79] Boyd, Renaissance, p. 321.

[80] Howe, p. 113; cf. also Howe, p. 58.

[81] Henn, p. 27.

[82] Skelton, p. 57. Cf. also Collins, op. cit., p. 291.

[83] Corkery, p. 124.

[84] ibid., p. 125.

> Actually it is . . . a firm and clear embodiment of a tension between two modes of being, and the gradations of mood are the inevitable result of the interplay of human and natural forces.[85]

Although Nora's situation is filled with pathos and she has scant hope for a better life, she does not attain tragic status; nothing is inevitable in her case, and she suffers no fall - only disappointment.

Nora can escape the restrictive, materialistic life around her only by changing her environment, but she lacks the courage to do this voluntarily.[86] She might be going to a life of liberty, but she is not keen on the terms. Domestic security in a different environment would be her ideal, not an existence with a crass man like her husband, nor an imperfect life in the open with the tramp, who can offer her companionship and teach her to appreciate the more pleasing features of the natural world, but who can give her no stability. By her being "a hard woman to please," neither possible outcome could satisfy her. She tells the tramp that "there's a small path only, and it running up between two sluigs where an ass and cart would be drowned."(41)[87] But it is Nora whose lot it is to find any alternative a "sluig" and, in effect, who cannot even start on her path to a life which will fulfil all her needs. She is too firmly bound to Dan's world, and one is left with the impression that if he were really dead and the tramp and Michael not in the glen, she would just watch "the mists rolling down the bog, and the mists again, and they rolling up the bog,"(49) until she, like Patch Darcy, would be driven mad.

Reid says that Nora "suffers precisely because she is

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[85] Price, p. 126.

[86] Her only decision at the end is the one to follow the tramp instead of leaving alone. She is not given the opportunity to decide whether to leave the cottage or not - that is decided for her.

[87] Henn, (p. 322) describes "sluigs" as mires or morosses - "that which swallows."

a sentient human being, not a mere animal."[88] This is true of the glenswoman who is revealed as a complex figure.[89] She is "driven to distraction by her own sensitiveness,"[90] but she is also something of "a piece of naturalistic flesh and blood,"[91] and is more than an unselfconscious woman going as her nature bids.[92] Were she "full of physical courage, daring and bold,"[93] she would have turned her back on Dan long ago. Nora lives in "the valley of the shadow of death"[94] and she fears its evil, but in going away from it she loses her desired position of "lady of the house." Her life has been described as one "dragging on between dream and dream,"[95] and she has been referred to as "the kind of woman who follows star after star, and ends in ditches."[96]

If one disregards Skelton's persistence in drawing attention to Nora's "moral frailty," his appraisal of her is valid:

> Synge was mortality-conscious and time-haunted, and his characters present that double standard with which we deal with our unique human awareness of temporality. Nora may be the most obvious vehicle for this theme in the whole of Synge's drama, largely because she has for so long denied herself dreams and toughened herself by a steady contemplation of the cramping facts. Unlike Deirdre of the Sorrows /sic/ she cannot accept a "crowded hour of glorious life" in confidence that its value must exceed

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[88] Alec Reid, "Comedy in Synge and Beckett," YS, No. 2 (1972) p. 89.

[89] Price (p. 119) says that "Nora embodies the tension between free emotional fulfilment and material security, between imaginative insight and everyday appearances (coupled always with a consciousness of the transience of youth and beauty) which is at the heart of Synge's life and work."

[90] Cf. W. B. Yeats, Preface to The Well of the Saints, Essays and Introductions, p. 300; supra, p. 82.

[91] Cf. Corkery, p. 125; supra, p. 82.

[92] Cf. Collins, op. cit., p. 291.

[93] Cf. Corkery, p. 125; supra, p. 82.

[94] Psalm 23:4.

[95] O'Connor, in Robinson, p. 42.

[96] Lucas, op. cit., p. 175.

> whatever price is to be paid for it. Unlike Maurya of _Riders to the Sea_, she cannot resign herself to her fate. Unlike the Douls in _The Well of the Saints_ she cannot lose herself in deliberate fantasy. Nor can she, like Sarah Casey of _The Tinker's Wedding_, rebel completely against the conventions, for her upbringing has not been that of a tinker girl. She has not the ruthless idealism of Pegeen Mike in search of her hero, for unlike Pegeen Mike she is sure that all her opportunities have been lost. She is, more than any other of Synge's heroines, a trapped and bitter figure, and the ironic note upon which the play ends is itself a tribute to that turbulence of spirit which gives her heroic stature even while it may also underline her moral frailty.[97]

Nora Burke is a woman, basically alone, who cannot find anybody to provide her with all her needs; she is sensitive to nature but cannot appreciate its finer aspects; she is conscious of the decay of beauty and the encroachment of age, but cannot stop the years passing by; when she finds companionship in herdsmen, they are parted; when she meets somebody who understands her fears, he cannot provide her with the roots she wants so earnestly; in the end, she loses initiative and must do as her husband orders, follow as the tramp requests. Nora Burke is defeated in all her attempts at a better life. She is a woman frustrated.

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[97] Skelton, p. 62.

Chapter 6

THE CUTE THINKING WOMAN AND THE MALICIOUS GIRL: MARY DOUL AND MOLLY BYRNE

> . . . I've heard tell there isn't anything like the wet south wind does be blowing upon us, for keeping a white beautiful skin - the like of my skin - on your neck and on your brows, and there isn't anything at all like a fine skin for putting splendour on a woman.(71)

Wet south wind or not, Mary Doul regards herself as the finest-looking woman in Wicklow, admired by the men and envied by the women, lovelier than the Beauty of Ballinacree or even Deirdre of the Sorrows. But this deluded, "dark" old woman, unaware of her blemishes,[1] is weather-beaten and ugly to the point of repulsiveness.

Mary's misplaced vanity is revealed for the first time when Martin complains about her tardiness, brought about by her occupation with her hair:

> You were that length plaiting your yellow hair you have the morning lost on us, and the people are after passing to the fair of Clash.(71)

Mary, however, answers glibly that they have not lost anything:

> It isn't going to the fair, the time they do be driving their cattle and they with a litter of pigs maybe squealing in their carts, they'd give us a thing at all. . . . It's well you know that, but you must be talking.(71)

Martin, deluded into believing that Mary is beautiful, cannot reconcile this to her voice and gibes at her good-humouredly:

> If I didn't talk I'd be destroyed in a short while listening to the clack you do be making, for you've a queer cracked voice, the Lord have mercy on you, if it's fine to look on you are itself.(71)[2]

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[1]Cf. Boyd, Contemporary, p. 99.

[2]Henn (p. 333), who finds the women's voices a constant theme, says that "cracked" has "overtones of insanity as well as of sound." But Martin is referring to nothing but Mary's voice here.

But Mary, quick to rationalize, explains that although her life is a bad one for the voice, it is a marvellous one for the skin. Martin, who now appears to doubt that his wife is comely, continues to tease her:

> I do be thinking odd times we don't know rightly what way you have your splendour, or asking myself, maybe, if you have it at all, for the time I was a young lad, and had fine sight, it was the ones with sweet voices were the best in face.(71)

Mary defends herself because the men continually compliment her on her looks and, she reminds Martin, "it was 'the beautiful dark woman,' they did call me in Ballinatone,"(73) but he counters with Molly Byrne's opinion that she is "little more than a fright."(73) Again she finds an excuse - Molly was jealous because Timmy the smith was praising her hair which Mary obviously regards as her main attraction. She believes only those who are kind to her:

> Ay, jealous, Martin Doul, and if she wasn't itself, the young and silly do be always making game of them that's dark, and they'd think it a fine thing if they had us deceived, the way we wouldn't know we were so fine-looking at all. /<u>She puts her hand to her face with a complacent gesture and smoothes her hair back with her hands.</u>/(73)

The irony is that Mary is deceived, not by the "young and silly" Molly but by the rest. She is convinced that she is lovely. Martin, who evidently has been told of his own good looks, desires visual confirmation - he is not as easily satisfied as his wife:

> I do be thinking in the long nights it'd be a good thing if we could see ourselves for one hour, or a minute itself, the way we'd know surely we were the finest man, and the finest woman, of the seven counties of the east. . . /<u>bitterly</u>/ then the seeing rabble below might be destroying their souls telling bad lies, and we'd never heed a thing they'd say.(73)

Martin's reference to "the seeing rabble below" reveals a certain tension between the sighted and the blind. The couple

are "united in the face of the rest of mankind,"[3] an impression endorsed by Mary who reprimands him for doubting:

> If you weren't a big fool you wouldn't heed them this hour Martin Doul, for they're a bad lot those that have their sight, and they do have great joy, the time they do be seeing a grand thing, to let on they don't see at all, and to be telling fools' lies, the like of what Molly Byrne was telling to yourself.(73)

Molly is a subject of contention. Martin, who points out that "she's a beautiful sweet voice,"(73) the opposite of Mary's, pensively considers her physical attributes: "It should be a fine soft, round woman, I'm thinking would have a voice the like of that."(73) Mary, shocked at his implied lust, puts forward her view:

> Let you not be minding if it's flat or rounded she is, for she's a flighty, foolish woman you'll hear when you're off a long way, and she making a great noise and laughing at the well.(73)

The blind woman shows some jealousy here, appearing to resent Molly, probably because of the unflattering things the girl has said about her; it is also suggested that she regards Molly as a rival. Mary talks "bitterly" of her "loud braying laugh," adding:

> Ah, she's a great one for drawing the men, and you'll hear Timmy himself, the time he does be sitting in his forge, getting mighty fussy if she'll come walking from Grianan, the way you'll hear his breath going, and he wringing his hands.(73-75)

Appropriately, Mary judges others on what she hears in referring to Molly's flirtatious nature. Martin, who observes that the men react differently to his wife, implies that they do not find her as attractive:

> I've heard him say a power of times, it's nothing at all she is when you see her at the side of you, and yet I never heard any man's breath getting uneasy the time he'd be looking on yourself.(75)

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[3] Price, p. 139.

The opposition here is between what is told and what is overheard. Martin cannot relate the two but Mary, as always, finds a reason for the discrepancy:

> I'm not the like of the girls do be running round on the roads, swinging their legs, and they with their necks out looking on the men.(75)

Although she describes herself as coy, even if she were not she could hardly romp about like the others, whom she disparages once more:

> Ah, there's a power of villainy walking the world, Martin Doul, among them that do be gadding around, with their gaping eyes, and their sweet words, and they with no sense in them at all.(75)

Martin agrees but admits that he has been told that "it's a grand thing to see a young girl walking the road,"(75) to which Mary responds by slighting the seeing once more:

> You'd be as bad as the rest of them if you had your sight, and I did well surely, not to marry a seeing man - it's scores would have had me and welcome - for the seeing is a queer lot, and you'd never know the thing they'd do.(75)

It is rather doubtful whether "scores" have desired Mary, even if they have praised her. She is either lying to make Martin value her even more, or, more likely, imagining that she is so admired, because she believes firmly in her attractiveness.

When Martin hears somebody approaching, Mary craftily advises hiding the pith in order to win sympathy and money, but their visitor is Timmy the smith, and Martin's explanation for not recognizing his footsteps is because the much-mentioned Molly is not with him, suggesting that the beggar listens for her. He comments:

> . . . It's a few times I've heard you walking up the like of that, as if you'd met a thing wasn't right and you coming on the road.(75)

Timmy, of course, has come to tell them about something that, according to him, is "right"; but he has really "met a thing

wasn't right," something the Douls realize only later.

On learning of the wonder to come "at the crossing of the roads,"(77) Martin objects,

> for it's ourselves have a right to the crossing roads and we don't want any of your bad tricks, or your wonders either, for it's wonder enough we are ourselves.(77)

The Douls, who believe that their blindness has made them the centre of attraction, disapprove of anything that could threaten their position;[4] it is here, too, that they would be most successful in begging.

The only "wonders" that Martin can think of concern murder and drink. Mary suggests the hanging of a thief, which would not be any joy to them because of their blindness. Skelton points out that the Douls "immediately think of the grotesque and gross excitements," and that "it is as if reality can only intrude upon them in terms of appetite and suffering."[5]

When Timmy mentions that Mary could see "a power hanged," she does not understand the implication:

> Well you've queer humbugging talk. . . . What way would I see a power hanged, and I a dark woman since the seventh year of my age?(79)[6]

Martin grows excited when Timmy tells them of the

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[4]In a letter of August 12, 1905, Synge explained to Max Meyerfield that "it's wonder enough we are ourselves" means "we are such fine-looking wonderful blind people that we are wonder enough for this place, and we don't wish you to do anything here that people would think of instead of us." "Letters of John Millington Synge. From Material Supplied by Max Meyerfield," Yale Review, XIII (July 1924), 694.

[5]Skelton, p. 96.

[6]Neither of the Douls has been blind since birth - Mary could see until she was seven and Martin had "fine sight" as a"young lad."(71) Bourgeois (p. 191) is mistaken in objecting to Martin's distinguishing "green bits of ferns,"(93) and recognizing Timmy "by the black of his head"(93) and Patch Ruadh by "his fiery hair."(96)

curative powers of water from the well at the grave of "the four beautiful saints,"(79) a story which the smith affirms:

> That's the truth, Martin Doul, and you may believe it now, for you're after believing a power of things weren't as likely at all.(79)

Among this "power of things" is the Douls' belief in their fine appearance.

Mary, who, unlike Martin, has appeared quite satisfied with being blind until now, reveals that she also wants sight. She has been contented with her affliction as long as no remedy has seemed possible, but now she puts forward a plan to get the water:

> Maybe we could send a young lad to bring us the water. I could wash a naggin bottle in the morning, and I'm thinking Patch Ruadh would go for it, if we gave him a good drink, and the bit of money we have hid in the thatch.(79)

Mary's "folk-theology" is implied here; she believes that anybody, holy or otherwise, can bring them the healing water.[7] Timmy explains:

> It'd be no good to be sending a sinful man the like of ourselves, for I'm told the holiness of the water does be getting soiled with the villainy of your heart, the time you'd be carrying it, and you looking round on the girls, maybe, or drinking a small sup at a still.(79)

Martin and the smith wrangle briefly but Mary tries to appease Timmy: "Is it yourself has brought us the water?"(81) she asks, still not understanding that he may not carry it, and is "overawed" on hearing that "a fine holy man . . . a saint of the Almighty God"(81) is bringing it. The Douls react differently.[8] Martin is more effusive and thinks of seeing: "And we'll be

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[7]Cf. Grace Eckley, "Truth at the Bottom of a Well: Synge's _The Well of the Saints_," _MD_, XVI (September 1973), 194.

[8]Cf. Corkery, pp. 172-73.

seeing ourselves this day. Oh, glory be to God, is it true surely?"(81) Mary is more concerned with being seen:

> Maybe I'd have time to walk down and get the big shawl I have below, for I do look my best, I've heard them say, when I'm dressed up with that thing on my head.(81)

Molly Byrne and Bride arrive, Martin recognizing the walk of the former who is filled with her own importance:

> God bless you, Martin. I've holy water here from the grave of the four saints of the west, will have you cured in a short while and seeing like ourselves.(83)

Timmy interrupts her, astonished that the saint has left the holy water with them, but Molly explains:

> The lads told him no person could carry them things through the briars, and steep, slippy-feeling rocks he'll be climbing above, so he looked round then, and gave the water, and his big cloak, and his bell to the two of us, for young girls, says he, are the cleanest holy people you'd see walking the world.(83)

Molly must be telling the truth - there is no other way they could have obtained the water. The saint's attitude appears rather naïve, especially in the light of Molly's malicious behaviour later, but, as Henn points out, this is "the conventional view of the goodness of virginity."[9] Mary believes she knows better: "Well, the saint's a simple fellow, and it's no lie."(83) This could also be a stab at Molly.

The girl gives Martin the can and both he and Mary shake it; it is notable that the water still "works" after this. Martin's thoughts immediately turn to women:

> Well, isn't it a great wonder the little trifling thing would bring seeing to the blind, and be showing us the big women and the young girls, and all the fine things is walking the world.(85)

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[9] Henn, p. 55.

The frivolous Molly indulges in byplay, putting the cloak on Martin to see how he would look as "a saint of the Almighty God."(85)[10] Timmy is uneasy in case the saint sees this, but she says "recklessly":

> How would he see us, and he saying prayers in the wood? /She turns MARTIN DOUL round./ Isn't that a fine holy-looking saint, Timmy the smith? /Laughing foolishly/ There's a grand handsome fellow, Mary Doul, and if you seen him now, you'd be as proud, I'm thinking, as the archangels below, fell out with the Almighty God.(85)

When the Douls see each other, they do "fall out" with themselves, with the villagers, and with the saint of the Almighty God.[11] There is dramatic irony as well as pathos in Mary's confident: "It's proud we'll be this day, surely."(87)

Molly, who persists in her fooling, asks Martin:

> Would you think well to be all your life walking round the like of that Martin Doul, and you bell-ringing with the saints of God?(87)

This leads to the first outright confrontation with Mary, who resents her interference, remarking on her stupidity in suggesting this as Martin is in no position to become such a man of God: "How would he be bell-ringing with the saints of God and he wedded with myself?"(87) Anyhow, Martin is more interested in worldly things and prefers an allegiance to "the beautiful dark woman of Ballinatone."(87) Molly is scornful,

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[10] Donna Gerstenberger (p. 60) remarks: "Perhaps the byplay which seems to be rather unnecessary stage business in the middle of this act may be an attempt on Synge's part to establish the theme of the meaninglessness of outward appearance, for Molly Byrne dresses blind Martin in the saint's robe and cruelly teases him about his fine appearance."

[11] Cf. Grace Eckley, op. cit., pp. 196-97.

and Martin admits that he knows little of Mary, being "destroyed this day waiting to look upon her face."(87) When he says plaintively that he has touched few faces "for the young girls is mighty shy,"(87) Mary mocks him, but with good humour as she is also excited about regaining her sight:

> Isn't it a queer thing the voice he puts on him, when you hear him talking of the skinny young-looking girls, and he married with a woman he's heard called the wonder of the western world?(87)

The derisive epithet "skinny" to describe the girls further reveals the vanity of Mary who allows no competition. Significantly, when Martin contemplates her qualities he mentions her yellow hair before "her white skin, and her big eyes are a wonder, surely."(87)

As they hear the saint approach, the byplay stops, and when he arrives the two pure maidens are standing "demurely."

Surprisingly, it is Martin, not Mary, who is troubled about appearances now: "Will he mind the way we are, and we not tidied or washed cleanly at all?"(89) But Molly explains that the saint is not concerned with such things.

Timmy introduces the couple, mentioning their cheerful raillery and happiness:

> . . . They do be always sitting here at the crossing of the roads, asking a bit of copper from them that do pass, or stripping rushes for lights, and they not mournful at all, but talking out straight with a full voice and making game with them that likes it.(89)

He is lying in order to help the Douls as he and Martin have quarrelled in the past few minutes, Mary has turned on Molly, and, when he arrived with the news, Martin put on "a begging voice."(75)[12]

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[12] Henn (p. 335) notes after this speech: "Synge emphasizes delicately from time to time the happiness of the couple before they recover their sight." This is evident but Henn disregards the falsities in this instance.

Martin becomes uneasy when the saint refers to them as "wrinkled and poor,"(89) but Timmy silences him, and the blind man and the man of God go into the church. The saint forbids the others to follow:

> Stay back where you are, for I'm not wanting a big crowd making whispers in the church. Stay back there, I'm saying, and you'd do well to be thinking on the way sin has brought blindness to the world, and to be saying a prayer for your own sakes against false prophets and heathens, and the words of women and smiths, and all knowledge that would soil the soul of the body of a man.(91)

The villagers as well as the Douls suffer from a blindness not physical: they cannot perceive the goodness of God and understand little of the spiritual - hence, their emphasis throughout the play on outer beauty rather than on the beauty of holiness and purity.[13] Double-meanings are implicit in this speech: the saint is a "false prophet" against whose interference Martin and Mary must fight later, not because he reveals God's will but because he uncovers a disagreeable world; the heathens are the Douls who upset the villagers by pointing out physical defects, whose life of the imagination the others cannot comprehend, and who finally thwart the saint; "the words of women and smiths" are those of Molly and Timmy in particular but also of the others who help build the Douls' illusions.

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[13]Grace Eckley (op. cit., p. 194) points out that "the Christian metaphor of the well, as Harold Bayley explains it, 'that Jesu is a Well, the Huel or Water of Salvation, the opener of blind eyes,' is not only totally lost on these blind folk of Leinster, but also the repeated structural insistence upon physical - not spiritual - beauty conveys the impossibility of their grasping abstractions." But she is mistaken in saying (p. 195) that "the saint himself fails in theology because he stresses the physical cure, not the spiritual one . . . ." The saint emphasizes both.

and who also taunt them; knowledge is not only that of sin but also that which the saint brings the Douls and which tarnishes the world they believe in. An explanation by Synge throws further light on this speech: he told Max Meyerfield that the phrase "the words of women and smiths"

> is almost a quotation from an old hymn of Saint Patrick. In Irish folklore smiths were thought to be magicians, and more or less in league with the powers of darkness.[14]

Grace Eckley says that the "greatest - 'deepest' - irony" in the play is the saint's speech:

> The statement reveals, as did "St Patrick's Breastplate" from which it derives, that the saint believed such spells, opposing his own, actually existed. The saint does not, as Patrick did not when his work demanded that he drive out demons, seek to oppose pagan belief in such, but the actuality of the spell itself, an actuality which in Christianity was recognized as the work of the devil. /Her italics./[15]

The villagers comment on the saint's attributes, but Molly does not consider that his holiness combines with the special quality of the water from the well of the saints in making the cure possible:

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[14]Synge "Letters of John Millington Synge," op. cit., p. 695; letter of August 12, 1905. Ann Saddlemyer (CW III, 90) quotes the lines in "St Patrick's Breastplate," translated by Whitley Stokes, John Strachan and Kuno Meyer:

I summon to-day all these powers between me and those evils,
Against every cruel merciless power that may oppose my body and soul,
Against incantations of false prophets,
Against black laws of pagandom,
Against false laws of heretics,
Against craft of idolatry,
Against spells of women and smiths and wizards,
Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and soul.

[15]Grace Eckley, op. cit., p. 196.

> It'd be a fine thing if some one in this place could pray the like of him, for I'm thinking the water from our own blessed well would do rightly if a man knew the way to be saying prayers, and then there'd be no call to be bringing water from that wild place, where, I'm told, there are no decent houses, or fine-looking people at all.(91) [16]

The last part of the speech underlines her material outlook and that she values outer, rather than inner, beauty.

Timmy is perturbed because he fears Martin's reaction on seeing his wife:

> I'm thinking it was bad work we did when we let on she was fine-looking, and not a wrinkled wizened hag the way she is.(91-93)

He blames himself and the others for building the Douls' illusions, but Mat Simon puts forward an opposing view: "Why would he be vexed, and we after giving him great joy and pride, the time he was dark?"(93) [17]

Molly is described at this point as sitting in Mary's seat and tidying her hair. This is symbolically significant as well as dramatically important, implying that beauty is transient and decay awaits all. Molly, who has yellow hair, is occupied with it just as Mary, in whose place she is, is always busying herself with what she believes is her own fair hair. This suggests that the lovely girl will become like the ugly woman. Molly remarks cynically:

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[16] Grace Eckley (op. cit., p. 194), who is mistaken in ascribing this speech to Mary, says that "this judgment puts prayers on the level of incantations."

[17] Henn's remark (p. 335) that in these two speeches "are the two essences of the situation," is valid regarding the dual nature of illusion present throughout the play: it brings both happiness and misery.

> If it's vexed he is itself, he'll have other things now to think on as well as his wife, and what does any man care for a wife, when it's two weeks, or three, he is looking on her face?(93)[18]

Mat Simon misguidedly agrees with her:

> That's the truth now, Molly, and it's more joy dark Martin got from the lies we told of that hag is kneeling by the path, than your own man will get from you, day or night, and he living at your side.(93)

The vain girl becomes abusive at this personal remark:

> Let you not be talking, Mat Simon, for it's not yourself will be my man, though you'd be crowing and singing fine songs if you'd that hope in you at all.(93)

Martin's first words on being cured are in praise of God - he is ecstatic:

> Oh, glory be to God, I see now surely. . . . I see the walls of the church, and the green bits of ferns in them, and yourself, holy father, and the great width of the sky.(93)

In a brilliant touch, as he passes Mary he is described as "drawing a little away from her as he goes by."(93) At first sight he is repulsed by her, even without realizing who she is.

On thinking Molly to be Mary he waxes lyrical, thanking God for allowing him this sight:

> Oh, it was no lie they told me, Mary Doul. Oh, glory to God and the seven saints I didn't die and not see you at all. The blessing of God on the water, and the feet carried it round through the land. The blessing of God on this day, and them that brought me the saint, for it's grand hair you have /she lowers her head, a little confused/,

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[18]Corkery (p. 176, n. 1) says that Synge should not have allowed Molly this expression: "A young, fine-looking girl, about to be married, would not allow herself to think such a thought, let alone express it." But the first indication that Molly and Timmy have decided to marry comes only in Act II (109); there is no evidence that they are betrothed now. Even her next speech where she tells Mat Simon that he will not be her man does not imply that she has been won by Timmy yet.

> and soft skin, and eyes would make the saints, if they were dark awhile and seeing again, fall down out of the sky. . . . Hold up your head, Mary, the way I'll see it's richer I am than the great kings of the east. Hold up your head I'm saying, for it's soon you'll be seeing me, and I not a bad one at all.(95)[19]

Molly shatters this delusion in an instant: "Let you keep away from me, and not be soiling my chin."(95) The word "soiling" alone implies that she not only regards herself as too good for him but also is revolted at his touch. The confused beggar turns to another handsome girl, Bride, remarking, as usual, first on her hair and then on her skin, but again he is rejected. The third girl who is less lovely suggests in turn that he is not attractive:

> I never seen any person that took me for blind, and a seeing woman, I'm thinking, would never wed the like of you.(95)

The people, gleeful at this, jeer at Martin and delight in his bewilderment. In retorting, he calls attention to their appearance:

> Where is it you have her hidden away? Isn't it a black shame for a drove of pitiful beasts the like of you to be making game of me, and putting a fool's head on me the grand day of my life? Ah, you're thinking you're a fine lot, with your giggling, weeping eyes, a fine lot to be making game of myself, and the woman I've heard called the great wonder of the west. . . .(97)

At which point the "great wonder of the west" herself enters.

They face each other and are stunned. Molly

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[19] Price (p. 141) remarks: "What power and irony are here: the culmination of Martin's happiness is at the same time the culmination of his delusion; his fervent thanksgiving and admiration are soon to turn to bitter recrimination and curses when the truth becomes known and he realizes that far from being richer than the great kings of the east he is poorer than he ever was."

contemptuously reminds him of his conduct to her: "Go up now and take her under the chin and be speaking the way you spoke to myself." She is gratuitously cruel:[20]

> You're not saying a word, Mary. What is it you think of himself, with the fat legs on him, and the little neck like a ram?(97)

The couple regain their wits and yell at each other in horror and repugnance. When Martin derisively tells Mary that

> if it was yourself you seen, you'd be running round in a short while like the old screeching madwoman is running round in the glen,(97)

she immediately mentions her hair, her big eyes and her white skin, but is devastated by his reply:

> Your hair, and your big eyes, is it? . . . I'm telling you there isn't a wisp on any grey mare on the ridge of the world isn't finer than the dirty twist on your head. There isn't two eyes in any starving sow, isn't finer than the eyes you were calling blue like the sea.(97)

She becomes frantic at having her illusions torn away like this and cannot accept that she, "the beautiful dark woman," is an ugly hag. The saint is equated with the devil:

> It's the devil cured you this day with your talking of sows; it's the devil cured you this day, I'm saying, and drove you crazy with lies.(99)

They sling insult upon insult at each other, each more vicious than the last, with Martin, in laying the entire blame for the deception on Mary, forgetting the role of the villagers:[21]

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[20]Weygandt (op. cit., p. 175) seems to overlook the degree of her nastiness in referring to her as "a fine white girl, young, and as teasing us an ox-eyed and ox-minded colleen may be . . . ." Howe (p. 41) also underplays this attribute in saying: "Molly Byrne is beautiful, but shallow like a little dancing stream."

[21]Cf. Price, p. 142; Skelton, p. 97.

> Isn't it yourself is after playing lies on me, ten years, in the day, and in the night, but what is that to you now the Lord God has given eyes to me, the way I see you an old, wizendy hag, was never fit to rear a child to me itself.(99)

His censure reveals that theirs has been a barren marriage. The distraught Mary counters that she "wouldn't rear a crumpled whelp"(99) like Martin:

> It's many a woman is married with finer than yourself should be praising God if she's no child, and isn't loading the earth with things would make the heavens lonesome above, and they scaring the larks, and the crows, and the angels passing in the sky.(99)

The last images underline the reference to the devil curing Martin - the beggar is bound for hell; were he to have any offspring they would follow him, thus making "the heavens lonesome above." The climax of their invective comes in Martin's vision of shrieking people praying for blindness on seeing Mary:

> Go on now to be seeking a lonesome place where the earth can hide you away, go on now, I'm saying, or you'll be having men and women with their knees bled, and they screaming to God for a holy water would darken their sight, for there's no man but would liefer be blind a hundred years, or a thousand itself, than to be looking on your like.(99)[22]

Mary threatens to strike him - "Maybe if I hit you a strong blow you'd be blind again, and having what you want"(99)[23] - and Martin is about to thrash her when Timmy intervenes, calling on respect for the "saint above saying his prayers."(99) But the cured man is in too much of a rage to show deference:

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[22]Price (p. 142) observes that these words are unconsciously ironic and prophetic - they hint that the Douls will go blind again and will welcome their blindness.

[23]It is when Martin is losing his sight that Mary does hit him.(119)

> What is it I care for the like of him? [Struggling to free himself.] Let me hit her one good one for the love of the Almighty God, and I'll be quiet after till I die.(99)

It is this same "love of the Almighty God" that has cured him.

The saint comes forward asking whether their minds are troubled with joy or "their sight uncertain the way it does often be the day a person is restored."(99) Timmy explains that just the opposite condition has caused the conflict:

> It's too certain their sight is, holy father, and they're after making a great fight, because they're a pair of pitiful shows.(101)

The man of God tries to pacify Martin and Mary who hate each other because of what they see and because of what they are:

> May the Lord who has given you sight send a little sense into your heads the way it won't be on your two selves you'll be looking - on two pitiful sinners of the earth - but on the splendour of the Spirit of God, you'll see an odd time shining out through the big hills, and steep streams falling to the sea. For if it's on the like of that you do be thinking, you'll not be minding the faces of men, but you'll be saying prayers and great praises, till you'll be living the way the great saints do be living, with little but old sacks, and skin covering their bones.(101)

The saint, who perceives the spirit of God in nature,[24] turns to the people, telling them,

> who have seen the power of the Lord, be thinking on it in the dark night, and be saying to yourselves it's great pity, and love he has, for the poor, starving people of Ireland.(101)

But it is when Martin and Mary are blind, when they are living in their own "dark night," that they apprehend "the splendour of the Spirit of God," as described by the saint; only it is through their imagination.[25]

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[24] Cf. Ellis-Fermor, pp. 167-68.

[25] Cf. Skelton, p. 97.

Mary Doul appears only briefly in the second act which concentrates on her husband who, working for Timmy, complains about bad pay and little food. The two men quarrel and Martin compares his present life to that when he was blind:

> . . . It's more I got a while since, and I sitting blinded in Grianan, than I get in this place, working hard, and destroying myself, the length of the day.(103)[26]

He insults Timmy, refers to his red nose and watering eyes, and says that he thinks "it's well for the blind don't be seeing the like of them grey clouds driving on the hill."(105) Timmy asks: "Is it turning now you are against your sight?"(105) The question is ambiguous, implying both that Martin resents his sight and also that he is losing it. The smith adds that "it's a power the saint cured lose their sight after a while - it's well you know Mary Doul's dimming again,"(105) which leads one to question the validity of the saint - saints do not have "half-cures" or perform temporary miracles.

To her husband's discomfort Mary passes and Timmy is amused because Martin starts working. The smith remarks on this but Mary pretends not to notice Martin, asking "_stiffly_": "Of what is it you're speaking, Timmy the smith?"(107) The Douls have stopped talking to each other, and Mary walks out proudly.

Martin observes that his wife cannot go two days without looking at him, but Timmy scoffs:

> Looking on your face is it? And she after going by with her head turned the way you'd see a sainted lady going where there'd be drunken people in the side ditch singing to themselves.(107)

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[26]Cf. the Blind Beggar's remark in Yeats's _The Cat and the Moon_: "There is many gives money to the blind man and would give nothing but a curse to a whole man." W. B. Yeats, _The Collected Plays_ (2nd ed:, London: Macmillan, 1952), p. 463.

There is irony both in the mention of the "sainted lady," as a true saint would not pass by in such a way, and in the comparison of Mary with such a person. Martin looks after her, revealing that he is the one who seems to be missing companionship, but he denies that she left him voluntarily: "You know rightly, Timmy, it was myself drove her away."(109)

Timmy remarks that he and Molly, who is seen approaching, are to be married by the saint. Martin, who wants to be alone with the girl, offends him again by drawing attention to his appearance, and Timmy replies:

> She's no call to mind what way I look, and I after building a house with four rooms in it above on the hill. . . .[27] But it's a queer thing the way yourself and Mary Doul are after setting every person in this place, and up beyond to Rathvanna, talking of nothing, and thinking of nothing, but the way they do be looking in the face. . . . It's the devil's work you're after doing with your talk of fine looks, and I'd do right, maybe, to step in, and wash the blackness from my eyes.(111)

The "devil's work" of the Douls has been caused by the saint's work, which appears to have been wholly unsuccessful regarding the villagers: they have not washed the spiritual blackness from their eyes, are concerned with comeliness rather than with inner well-being, and have been made to see themselves more clearly but not in the way intended by the saint.

Unlike Mary, Martin retains an illusion:[28] he believes that he can find happiness with a lovely-looking girl - "Timmy's odious young fiancée,"[29] Molly Byrne. In starting to court her, Martin flatteringly tells her:

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[27]Molly seems to be marrying Timmy for material reasons, just as Nora married Dan Burke for property. Cf. CW II, 49; supra, pp. 90-91, 95. This contrasts with Mary and Martin's marriage which is based on a need of companionship. Cf. Henn, p. 339; Gerstenberger, p. 60.

[28]Cf. Price, p. 147.

[29]Coxhead, p. 17.

. . . Every time I set my eyes on you, I do be blessing the saints, and the holy water, and the power of the Lord Almighty in the heavens above.(111)

Molly answers snidely: "I've heard the priests say it isn't looking on a young girl would teach many to be saying their prayers."(111) She has no sympathy when he tells of his frustration while blind:

> That should have been a queer time for an old wicked coaxing fool to be sitting there with your eyes shut, and not seeing a sight of girl or woman passing the road.(113)

Martin persists:

> . . . It's of many a fine thing your voice would put a poor dark fellow in mind, and the day I'd hear it, it's of little else at all I would be thinking.(113)

The girl tries to put the lustful old man down with a remark that she must know will hurt him: "I'll tell your wife if you talk to me the like of that."(113) Martin objects to being reminded of Mary "or that day either at Grianan,"(113) which gives Molly an opportunity for another malicious comment: "I was thinking it should be a fine thing to put you in mind of the day you called the grand day of your life."(113) Martin's reply sums up his and Mary's reaction on being cured; they were woken from an almost blissful world of the imagination to a wretched one of stark, unavoidable reality:

> Grand day, is it? /Plaintively again, throwing aside his work, and leaning towards her./ Or a bad black day when I was roused up and found I was the like of the little children do be listening to the stories of an old woman, and do be dreaming after in the dark night that it's in grand houses of gold they are, with speckled horses to ride, and do be waking again, in a short while, and they destroyed with the cold, and the thatch dripping maybe, and the starved ass braying in the yard?(113)

When Martin suggests once more that his thoughts dwell on her constantly, Molly becomes interested in this "queer

talk" of the "little, old, shabby stump of a man."(115) He tells her of his being fooled by Timmy's lies into "feeling love, and talking love, with the old woman,"(115) which leads Molly to say "half invitingly":

> It's a fine way you're wanting to pay Timmy the smith. . . . And it's not his lies you're making love to this day, Martin Doul.(115)

He answers by picturing a vagrant life for the two of them. Molly is tickled, for she knows that she is so much more attractive than Mary:

> Well, isn't it a queer thing when your own wife's after leaving you because you're a pitiful show you'd talk the like of that to me?(115)

Martin, who is hurt has a swift rejoinder, reminiscent of her remark to Mat Simon:

> It's a queer thing maybe for all things is queer in the world. . . . But there's one thing I'm telling you, if she walked off away from me, it wasn't because of seeing me, and I no more than I am, but because I was looking on her with my two eyes, and she getting up, and eating her food, and combing her hair, and lying down for her sleep.(115)

Molly, "interested, off guard," repeats her view: Wouldn't any married man you'd have be doing the like of that?"(117) Martin, who has her attention now, points out his qualities:

> I'm thinking by the mercy of God it's few sees anything but them is blind for a space. /With excitement./ It's few sees the old women rotting for the grave, and it's few sees the like of yourself /he bends over her/, though it's shining you are, like a high lamp, would drag in the ships out of the sea.(117)

He sees Molly as a haven of happiness, but she is frightened by his passionate outpouring. He gets carried away, stressing that his blindness has given him the opportunity to look at

things clearly - his sight has not been staled by habit,[30] and he can see Molly as she really is. The girl, who is "half-mesmerized," tries to get away from the passionate old man, believing him to be going mad: "It's the like of that talk you'd hear from a man would be losing his mind."(117)

Again Martin appeals to her to go off with him:

> It'd be little wonder if a man near the like of you would be losing his mind. Put down your can now, and come along with myself, for I'm seeing you this day, seeing you, maybe, the way no man has seen you in the world. . . . Let you come on now, I'm saying, to the lands of Iveragh and the Reeks of Cork, where you won't set down the width of your two feet and not be crushing fine flowers, and making sweet smells in the air. . . . (117)[31]

These fine words only serve to scare Molly further and she cries out for help. She is not able to appreciate the world that Martin conjures up for her, being bound both to Timmy and to her materialistic outlook. But then, with such a figure as Martin enticing her, she cannot be blamed for rejecting his vision and his values. She turns to Timmy, telling him of Martin's conduct:

> Look on him now, and tell me if that isn't a grand fellow to think he's only to open his mouth to have a fine woman, the like of me, running along by his heels.(119)

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[30] Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 60.

[31] Corkery (p. 170) says that Martin makes love to Molly "with such an intensity and passion as makes the love scenes in The Playboy seem the merest play-acting."

The beggar is reminiscent of Yeats's "Wild Old Wicked Man":

"I have what no young man can have
Because he loves too much.
Words I have that can pierce the heart,
But what can he do but touch?"

W. B. Yeats, The Collected Poems (2nd ed.; London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 357. Cf. Henn, p. 337.

But Martin has done more than merely "open his mouth"; he has poured his soul into his words to win Molly, whom he regards as the only one who could give him joy.

Timmy is amazed: "Oh, the blind is wicked people, and it's no lie."(119) But Martin is not blind now. The smith and the girl are blind to his imaginative powers, to his dreams.

Mary enters, and Martin implores Molly:

> Let you not put shame on me, Molly, before herself and the smith. Let you not put shame on me and I after saying fine words to you, and dreaming . . . dreams . . . in the night.(119)

As his sight fails noticeably, he staggers to Mary and trips over Molly's tin can, filled with water from the village well. The wheel has turned full cycle and he clutches his wife, needing her aid now that he can barely see. But she, who is not blind yet, hits him across the face with a sack:[32] "I see you a sight too clearly, and let you keep off from me now."(119) Mary angrily rejects him; Molly delightedly betrays him:

> That's right, Mary. That's the way to treat the like of him is after standing there at my feet and asking me to go off with him, till I'd grow an old wretched road woman the like of yourself.(119)

Mary is prepared for the girl's malice this time and batters her verbally:

> When the skin shrinks on your chin, Molly Byrne, there won't be the like of you for a shrunk hag in the four quarters of Ireland. . . . It's a fine pair you'd be surely!(119)

Like so many of Synge's women, Mary is aware of the transience

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[32]Price (p. 151) holds that Mary's action confirms "that actuality is brutal and inhuman," and that it impresses, as it were, "upon the physical parts the same terrible truth that has just ravaged the mind and imagination. There exist few more searching instances in drama of Man's inhumanity to Man than Mary's swipe and Molly's words . . . ." This seems to be taking interpretation of this act a bit too far.

of beauty, and continues to rant at Molly, disparaging her present features while predicting that she will be a beldame to surpass all others in vileness:

> It's them that's fat and flabby do be wrinkled young, and that whitish yellowy hair she has does be soon turning the like of a handful of thin grass you'd see rotting, where the wet lies, at the north of a sty. . . . Ah, isn't it a grand thing for the like of your make to be setting fools mad a short while, and then to be turning a thing will drive off the little children from your feet.(121)

And before anybody can answer, Mary goes off in triumph.

"Oh, God protect us, Molly, from the words of the blind,"(121) gasps Timmy; both Mary and Martin have made them open their eyes to the grosser side of reality. Skelton observes that Timmy

> is not asking protection from curses only, but from the strange and vivid light those words shed upon human affairs. He sees that the dream is a dangerous thing to all, including the dreamer if he should once be awoken.[33]

The smith orders Martin off, and the dimming man turns to Molly in despair. But she vilifies him and gives him lewd advice:

> Go off now after your wife, and if she beats you again, let you go after the tinker girls is above running the hills, or down among the sluts of the town, and you'll learn one day, maybe, the way a man should speak with a well-reared civil girl the like of me.(123)

This diatribe certainly does not come from the lips of a "well-reared civil girl." Timmy threatens Martin and closes the forge door on him as he goes blind.[34] Martin prays to God to blight him as well as them so that he will see them "screeching in hell":

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[33]Skelton, p. 99.

[34]Howe (p. 136) says that when Timmy closes the door on Martin, his action secures "with perfect justice an emotional effect that is familiar - the people inside in the warm glow, and the one person shut outside."

It's not blind I'll be that time, and it won't be hell to me I'm thinking, but the like of Heaven itself and it's fine care I'll be taking the Lord Almighty doesn't know. (123)[35]

Martin and Mary go blind not because of sin but because of the cure being inadequate. Synge stressed this point in writing to Meyerfield on August 21, 1905:

I agree with you that the way I have treated their going blind again is open to criticism, but if I had taken the motive that their blindness was a punishment, I would have got out of the spirit of the play, or have fallen into needless complications or commonplaces so I passed lightly over the matter as it was not really essential to what is most important in the play.[36]

The setting of the third act is the same as that of the first, except that briers fill the gap in the wall. This symbolizes the Douls' knowledge of their true condition, as distinct from the space in their self-conception earlier. Just as they cannot escape from the saint through this gap but must find another way out, so they must find new illusions to overcome reality once more.

Mary, who, unlike her husband, praised neither God nor his saint on being cured, dolefully uses His name in her blindness which she finds worse now being unaccustomed to it:

Ah, God help me. . . . God help me, the blackness wasn't so black at all the other time as it is this time and it's destroyed I'll be now, and hard set to get my living working alone, when it's few are passing and the winds are cold. . . . I'm thinking short days will be long days to me from this

[35]Synge wrote to Meyerfield on September 1, 1905: "At the end of Act II you are right in supposing that Martin wishes to deceive God, his theology - folk-theology - is always vague and he fears that even in Hell God might plague him in some new way if he knew what an unholy joy Martin has found for himself." Yale Review, XIII, 698.

[36]ibid., p. 697.

> time, and I sitting here, not seeing a blink, or hearing a word, and no thought in my mind but long prayers that Martin Doul'll get his reward in a short while for the villainy of his heart. It's great jokes the people'll be making now, I'm thinking, and they passing me by, pointing their fingers, maybe, and asking what place is himself, the way it's no quiet or decency I'll have from this day till I'm an old woman with long white hair and it twisting from my brow. /She fumbles with her hair, and then seems to hear something./(125)

She is lonely, but does not say that she is missing Martin; this is implied, however, in her mention of others asking where he is - she, too, would like to know. She fears others making fun of her, and, as so often with Mary, her thoughts turn to her hair.

Martin enters, cursing all in the name of the devil:

> The devil mend Mary Doul for putting lies on me, and letting on she was grand. The devil mend the old saint for letting me see it was lies. . . . The devil mend Timmy the smith for killing me with hard work, and keeping me with an empty windy stomach in me, in the day and in the night. Ten thousand devils mend the soul of Molly Byrne /MARY DOUL nods her head with approval/ and the bad wicked souls is hidden in all the women of the world.(125)

Martin admits that he is lonely and wants companionship - even that of his wife, notwithstanding his knowledge that she is no beautiful woman:

> It's lonesome I'll be from this day, and if living people is a bad lot, yet Mary Doul herself, and she a dirty, wrinkled-looking hag, was better maybe to be sitting alone with than no one at all. I'll be getting my death now, I'm thinking, sitting alone in the cold air, hearing the night coming, and the blackbirds flying round in the briars crying to themselves, the time you'll hear one cart getting off a long way in the east, and another cart getting off a long way in the west, and a dog barking maybe, and a little wind turning the sticks.(125-27)

This dismal and desolate picture reflects Martin's state of mind.[37] Mary is not afraid of being by herself but he, who fears losing

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[37] Cf. Price, p. 152.

his senses, is "destroyed with terror and dread,"(127) noticeably when Mary sighs. She is at an advantage because he has given himself away and she knows that he would welcome her. Martin touches her hand, grows terrified and confused, and misses the path:

> My road is lost on me now! Oh, merciful God, set my foot on the path this day, and I'll be saying prayers morning and night, and not straining my ear after young girls, or doing any bad thing till I die.(127)

In his new predicament, Martin turns to God, but in crying out that he will not listen for girls, he betrays that even now he is thinking about them and is aware that his thoughts are sinful. Mary reveals herself at last, pulling him up indignantly: "Let you not be telling lies to the Almighty God."(127) She knows her husband's failings.

Martin recovers "with immense relief"(127) at finding that the hand is Mary's, but she retorts ironically:

> There's a sweet tone in your voice I've not heard for a space. You're taking me for Molly Byrne, I'm thinking.(127)[38]

She knows that he is not, but cannot resist this dig. "Well, sight's a queer thing for upsetting a man,"(127) Martin comments aptly. A few month's vision has not only led to his being uncertain in his blind state, but has also caused their whole world to be turned upside down. He says that he will regain control soon, to which Mary, who is the more offensive in this scene, replies ironically once more: "You'll be grand then, and it's no lie."(127) Martin, who is described as "sitting down shyly," mentions that Mary is also blind, but she continues to taunt him:

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[38] Henn (p. 338) remarks that "this moment, that another dramatist might have made sentimental, the beginning of a reconciliation, is cancelled by Synge's irony. Man and wife proceed to attack each other."

> If I am I'm bearing in mind I'm married to a little dark stump of a fellow looks the fool of the world, and I'll be bearing in mind from this day the great hullabaloo he's after making from hearing a poor woman breathing quiet in her place.(127)

Martin reminds his wife that she is no better looking than he is:

> And you'll be bearing in mind, I'm thinking, what you seen a while back when you looked down into a well, or a clear pool, maybe, when there was no wind stirring and a good light in the sky.(129)

Instead of faltering or continuing to attack him, Mary tells of being delighted on seeing her reflection:

> I'm minding that surely, for if I'm not the way the liars were saying below I seen a thing in them pools put joy and blessing in my heart.(129)

And "she puts her hand to her hair again." Martin is convulsed at her remark:

> God help you, Mary Doul, if you're not a wonder for looks, you're the maddest female woman is walking the counties of the east.(129)

Mary, who rebukes him, accepts that she is "a wrinkled poor woman is looking like three scores, maybe, or two scores and a half,"(129) as Martin describes her, but she denies that she is lying about being joyful. In explaining why, she puts forward her vision:

> For when I seen myself in them pools, I seen my hair would be grey, or white maybe in a short while, and I seen with it that I'd a face would be a great wonder when it'll have soft white hair falling around it, the way when I'm an old woman there won't be the like of me surely in the seven counties of the east.(129)

The holy water destroys Mary's original illusion, but the water in the pool helps her create another image of herself.[39] If she

[39] Grace Eckley (op. cit., p. 197) deviates somewhat from the subject in saying: "The cleansing, restorative, and preservative powers of water are, indeed, world-wide; and Synge combines in

cannot be beautiful and young-looking, she can be magnificent when old. Her imagination, which saves her from despondency and from defeat by harsh facts, enables her to create this new illusion, and she turns to her hair, always her chief pride while blind, for a source of fresh vanity.[40]

Martin cannot but admire his wife: "You're a cute thinking woman, Mary Doul, and it's no lie."(129) The ingenious woman agrees "triumphantly" - now she can attract attention once more:

> I am surely, and I'm telling you a beautiful white-haired woman is a grand thing to see, for I'm told when Kitty Bawn was selling poteen below, the young men itself would never tire to be looking in her face.(129)

Martin tries to adopt his wife's fantasy for himself, but she will not allow him such consolation, telling him contemptuously:

> In a short while you'll have a head on you as bald as an old turnip you'd see rolling round in the muck. You need never talk again of your fine looks, Martin Doul, for the day of that talk's gone for ever.(129)

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this one play the symbols of holy water on the eyes and reflective water in a pool to develop his preference for confronting one's fate in one's own fashion and in a short, full life - his form of the myth of the fountain of youth - rather than prolonging a weary, wasted life." She is mistaken in adding (pp. 197-98): "Having been sprinkled with the holy water, Martin and Mary Doul take the 'journey into the self' and, like Deirdre and Naisi, or Nora Burke and the tramp, will make their choices on that highly individual basis." The "journey into the self" does not come only after the miracle - Mary especially is self-centred throughout, with the holy water having nothing to do with this attribute.

[40] Mary is like the old tramp in "The Vagrants of Wicklow" (CW II, 203): "All his pride and his half-conscious feeling for the dignity of his age seemed to have set themselves on this long hair, which marked him out from the other people of this district; and I have often heard him saying to himself, as he sat beside me under a ditch: 'What use is an old man without his hair? A man has only his bloom like the trees; and what use is an old man without his white hair?'" Cf. Howe, pp. 114-15; Bourgeois, p. 185; Corkery, pp. 157-59.

But Martin also needs to build an image of himself as a striking figure, and seems hurt at her brutal depiction:

> That's a hard word to be saying, for I was thinking if I'd a bit of comfort, the like of yourself, it's not far off we'd be from the good days went before, and that'd be a wonder surely. But I'll never rest easy, thinking you're a grey beautiful woman, and myself a pitiful show.(131)

Mary has no compassion on him now that she is content with her own illusion. She attempts to humiliate him, pointing out his physical defects, but in so doing gives him the idea he needs:

> I can't help your looks, Martin Doul. It wasn't myself made you with your rat's eyes, and your big ears, and your griseldy chin.(131)

He "rubs his chin ruefully, then beams with delight," and a fancy is born:

> I've this to say, Mary Doul. I'll be letting my beard grow in a short while - a beautiful, long, white, silken, streamy beard, you wouldn't see the like of in the eastern world. . . . Ah, a white beard's a grand thing on an old man, a grand thing for making the quality stop and be stretching out their hands with good silver or gold, and a beard's a thing you'll never have so you may be holding your tongue.(131)

Mary's help is unintentional, but it underlines Martin's dependence upon her to make his own dream possible.[41] And it is Martin's presence that stimulates Mary to complete her dream.[42]

Once her husband is able to match her in inspired fantasy, Mary is delighted:

> Well, we're a great pair, surely, and it's great times we'll have yet, maybe, and great talking before we die.(131)

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[41]Cf. Ellen Douglass Leyburn, op. cit., p. 87.

[42]Cf. Price, p. 153.

She is looking forward to their life together, the building of illusions and squabbling,[43] and laughs not only at the bright future depicted, but also at themselves. Her comment reveals her awareness that they are only talking themselves into believing in their coming beauty. It is suggested that she knows that they are fooling themselves.

That it is early spring is in keeping with the couple's present mood: they experience a rebirth of vivid imagination which leads to illusion and joy. This is further significant in the light of the play opening in late autumn, when the Douls have been following a relatively contented life for years; the second act takes place in winter, when they are miserable and their illusions have been smashed.[44]

Reunited in all ways, Martin and Mary cheerfully regard their surroundings, emphasizing the gaiety and sweetness of the sounds and smells,[45] as they are carried away on a wave of lyricism:[46]

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[43] Synge wrote to Meyerfield on September 23, 1905, explaining that by "great talking," Mary "means that they will have a good time talking and quarrelling with each other . . . ." Yale Review, XIII, 700.

[44] In noting that the season of the first act is late autumn, Henn (p. 333) says that he does not think any symbolism is intended.

[45] Cf. Howe, p. 42; Strong, p. 33; Henn, p. 339.

[46] Donna Gerstenberger (pp. 60-61) says that Martin and Mary easily become part of the sighted world with all its attention turned selfishly inward; only when their blindness returns do they once again become a part of the outward world: "With the sense of sight gone, they see the world about them in a way lost to the sighted world." [Her italics.] She adds: "They live through all their senses except that self-centring one they have lost; and, with their regained awareness of the world around them, and the vision which they now share, it is little wonder they refuse the saint the healing that would take this world from them again." This holds true except that sight does not make Mary more self-centred; in fact, it is only when she is blind that she can dream about herself without the distraction of the outside world.

MARY DOUL. There's the sound of one of them twittering yellow birds do be coming in the spring-time from beyond the sea, and there'll be a fine warmth now in the sun, and a sweetness in the air, the way it'll be a grand thing to be sitting here quiet and easy, smelling the things growing up, and budding from the earth.

MARTIN DOUL. I'm smelling the furze a while back sprouting on the hill, and if you'd hold your tongue you'd hear the lambs of Grianan, though it's near drowned their crying is with the full river making noises in the glen.(131-33)

At the height of their pleasure, "a faint sound of a bell is heard." The saint is returning, and the Douls are dismayed. They know that another miracle would mean torment, not salvation,[47] thus the reason for Mary's incongruous cry: "The Lord protect us from the saints of God!"[48] When they decide to run off, Martin expresses doubt at finding his way but Mary reveals her confidence in him:

> You'd find the way, surely. You're a grand man the world knows at finding your way if there was deep snow itself lying on the earth.(133)

They are frustrated, however, as "there's a tree pulled into the gap,"(133) and Martin bemoans their predicament:

> It's hard set I am to know what would be right. And isn't it a poor thing to be blind when you can't run off itself, and you fearing to see?(133)

Almost in tears at this, Mary once more betrays her awareness that she is deluding herself:

> It's a poor thing, God help us, and what good'll our grey hairs be itself, if we have our sight, the way we'll see them falling each day, and turning dirty in the rain?(135)

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[47] Cf. Price, p. 154.

[48] This counterpoises Timmy's "Oh, God protect us, Molly, from the words of the blind"(121); supra, p.132. Cf. Grace Eckley, op. cit., p. 195.

In creating her second dream despite her recent sighted condition, Mary has to deny the basis of actuality. She knows that another cure will force the ineluctable world of reality on her again and destroy her vision of splendour. In time, when she believes that she no longer looks as she does now, she will be convinced that she is beautiful, but to see her grey hairs falling would shatter any fancy of long white tresses.[49] Her mask of illusion, therefore, is "consciously resumed, as the best way to go on living."[50]

They try to hide behind a bush, and when Mary asks Martin whether he thinks the others will see them, he replies:

> I'm thinking they can't but I'm hard set to know, for the lot of them young girls, the devil save them, have sharp terrible eyes, would pick out a poor man I'm thinking, and he lying below hid in his grave.(135)

Appropriately, such a young girl, Molly, does discover them. This comment worries Mary: "Let you not be whispering sin, Martin Doul, or maybe it's the finger of God they'd see pointing to ourselves."(135) Martin answers astutely: "It's yourself is speaking madness, Mary Doul, haven't you heard the saint say it's the wicked do be blind?"(135) Before curing Martin, the saint told the villagers to consider "the way sin has brought blindness to the world."(91) Martin does think of this spiritual blindness here. He implies that the girls are wicked and will not be able to see "the finger of God";[51] but they have excellent eyesight. Mary, however, interprets this as referring to the physical, and

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[49]Howe (p. 40), who considers that "there is nothing for the symbolists in The Well of the Saints," but adds that "symbolism may be forced upon any work of art," says of this speech: ". . . You may think, if you choose, of the superiority of the imaginative life over that of the reason, and find in the remark all that is to be found in the prophetic books of Blake."

[50]Williams, op. cit., p. 191.

[51]Cf. his speech: "Ten thousand devils mend the soul of Molly Byrne . . . and the bad wicked souls is hidden in all the women of the world."(125)

says: "If it is you'd have a right to speak a big terrible word would make the water not cure us at all."(135) Martin's reply is noteworthy:

> What way would I find a big terrible word, and I shook with the fear, and if I did itself, who'd know rightly if it's good words or bad would save us this day from himself?(135)

Skelton comments:

> This, both comic and pathetic, points to the central concern of the play. When the value systems of men are in conflict with each other, then the imposing of "blessings" by one group upon another may result in hardship and confusion of mind. . . . The "do-gooder" may do evil by bringing new problems into lives that were previously under-privileged but harmonious.[52]

The saint arrives with the others, and Timmy, with all good intentions, interferes, asking him to have pity on the Douls. On being found, Martin asks: "What is it you want, Timmy, that you can't leave us in peace?"(137) It is their peace of mind that is most threatened by the prospect of another miracle. The saint gives the dejected pair horrifying information - they face the prospect of permanent sight:

> It's many a time those that are cured with the well of the four beauties of God lose their sight when a time is gone, but those I cure a second time go on seeing till the hour of death.(139)

After the Douls try in vain to get away, Martin explains that they do not want their sight restored. The saint, who suggests that Martin's mind has gone, cannot understand his plea:

> I never heard tell of any person wouldn't have great joy to be looking on the earth, and the image of the Lord is thrown upon men.(139)

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[52]Skelton, pp. 99-100.

Martin refutes this, mentioning his sight of the saint's bleeding feet and the villainy of Molly:

> That was great sights maybe. . . . And wasn't it great sights seeing the roads when north winds would be driving and the skies would be harsh, and you'd see the horses and the asses and the dogs itself maybe with their heads hanging and they closing their eyes.(141)

This contrasts vividly with his and Mary's picturing of their surroundings just before hearing the saint's bell. With eyesight, they see the unpleasant only. Timmy and Mat Simon are impressed, but Molly, who tells the saint to "speak up . . . and confound him now,"(141) is not. The saint puts forward his view:

> Did you never set eyes on the summer and the fine spring in the places where the holy men of Ireland have built up churches to the Lord, that you'd wish to be closed up and seeing no sight of the glittering seas, and the furze is opening above, will soon have the hills shining as if it was fine creels of gold they were, rising to the sky?(141)

But Martin counters with his and Mary's glorious world of the imagination:

> Isn't it finer sights ourselves had a while since and we sitting dark smelling the sweet beautiful smells do be rising in the warm nights and hearing the swift flying things racing in the air . . . , till we'd be looking up in our own minds into a grand sky, and seeing lakes, and broadening rivers, and hills are waiting for the spade and plough.(141)

The villagers cannot understand this fantasy: Mat Simon laughs, Patch Ruadh thinks he is mad, Molly Byrne says he is lazy "and not wishing to work, for a while since he was all times longing and screeching for the light of day."(141) Martin turns to her:

> If I was, I seen my fill in a short while with the look of my wife, and of your own wicked grin, Molly Byrne, the time you're making game with a man.(143)

Reacting to Martin's invective, Molly says that the saint should leave him blind - which is what he desires. But

Timmy upsets this by his plea:

> Cure Mary Doul, your reverence, who is a quiet poor woman never said a hard word but when she'd be vexed with himself, or with the young girls do be making game of her below.(143)

Martin is defiant:

> You will not, holy father! Would you have her looking on me, and saying hard words to me, till the hour of death?(143)

He knows that if Mary sees him as he really is, she will not spare him her scolding tongue. This suggests again that the Douls realize that their vision of beauty will be no more than a dream.

Mary, the initiator of the fantasy, who has remained quiet throughout this altercation, appears less adamant than Martin, saying "doubtfully":

> Let us be as we are, holy father, and then we'll be known again as the people is happy and blind, and we'll be having an easy time with no trouble to live, and we getting half-pence on the road.(143)

Molly opposes her:

> Let you not be raving. Kneel down and get your sight, and let himself be taking half-pence if he likes it best.(143)

There is no evidence that Molly's meddling here is caused by ill will; she shows common sense but not perception in believing that sight would benefit Mary.

Timmy tells the blind woman that nobody will aid her if she chooses to be blind, but it is only when Mat Simon plays on her wifely jealousy that she becomes "half persuaded":[53] "If you had your sight you could be keeping a watch that no other woman came near to him at all."(143) She falters under the combined pressure of all the people, but is described as looking uneasily

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[53] Cf. Henn, p. 339.

at Martin, as if she knows she should not yield: "Maybe it's right they are, and I will if you wish it, holy father."(145) Mary is swayed by these demands because nobody refutes her new image of herself directly - the dispute concerns the wisdom of her decision, and here she lacks Martin's stubbornness; she has firmness of fantasy only and is unable to act forcibly. It takes all of Martin's wiles and strength to prevent a reversion to their unhappy sighted state, and he pushes the saint away roughly, condemning his unwelcome interference:

> Keep off yourself, holy father, and let you not be taking my rest from me in the darkness of my wife. . . . What call have the like of you to be coming in where you're not wanted at all, and making a great mess with the holy water you have and the length of your prayers? [Defiantly.] Go on, I'm saying, and leave us this place on the road.(145)[54]

When the saint persists, Martin becomes wildly agitated, frantically flinging himself down and clinging to his wife. At last Mary responds to his desperate conduct and rebuts the saint's temptation:

> Leave him easy, holy father, when I'd liefer live dark all times beside him, than be seeing new troubles now.(147)

The saint brooks no rejection from her, however. Martin is dragged off screaming, but he calls on all his cunning to win himself into favour, whining to be cured as well, in order to "see when it's lies she's telling and be looking out day and night upon the holy men of God."(147) The saint takes pity on him and explains why the Douls, particularly Martin, are different:

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[54]Henn (p. 55) says: "This is the eternal protest of the common man against the right of the celibate to pronounce on love and marriage." But there is nothing in Martin's speech to suggest this.

> Men who are dark a long while and thinking over queer thoughts in their heads, aren't the like of simple men, who do be working every day, and praying, and living like ourselves . . . .(147)

It is because of these "queer thoughts" that Martin dashes the can from the saint's hand.[55] Mary's fantasy delivers the couple from the misery of blindness; Martin's action saves them from the curse of sight.

As the people turn against him, Martin expresses his belief in the individual's right to choose his own way of life.[56] The Douls' choice is a life of blindness in which they smell, hear and imagine the beautiful while not being bothered by disagreeable sights:[57]

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[55] Bourgeois (pp. 191-92) finds this action "utterly untrue to the Irish nature." But Corkery (p. 169) takes a contrary view: "We may then, as Irishmen, accept with an easy conscience Martin Doul's flinging aside of the holy water. The action springs directly out of the character of the man, as also out of the nature of the situation: Martin Doul is an unspiritual creature: the repercussions that might follow from an act of impiety have no existence for him. What is really expressed in the action is not his contempt for holy things, but the tyranny of his imaginings over himself. To the world of blindness he will, at any cost, cleave, his adventuring in the world of light having had such disastrous consequences."

[56] Skelton (p. 101) holds that The Well of the Saints "expresses more distinctly than any other of Synge's plays his belief in individualism, his distrust of conventional idealism, his relish of those that stand up for their right to their visions."

[57] Johnston's interpretation of The Well of the Saints is superficial. He says (p.24): "The point of the satire is not . . . that an opening of the eyes discloses a world that is universally loathsome, but merely that Martin and Mary Doul are each unfortunate in a particular spouse."

Weygandt (op. cit.,p.195), on the other hand, refers to the blindness as "the blessed self-delusion of mankind," and says (p. 196) that "The Well of the Saints is unquestionably, whether he [Synge] wills it or not, a symbol of man's discontent with things as they are, his preference in some things of the lie to the truth."

Donna Gerstenberger (p. 61) remarks that "the choice the

> We're going surely, for if it's a right some of you have to be working and sweating the like of Timmy the smith, and a right some of you have to be fasting and praying and talking holy talk the like of yourself, I'm thinking it's a good right ourselves have to be sitting blind, hearing a soft wind turning round the little leaves of the spring and feeling the sun, and we not tormenting our souls with the sight of the grey days, and the holy men, and the dirty feet is trampling the world.(149)

The others, who see Martin's action as a threat to their own lives, cast him out, but, even without their antagonism, he appears determined to go:

> Keep off now, and let you not be afeard; for we're going on the two of us to the towns of the south, where the people will have kind voices maybe, and we won't know their bad looks or their villainy at all.(149)

Mary, who has offended nobody, must leave with him. They need each other to establish belief in their dream and to protect themselves from any attempt to undermine it. The Douls are at a cross-road in their lives.[58] They were disillusioned and thwarted when following the path of sight and reality. Now, reconciled to the way of the blind and fancy, they find that this is the only way they can live with each other and, more importantly, with themselves.[59] They have changed in that they

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Douls finally make is not one between illusion and reality, but between illusions. The quality of the illusions provides the criterion for choice. Their gains in blindness are greater than their losses; their blindness is more honest than that of the self-deceiving sighted world. Nevertheless, their choice is one that denies the wholeness of the world, the totality of experience . . . ."

[58]The first and last acts are set at the "crossing of the roads," and this appears to be symbolic of Mary and Martin's condition. Henn (p. 339), however, does not think this is meant to carry any symbolic value.

[59]Ann Saddlemyer (p. 22) says: "Martin and Mary can regain their former happiness only by darkening their own minds once more, and this is not possible in the surroundings they themselves have made unbearable. For their disillusionment has created bitterness

are aware that they are deluding themselves now, and it is unlikely that they will ever desire sight again. But they have remained the same as they were before the miracle in that they continue to live in a dream-world of their own.[60]

But Mary is despondent. The woman who lives in a world of fantasy regarding her appearance has no illusions of the life that is in store for them. Nevertheless, she, too, stresses their right to lead their own kind of life:

> That's the truth, surely, and we'd have a right to be gone, if it's a long way itself, where you do have to be walking with a slough of wet on the one side and a slough of wet on the other, and you going a stony path with a north wind blowing behind.(149-51)

The reference to the sloughs is symbolic: Mary knows that if she deviates slightly, if she gains her sight once more or surrenders her dream, she will flounder and drown in a wave of disillusion.[61] The "stony" path also suggests that to keep their illusions they must bear the roughness of the way.[62]

The Douls leave with a certain triumph at having

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amongst those who had contributed to the creation - and destruction - of their former dream; this second dream must be more powerful still, first because they create it in spite of their surroundings and the knowledge of sight, thereby denying the roots of reality, second because they must seek a world in which they can live their dream, and the risk is death."

[60] Cf. O'Connor in Robinson, p. 44.

[61] Cf. Martin's conversation with Timmy: ". . . I do be thinking it should be a hard thing for the Almighty God to be looking on the world bad days, and on men the like of yourself walking around on it, and they slipping each way in the muck."(105)

Cf. also Nora Burke's speech: "You wouldn't find your way, stranger, for there's a small path only, and it running up between two sluigs where an ass and cart would be drowned" (III,41); supra, p. 105.

[62] Henn (p. 56) says: "Mary, like Nora of The Shadow, assents, though her woman's vision also is realistic; their paths will be wet and stony, 'with a north wind blowing behind.'" But he adds that Synge's reticence gives no symbolism, as a lesser poet might have done, to sloughs or rivers or winds."

thwarted the saint and the people, but Timmy predicts that with deep rivers ahead "the two of them will be drowned together in a short while, surely."(151) This is the chance they must take, however, if they are to remain contented with themselves. The end is also a victory for the others as they succeed in pursuing the conventional life they desire, and the blind will trouble them no more.[63] The saint, who remains composed throughout,[64] includes everybody in his final blessing:

> They have chosen their lot, and the Lord have mercy on their souls. /He rings his bell./ And let the two of you come up now into the church, Molly Byrne and Timmy the smith, till I make your marriage and put my blessing on you all.(151)

Bourgeois regards The Well of the Saints as "perhaps of all Synge's dramatic works the one in which we find embodied the truest expression of his pessimistic view, if not philosophy, of life."[65] The ending is pessimistic in that the two groups - the Douls on the one hand and the villagers on the other - are not and can never be reconciled. Mary and Martin are unable to accept the reality of the outside world; the sighted lack the sensibility to perceive the creative and compensatory world of the imagination without which the blind couple are lost;[66] members of both groups are not able to comprehend spiritual beauty. The Douls intend growing into ignorance of reality, "lapped in

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[63] Cf. Howe, p. 42.

[64] This is contrary to W. G. Fay's comment that "as The Well of the Saints took shape, I realized that every character in the play from the saint to Timmy the smith was bad-tempered right through the play . . . ." W. G. Fay and Catherine Carswell, The Fays of the Abbey Theatre. An Autobiographical Record (London: Rich & Cowan, 1935), pp. 167-68. The saint does speak or act "severely" (139, 143, 149) and "imperiously"(145) at times, but he never becomes angry. However, there is, admittedly, bad temper throughout most of the play.

[65] Bourgeois, p. 192.

[66] Cf. Coxhead, pp. 17-18; Saddlemyer, p. 23.

the security of their own dreams,"[67] but this they can only do without what Bourgeois calls "the tragic gift of sight."[68]

Henn, who notes the "cynicism, sexuality, and flirtatiousness"[69] of Molly who is "vain, silly, provocative by turns,"[70] says that she and Martin "are the most fully developed characters in the play."[71] Corkery is more accurate in saying that

> Timmy the smith, Molly Byrne, and the few others in the play, are brought in simply to carry on the action. Martin Doul and Mary Doul are the play.[72]

Molly is only secondary to Mary and in some ways a mere foil. Mary, an ugly woman, builds the fancy that she is, or will be, grand; Molly, a beautiful girl, embodies Martin's image of the most desirable woman,[73] with the appearance he has believed his wife to possess, but she is bound to reality. Both are concerned with their appearance, and both delight in taunting others, but Molly is the more malicious; unlike Mary, she is unnecessarily cruel.

Corkery points out the difference between Martin and Mary:

> The inner principle in Martin's character is out-going: he will touch other people, his dreams are of others: others he would enjoy. Mary's principle is self-centred: she will sit with her hands crossed, like an eastern deity, and, showing no sign, overhear the praises of those who cannot help admiring her. She is complacency itself.[74]

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[67] Corkery, p. 154. Cf. Henn, p. 56.

[68] Bourgeois, p. 183.

[69] Henn, p. 339.

[70] ibid., p. 52.

[71] ibid.

[72] Corkery, p. 173.

[73] Cf. Price, p. 146; Henn, p. 52.

[74] Corkery, p. 172. The only time she reflects on the world around her is when she hears "one of them twittering yellow birds"(131); supra, p. 140. Corkery (p. 162) points out that the Douls are "quaint and homely," but "there is in both, and more especially in Martin . . . a daemon which we do not laugh at." Cf. Price, p. 143; Saddlemyer, p. 22.

Mary is the most complacent of Synge's women characters. Her self-satisfaction stems from her belief in her beauty, whether in the present or the future, and she constantly rationalizes to reinforce the image of herself. Skelton remarks:

> It may be no accident that Mary Doul calls herself the wonder of the western world, for she is, in her struggle to assert her dignity and in her fantasies of pride, kin to the playboy of the western world who also had a vision of his dignity and found it conflicting with the actual.[75]

Mary Doul is a wrinkled and wizened hag, but she believes that she will be beautiful - and nobody will convince her otherwise. Her ability to adapt, to find compensation in her condition, is amazing. It is this quality that Martin Doul praises when he turns to his wife, now an ugly crone but soon, she tells him, an old woman glorious to behold, and says: "You're a cute thinking woman Mary Doul, and it's no lie.(129)

[75] Skelton, pp. 101-102.

Chapter 7

THE SQUABBLING DOXY AND THE DROUTHY OLD WOMAN: SARAH CASEY AND MARY BYRNE

> I asked him where most of the tinkers came from that are met with in Wicklow.
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> "They come from every part," he said. "They're gallous lads for walking round through the world. One time I seen fifty of them above on the road to Rathdangan, and they all match-making and marrying themselves for the year that was to come. One man would take such a woman, and say he was going such roads and places, stopping at this fair and another fair, till he'd meet them again at such a place, when the spring was coming on. Another, maybe, would swap the woman he had with one from another man, with as much talk as if you'd be selling a cow. It's two hours I was there watching them from the bog underneath, where I was cutting turf, and the like of the crying and the kissing, and the singing and the shouting began when they went off this way and that way, you never heard in your life.[1]

This, the Wicklow tinkers' custom in deciding on their partners for the coming year, is gone against by Sarah Casey, the young woman of Synge's farce, The Tinker's Wedding.[2]

On her entrance, Sarah appears a cheerful doxy, eager to see the priest, but her gaiety disappears as soon as Michael replies sardonically to her prediction of "his reverence" passing: "That'll be a sacred and a sainted joy!"(7) Sarah turns on him sharply, betraying a certain shrewishness: "It'll be small joy for yourself if you aren't ready with my wedding ring"(7) - hardly the tender comment of a dewy-eyed bride. She is irritated at his tardiness, and Michael's complaint at having to make the ring is followed by an equally loving remark: "If it's

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[1] "The Vagrants of Wicklow," CW II, 204.

[2] Cf. Bourgeois, p. 179: "The whole piece may be characterized as broad farce. No one but a stolid, pedantic critic will ever dream of taking it as a social document." On the other hand, Johnston (p. 26), who says that "the play is basically an expression of the mother-in-law joke," points out that in certain aspects The Tinker's Wedding "is not a wild Romany romp, but is a parody of a very middle-class play, with the thirst for respectability as the dominating motive."

the divil's job, let you mind it, and leave your speeches that would choke a fool."(7) Michael's retort reveals that they have been living together for some time, and that Sarah is the one who has taken the initiative in suggesting, even demanding, marriage; he is against it:[3]

> You to be going beside me a great while, and rearing a lot of them, and then to be setting off with your talk of getting married, and your driving me to it, and I not asking it at all.(7)

This wish for marriage seems to be a mere whim brought about by external elements.[4] Michael asks: "Can't you speak a word when I'm asking what is it ails you since the moon did change?"(7) "In the Spring," Tennyson writes, "a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love";[5] Sarah Casey's fancy turns to thoughts of holy wedlock.[6] She admits her irrationality, her repetition of "queer" underlining the oddity of the situation:[7]

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[3]Howe (p. 82) is mistaken in saying: "Michael Byrne, thinking it a mad thing that Sarah should be asking marriage of him, . . . /is/ content either way." Henn (p. 46) says that Michael "is prepared, stoically and stolidly, to go through with this whimsical marriage."

[4]It is not caused by religious belief. Bourgeois (p. 180) sees Sarah as an earnest Catholic; but she is not this at all. The tinkers might ejaculate with the occasional "God spare us" and "God help me," and Mary, especially, might offer her own blessings in the name of God quite freely, but this is as far as their religion goes.

[5]Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Locksley Hall," The Works (London: Macmillan, 1902), p. 98.

[6]Skelton (p. 76) remarks: "The unfixed nature of her life has made her free of moralities we associate with the ownership and protection of property, and given her, at this time of emotional hunger, a yearning for the greatest novelty she could experience, that of becoming part of an established moral and social order."

[7]Henn (p. 329) notes that, as in The Shadow of the Glen, "queer" includes the ideas of "fey" and "fantastic" as well as of "strange" and "peculiar."

> I'm thinking there isn't anything ails me, Michael Byrne; but the spring-time is a queer time, and it's queer thoughts maybe I do think at whiles.(7)

Michael, who stresses his unwillingness, realizes that this is only a crotchet, and asks Sarah:

> . . . What will you gain dragging me to the priest this night, I'm saying, when it's new thoughts you'll be thinking at the dawn of day?(7)

She is obviously the dominant partner and knows how to win him to her wishes. She teases him, playing on his jealousy by musing on a future with a wealthier tinker:

> It's at the dawn of day I do be thinking I'd have a right to be going off to the rich tinkers do be travelling from Tibradden to the Tara Hill; for it'd be a fine life to be driving with young Jaunting Jim, where there wouldn't be any big hills to break the back of you, with walking up and walking down.(9)[8]

Evidently, even tinkers have different social levels.[9] Sarah finds reason for dissatisfaction: the epithet "jaunting" in itself conveys an impression of the richer man not only having a vehicle to drive in but also being lively and gay; this contrasts with Sarah's life of trudging with the apparently morose and sluggish Michael.

Sarah's pleasure in her surroundings, her appreciation of nature, is evident in her telling Michael that she thinks of leaving him for Jaunting Jim "when there is a bit of sun in it, and a kind air, and a great smell coming from the thorn trees is above your head."(9) He points out that her present life agrees

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[8]Skelton (p. 73) says: "Although the phrase 'have a right to' is an Irish locution meaning, quite simply, 'should' or 'ought,' Synge utilizes its potential ambiguity here as he did that of the word 'destroyed' in Riders to the Sea. Sarah's 'right' is, of course, the right of any unmarried woman to choose her own male companions, and her words contain a threat which frightens Michael."

[9]Cf. Johnston, p. 26.

with her - she is "thriving" and "getting . . . good health."(9) After being nagged to hurry in making the ring, Michael shows that he is not as mild as he appears at first, threatening to hit Sarah "a great clout"(9) to rid her of her nonsense, just as he did when he "got" her. But this threat of violence cannot cow Sarah, who persists with her taunting:

> And a big fool I was too, maybe;[10] but we'll be seeing Jaunting Jim to-morrow in Ballinaclash, and he after getting a great price for his white foal in the horse-fair of Wicklow, the way it'll be a great sight to see him squandering his share of gold, and he with a grand eye for a fine horse, and a grand eye for a woman.(11)

Although money is Jaunting Jim's biggest attraction, he has another recommendation - he was the first to call Sarah, who enjoys flattery, the Beauty of Ballinacree. Michael tries to deflate her vanity and contemptuously takes up her reference to the wealthy tinker's appreciation of both horses and women:

> It's the like of that name they do be putting on the horses they have below racing in Arklow. It's easy pleased you are, Sarah Casey, easy pleased with a big word, or the liar speaks it.(11)

Sarah cannot be daunted, however. Her self-love shows itself again and, in a delightful flight of fancy, she describes her beauty:

> Liar, is it? Didn't you ever hear tell of the peelers followed me ten miles along the Glen Malure, and they talking love to me in the dark night, or of the children you'll meet coming from school and they saying one to the other, "It's this day we seen Sarah Casey, the Beauty of Ballinacree, a great sight surely."(11)[11]

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[10] This is reminiscent of Nora Burke's, "I do be thinking in the long nights it was a big fool I was that time, Michael Dara [to marry Dan Burke] . . ."(III,49); supra, p. 95. Unlike Sarah, however, Nora really seems to regret her decision.

[11] Sarah's speech in an earlier draft is even more far-fetched and hilarious: "Didn't you hear the grand word a

She continues to vex Michael with her vision of a better life with Jaunting Jim, a time when he will be "lonesome and cold"(11) without her.

On hearing the priest, Sarah prepares herself for the confrontation. She knows the value of good looks and shrewdly tells Michael to busy himself "keeping a great blaze, the way he can look on my face."(13) Her cunning also appears in her awareness that this is a propitious time to speak to the priest, who is "after drinking his glass,"(13) and in her instructing Michael to appear to be working, "for it's great love the like of him have to talk of work."(13)

The priest enters, and Sarah's histrionic ability comes to the fore.[12] She is described as speaking "in a very plausible voice"(13) and puts on a great show, playing the part of the respectable woman, talking about the weather, thanking the Almighty for it, and, by using her title, ensuring that he observes her lustrous loveliness. The priest is averse to being stopped by such a "holy pair"(13) - they can only want money - but Sarah gets her word in quickly:

> It isn't a halfpenny we're asking, holy father; but we were thinking maybe we'd have a right to be getting married; and we were thinking it's yourself would marry us for not a halfpenny at all; for you're a kind man, your reverence, a kind man with the poor.(13)

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gentleman said behind me this day and I leaving the Dargle? Didn't you ever hear of the peelers followed me ten miles along the Glen Malure, and they talking love to me in the dark night? And of the ladies by the sea-shore do be running this way and that way with their boxes and their pencils and their bits of paint, trying would they sketch my face and I letting on I wouldn't see them at all?"(10)

Skelton (p. 74) comments validly: "Disturbed by the 'change of the moon' at the time of the vernal equinox, she is filled with a rising excitement and sense of her own royal beauty, and expresses this in language that conflates folk-tale and ancient belief with the commonplace. She is being carried along upon one of the 'movements of May.'"

[12] Cf. Henn, p. 330.

He reveals his mercenary character immediately: "Is it marry you for nothing at all?"(13) Sarah shows hers, too: "It is, your reverence; and we were thinking maybe you'd give us a little small bit of silver to pay for the ring."(15) This is after she denies wanting even a halfpenny. She protests her poverty, and, when the priest speaks of her thievery, she takes out half a sovereign, "and it a nice shiny one with a view on it of the living king's mamma."(15) This close description would seem to reveal a certain lack of familiarity with money, an impression enhanced by Sarah's saying, truthfully or otherwise, that it has taken two years to get "that bit." She mentions that "the old woman, who has a great drouth"(15) will drink away the money, and plays on the priest's sympathy by crying in describing a life of suffering:

> It's two years we are getting the gold, your reverence, and now you won't marry us for that bit and we hard-working poor people do be making cans in the dark night, and blinding our eyes with the black smoke from the bits of twigs we do be burning.(15)

Her persistence and acting pay off, the priest lowers his price, and the old woman with the great drouth is heard. Michael tells them to stop talking about the marriage - he fears his mother's reaction:

> Whisht, now, the two of you. There's my mother coming, and she'd have us destroyed if she heard the like of that talk the time she's been drinking her fill.(17)

Mary enters singing tipsily:

> And when we asked him what way he'd die,
> And he hanging unrepented,
> "Begob," says Larry, "that's all in my eye,
> By the clergy first invented."(17)

Donna Gerstenberger says:

> The clergy and the law are linked in her song, which proves a prefiguration of the outcome of the action of the play and is a comment on its central conflict between the basic needs

> of man and those artifically imposed by custom, religious or social, in an attempt to control man's behaviour.[13]

Mary refuses to give the jug to Sarah, being quite capable of holding it, as it is hardly "frothing full to the brim"(17) after being in her hands. With a lot of drink in her, and only a little in the jug, she can afford to be hospitable, and offers some to the priest:

> God save your reverence. I'm after bringing down a smart drop; and let you drink it up now, for it's a middling drouthy man you are at all times, God forgive you, and this night is cruel dry.(17)

He reacts: "Let you not be falling to the flames. Keep off, I'm saying."(17) It is unlikely in such a frivolous play that this has a deeper meaning implying hell; in her drunken state, Mary is probably in danger of falling into Michael's fire.[14] She delightfully coaxes the priest to accept her charity, promising "not to tell":

> Let you not be shy of us, your reverence. Aren't we all sinners, God help us! Drink a sup now, I'm telling you; and we won't let on a word about it till Judgment Day.(17)

She shows no spurious reverence for him and stops singing her "bad, wicked song," not for fear of offending a worthy gentleman, but because "it's bad enough he is, I'm thinking, without ourselves making him worse."(19) Sarah, who cannot risk upsetting the priest, refers to Mary's state - with drink in her, nobody is safe from her "hospitality":

> Don't mind her at all, your reverence. She's no shame the time she's a drop taken; and if it was the Holy Father from Rome was in it, she'd give him a little sup out of her mug, and say the same as she'd say to yourself.(19)

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[13] Gerstenberger, p. 73. Cf. also Price, p. 132.

[14] Cf. Henn, p. 330.

When he accepts, Mary promptly blesses him and points out the differences in their stations:

> Isn't it a grand thing to see you sitting down, with no pride in you, and drinking a sup with the like of us, and we the poorest, wretched, starving creatures you'd see any place on earth?(19)

The priest turns to the old tinker woman for comfort, complaining about saying Mass with a dry mouth, running to the sick "and hearing the rural people again and they saying their sins."(19) Her answer is not merely sympathetic but is double-edged:[15] "It's destroyed you must be hearing the sins of the rural people on a fine spring."(19)

The old woman offers to console him in the way she knows best, now that most of the porter has been consumed: "Let you rouse up, now, if it's a poor, single man you are itself, and I'll be singing you songs unto the dawn of day."(19) But he scorns her, and, remembering his official tusk, recommends that she "that'll soon die"(21) pray to the Almighty God. Mary refutes his scolding with apt argument, and is childlike in her curiosity at wanting to hear him pray:

> If it's prayers I want, you'd have a right to say one yourself, holy father; for we don't have them at all, and I've heard tell a power of times it's that you're for. Say one now, your reverence; for I've heard a power of queer things and I walking the world, but there's one thing I never heard any time, and that's a real priest saying a prayer.(21)

Her joyous description of people praying is without ill-feeling: "I often heard the rural people making a queer noise and they going to rest."(21) It is all "queer" to her, and all she really wants is to have the priest do his turn for her amusement; she is making fun of him: "And I'm thinking it should be great game

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[15] ibid. Cf. also David Krause, "'The Rageous Ossean': Patron-hero of Synge and O'Casey," MD IV (December 1961) 285-86: "She absolves and damns him in the same breath."

to hear a scholar, the like of you, speaking Latin to the saints above."(21) The priest, understandably, is scandalized, and, as he rises to leave this jovial vagrant, she reverses their roles and asks him to stay, for then she will give him not only the "last sup from the jug"(21) but also her blessing. He condemns her:

> Leave me go, Mary Byrne; for I never met your like for hard abominations the score and two years I'm living in the place.(21)

But Mary is neither hurt nor proud at this, merely interested; she asks "innocently": "Is that the truth?"(21)

Sarah uses Mary's condition as an excuse for her to get married; marriage, she tells the priest, will stop her becoming like the old woman, and he agrees when she describes Mary as "an old, flagrant heathen."(21)

Mary, who considers that Sarah is flirting with their guest, protests:

> Let you be walking back here, Sarah Casey, and not be talking whisper-talk with the like of him in the face of the Almighty God.(21)

In her drunkenness, she adopts this disparaging attitude because she regards it both as wrong to indulge in "whisper-talk" with a man of the cloth and also as a lack of taste, for he is "the fearfullest old fellow you'd see any place walking the world."(23)[16] The fuddled Mary regards Sarah's spring madness as showing itself in "her fussing for marriage," and in her "making whisper-talk with one man or another man along by the road."(23) Michael implies that his doxy is something of a virago when he tells his mother to be quiet: "Whisht now, or she'll knock the head of you the time she comes back."(23)

Protest she might about Sarah's fickleness, but Mary

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[16]Cf. Denis Donoghue, "'Too Immoral for Dublin': Synge's The Tinker's Wedding'" Irish Writing, No. 30 (March 1955) p. 60.

understands why men are attracted to her. The old woman can still admire the beauty of the young:

> But if it's flighty you are itself, you're a grand handsome woman, the glory of tinkers, the pride of Wicklow, the Beauty of Ballinacree.(23)

She is, however, also trying to soften up Sarah, and says:

> I wouldn't have you lying down and you lonesome to sleep this night in a dark ditch when the spring is coming in the trees.(23)

But she is really worried about the others leaving her.

As her singing voice has gone, she offers to tell a story of queens; a sentimental story it probably would be, but one not devoid of the brutal. Mary knows that fairness does not necessarily indicate good temper - Sarah Casey is the obvious example. Although she loads the young woman with praise, she also digs at her, betraying "a pagan delight in vigour for its own sake":[17]

> I've a grand story of the great queens of Ireland with white necks on them the like of Sarah Casey, and fine arms would hit you a slap the way Sarah Casey would hit you.(25)

When she sees the young couple going off by themselves for a night of thieving, Mary shows that she is concerned, not with Sarah's, but with her own loneliness: "Where is it you're going? Let you walk back here, and not be leaving me lonesome when the night is fine."(25)

On being left by herself, the inner Mary is revealed. Superficially, she might be full of fun and nonsense, but, when alone, she is seen to be a sad, old woman. Mary intersperses much of her speech with references to nature, and in her soliloquy aptly draws on such images to describe her physical condition, which, of course, has been aggravated by drinking:

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[17] Price, p. 49.

> It's gone they are, and I with my feet that weak under me you'd knock me down with a rush, and my head with a noise in it the like of what you'd hear in a stream and it running between two rocks and rain falling.(25)

She realizes that her usefulness is almost at an end; she cannot help much and others will not listen to her. Mary knows that Sarah will assault her when she discovers that she has stolen the can (she is not afraid of her son), but physical harm is preferable to a night alone without any solace:

> What good am I this night, God help me? What good are the grand stories I have when it's few would listen to an old woman, few but a girl maybe would be in great fear the time her hour was come, or a little child wouldn't be sleeping with the hunger on a cold night? /She takes the can from the sacking, and fits in three empty bottles and straw in its place, and ties them up./ Maybe the two of them have a good right to be walking out the little short while they'd be young; but if they have itself, they'll not keep Mary Byrne from her full pint when the night's fine, and there's a dry moon in the sky. /She takes up the can, and puts the package back in the ditch./ Jemmy Neill's a decent lad; and he'll give me a good drop for the can; and maybe if I keep near the peelers to-morrow for the first bit of the fair, herself won't strike me at all; and if she does itself, what's a little stroke on your head beside sitting lonesome on a fine night, hearing the dogs barking, and the bats squeaking, and you saying over, it's a short while only till you die.(27)

In his essay on humour, Pirandello remarks that

> if you see an old woman with dyed hair and too much make-up, and she strikes you as ridiculous, you have only to go on thinking about her to find her sad.[18]

Such a person is Mary Byrne. An old layabout she is, and both Sarah and the priest remind her of her age. She is predisposed to drink, but it is suggested that she also drinks to drown her sorrows.[19] The priest can turn to his religion for comfort, Sarah

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[18] Luigi Pirandello, "Humour", cited by Eric Bentley, <u>The Life of the Drama</u> (London: Methuen, 1966), p. 312.

[19] Cf. Howe, p. 83.

and Michael have their youth and each other, but she has only songs and drink; she steals the can not out of jealousy or spite, but in an attempt to find her own bit of happiness.[20]

Mary does not brood too long, however. She is a mixture of the pathetic and the coarse, and exits singing the same song as before - "The night before Larry was stretched."[21] Like Larry, Mary wants to enjoy a full life for as long as she can, and, like him, it is doubtful whether she will be repentant when she dies.

In the morning, Sarah is at once full of the joy and excitement of her important day; she fusses about, telling Michael what to wear and how to behave. He is still not convinced that marriage is for the likes of him, and shows his concern with the commercial side of the venture: "Well, it's a power we're losing this time, and we not gaining a thing at all."(29) Sarah, who cannot be drawn, remains quite cheerful, but is anxious as she fears that Mary will learn about their plans and that her "godless talk" will turn the priest against them. Michael voices his concern that his mother will ridicule them: "She'll be crying out now, and making game of us, and saying it's

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[20]Cf. Ellen Douglass Leyburn, op. cit., p. 86; Price, p. 134. Donna Gerstenberger (p. 73) says: "She is the one character in the play to make the inevitable expression of Synge's sensitive characters of the essential loneliness of man, of the shortness of man's life, and of the transitory nature of his pleasures." Cf. also Corkery, p. 151.

[21]Mary has a kindred spirit in Mourteen, Synge's blind old guide on Aranmor; both combine earthiness with the lyrical. Synge relates how, inside an ancient dwelling, "old Mourteen took a freak of earthy humour and began telling what he would have done if he could have come in there when he was a young man and a young girl along with him.

"Then he sat down in the middle of the floor and began to recite old Irish poetry, with an exquisite purity of intonation that brought tears to my eyes though I understood but little of the meaning." _The Aran Islands_, _CW_ II, 56. Cf. Bickley, p. 25.

fools we are surely."(29) Both know that Mary, with her traditional tinker outlook, will regard wedlock as out of keeping for them.

The old woman wakes up, expresses surprise at seeing Sarah washing her face, and is suspicious as soon as the younger woman talks amiably to her - she is obviously not used to this sort of treatment. Mary welcomes the lovely day; unlike Sarah, she is not affected by any change in nature or of the moon:

> That's a sweet tongue you have, Sarah Casey; but if sleep's a grand thing, it's a grand thing to be waking up a day the like of this, when there's a warm sun in it, and a kind air, and you'll hear the cuckoos singing and crying out on the top of the hills.(31)

Sarah, who has succeeded so far in getting her own way with Michael and the priest, tries to coax Mary to beg money from the rich, but this time she is up against another stubborn woman who prefers to do what suits her. Mary finds reason not to take up Sarah's suggestion:

> When rich men do be driving early, it's queer tempers they have, the Lord forgive them; the way it's little but bad words and swearing out you'd get from them all.(31)[22]

Sarah loses her temper, never regaining it completely. Now Mary blames the moon for causing her "cranky" conduct, just as she believes it has brought about her other odd behaviour: "Oh! isn't she a terror since the moon did change,"(31) the old woman remarks, and craftily suggests selling the new can. Sarah accuses her of wanting drink, but Mary, "in a feigned tone of pacification," denies this:

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[22] Cf. Mary Doul's speech in The Well of the Saints: "It isn't going to the fair the time they do be driving their cattle and they with a litter of pigs maybe squealing in their carts, they'd give us a thing at all." (III, 71)

> It's not a drouth but a heartburn I have this day, Sarah Casey, so I'm going down to cool my gullet at the blessed well; and I'll sell the can to the parson's daughter below, a harmless poor creature would fill your hand with shillings for a brace of lies.(31)

She might not be able to join the young in chicken-stealing, but she is an old hand at beguilement.

The two women are at cross-purposes because neither will admit why she wants the can: Sarah does not want Mary to know the can is part of the price of a marriage ceremony; Mary just does not want Sarah to know that there is no can.

The bride-to-be has already displayed her shrewishness, but now she appears a real termagant, threatening her prospective mother-in-law with a hammer and terrifying her for a while. The old woman obeys her, accuses her of being mad, but at the same time tries to appease her by dropping a compliment: "Is it raving mad you're going Sarah Casey, and you the pride of women to destroy the world?"(33) Mary regains her composure and, being no match for Sarah in a hand-to-hand brawl, attacks her verbally:

> If I go, I'll be telling old and young you're a weathered heathen savage, Sarah Casey, the one did put down a head of the parson's cabbage to boil in the pot with your clothes . . . , and quenched the flaming candles on the throne of God the time your shadow fell within the pillar of the chapel door.(33)

These references to Sarah's slatternliness and wickedness[23] must be part of Mary's vivid imagination, and are evidence of the mischievous and malicious tongue which Sarah and Michael fear.

The priest, who enters during this tirade, suggests that Sarah was only fooling about marrying. She is angry and calls him to order: "Humbug is it! would you be turning back upon your spoken promise in the face of God!"(33) He tries to back down, pointing out that Sarah is a heathen:

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[23] Cf. Henn, p. 331.

> I'm thinking you were never christened, Sarah Casey; and it would be a queer job to go dealing Christian sacraments unto the like of you.(33)

Although the priest cannot marry an unbaptized person, he is as rapacious as any tinker and drives a hard bargain,[24] but he is willing to relinquish the prospect of a can and half a sovereign in order to avoid trouble; he even goes so far as to offer a shilling to Sarah if she remains living in mortal sin.[25]

Although annoyed, Sarah remains astute and attacks the priest at his weakest point - his fear of his clerical superiors. Her promises to complain "to the mitred bishop in the face of all,"(33) even if it means walking "to the city of Dublin with blood and blisters on my naked feet,"(33) conjures up the absurd image of her as a pilgrim on a holy mission.[26] The priest admits that he thinks he is taking a risk mixing with the tinkers; soon he discovers how right this belief is. Accustomed to tyrannizing one man, Sarah does not hold back from doing the same to another; "Be hasty then," she orders the priest, "and you'll have us done with before you'd think at all."(35)

Mary is amazed and dismayed when she realizes that her son and his doxy are going to marry. "Is it at marriage you're fooling again?"(35) she asks them. The "again" reveals that

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[24] Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 65. Henn (pp. 312-15) quotes the whole of Mary's song, "The night before Larry was stretched." The line immediately following the four sung by her is "to get a fat bit for themselves"(p. 313); in other words, religious offices and ceremonies are created for the benefit of the clergy. The priest's attitude seems to confirm this view and not that of Skelton (p. 77) who says that his insistence on getting his "bit of gold" and the tin can "may be less avarice than a desire to ensure that the tinkers take the whole affair seriously."

[25] Cf. Henn, p. 48; Johnston, p. 27.

[26] Skelton (p. 77) says that the priest, who is "susceptible to persuasion," is "first astonished and then moved" by this passionate assertion. But the priest is taken aback and daunted by the prospect.

Sarah's fancy is recurrent, but this seems the first time that she has actually demanded the sacrament.[27] Sarah is triumphant and, in trying to rationalize her desire, thinks along the lines of status, respectability and middle-class morality:

> I'll be married now in a short while; and from this day there will no one have a right to call me a dirty name and I selling cans in Wicklow or Wexford or the city of Dublin itself.(35)

Michael tries to explain his predicament to his mother:

> If I didn't marry her, she'd be walking off to Jaunting Jim maybe at the fall of night; and it's well yourself knows there isn't the like of her for getting money and selling songs to the men.(35)

Michael gives Sarah's money-making ability as his main justification for not refusing the proposal outright; his is "a very professional view of the economic sanctions of matrimony."[28]

Mary's reply is both motherly and sensible: "And you're thinking it's paying gold to his reverence would make a woman stop when she's a mind to go?"(35) She knows that no tinker woman, and especially no vagrant like Sarah, would allow a religious ceremony to tie her down. Sarah remarks that she has as much right to marry "as any speckled female does be sleeping in the black hovels above, would choke a mule."(35) But Mary, who does not even think of the implications of formal morality, realistically reminds her that beauty fails and old age comes to everyone, whether rich or poor:[29]

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[27] Even before she is aware of Sarah's current plan, Mary talks of her "fussing for marriage."(23)

[28] Johnston, p. 26.

[29] Price (p. 135) says: "Mary knows that without the spirit, the letter gives no life; that beneath all ceremony and form there is a basic kinship between all human beings; and that certain actualities must be faced against which sophistication is of no avail."

> It's as good a right you have surely, Sarah Casey, but what good will it do? Is it putting that ring on your finger will keep you from getting an aged woman and losing the fine face you have, or be easing your pains, when it's the grand ladies do be married in silk dresses, with rings of gold, that do pass any woman with their share of torment in the hour of birth, and do be paying the doctors in the city of Dublin a great price at that time, the like of what you'd pay for a good ass and a cart?(37)

Henn says that Sarah's frustration,

> like that of so many of Synge's women, finds its expression in her horror at the coming of old age and the passing of beauty; marriage may save her from the fate of Villon's old women.[30]

But it is Mary, not Sarah, who refers to this. The young woman is momentarily taken aback when Mary introduces the subject, but this does not indicate that she thinks of marriage as a "way out" of growing old; she just reasons that if an ugly, old woman may marry, why may a beautiful, young woman not? There is no evidence that it is this fear which has been plaguing her and which has driven her to aberration.

Sarah, who is described as "vehement but uneasy,"(37) tries to discredit Mary, but the older woman explains:

> If you do be drinking a little sup in one town and another town, it's soon you get great knowledge and a great sight into the world. You'll see men there, and women there, sitting up on the ends of barrels in the dark night, and they making great talk would soon have the like of you, Sarah Casey, as wise as a March hare.(37)

Significantly, Mary has acquired her own "great knowledge" while tippling. Michael supports his mother; but it is really self-defence because if they can dissuade Sarah, they will not waste their gold. Sarah, however, is adamant: "If it's wise or fool I am, I've made a good bargain and I'll stand to it now."(37)

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[30] Henn, p. 46. For Synge's translations of Villon, cf. "Prayer of the Old Woman, Villon's Mother," and "An Old Woman's Lamentations," CW I, 79-80.

Her description of the arrangement as a "bargain" underlines the light-hearted nature of her enterprise: she wants to go ahead with it because she will gain something relatively cheaply.

Mary's wiliness comes to the fore when she hears the horrifying news that the can is part-payment for the marriage; she decides to leave for the fair immediately, and advises Sarah:

> Let you not take the can from the sack, Sarah Casey; for the people is coming above would be making game of you, and pointing their fingers if they seen you do the like of that. Let you leave it safe in the bag, I'm saying, Sarah, darling. It's that way will be best.(37-39)

This contrasts with Sarah's explanation that she wants to marry so that the settled people will not "have a right" to call her a dirty name. Donoghue remarks:

> Here all "real" roles are reversed: Sarah, indefatigably pursuing the good life with benefit of clergy, is treated as if she were about to be indecent; Mary of the permanent thirst is the mock-Defender of the Right . . . .[31]

Earlier, when Sarah spoke sweetly to her, the old woman remarked on it; now that she is equally charming, the young ones distrust her. Michael wants to know what is wrong with his mother, and Sarah says anxiously: "It's real wicked she does be when you hear her speaking as easy as that."(39)

Mary possesses foresight in deciding to take refuge in the chapel from Sarah's expected blows, and her reply, on the spur of the moment, to Sarah's question is singularly ridiculous:

> I'm going up into the chapel to give you my blessing and hear the priest saying his prayers. It's a lonesome road is running below to Greenane, and a woman would never know the things might happen her and she walking single in a lonesome place.(39)

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[31]Donoghue, "'Too Immoral for Dublin,'" Irish Writing, No. 30 (March 1955), p. 60.

Mary went by herself to buy drink in the evening, and she protested about being left alone, not because of fearing anybody but because of a desire for company; now she says that she will not walk alone in the daylight, presumably because she is frightened of being attacked.[32]

The priest calls the couple, makes sure that the gold is good, and asks for the can. Sarah heeds Mary's advice:

> We have it here in a bit of clean sack, your reverence. We tied it up in the inside of that to keep it from rusting in the dews of the night, and let you not open it now or you'll have the people making game of us and telling the story on us, east and west to the butt of the hills.(39)

She is afraid of being laughed at and acts almost guiltily in betraying her kind.

When the bottles fall out of the bundle, Sarah blames the disappearance of the tin can on the devil; at first she does not suspect Mary, who, for self-protection, tries to act as peacemaker. Both women are perturbed and want the marriage to take place. Sarah is anxious not to be thwarted:

> Marry us, your reverence, for the ten shillings in gold and we'll make you a grand can in the evening - a can would be fit to carry water for the holy man of God. Marry us now and I'll be saying fine prayers for you, morning and night, if it'd be raining itself, and it'd be in two black pools I'd be setting my knees.(41)

Mary is desperate to avoid a beating:

> Marry her, your reverence, for the love of God, for there'll be queer doings below if you send her off the like of that and she swearing crazy on the road.(41)

Mary gives herself away with this, and Sarah arrives at the truth, furiously accusing the old woman of stealing the can and of

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[32] Henn (p. 332) notes that the irony lies in Mary's age and appearance, and also, "perhaps in the much vaunted chivalry accorded to women in Ireland."

trying to make a fool of her:

> It's making game of me you'd be, and putting a fool's head on me in the face of the world; but if you were thinking to be mighty cute walking off, or going up to hide in the church, I've got you this time, and you'll not run from me now.(43)

She seizes a bottle and prepares to attack Mary, who, although terrified, still has enough sense to call on the priest for aid by referring to the prospective state of his church, and with the bishop coming too:

> Keep her off, your reverence, keep her off for the love of the Almighty God. What at all would the Lord Bishop say if he found me here lying with my head broken across, or the two of yous maybe digging a bloody grave for me at the door of the church?(43)

No religious fear holds Sarah back, she yells about her physical prowess and warns the priest that she will assault him if he prevents her from falling upon Mary, whose life is somewhat in danger. The virago delivers her ultimatum and abuses the person upon whose offices she depends:

> I'll not go a step till I have her head broke, or till I'm wed with himself. If you want to get shut of us, let you marry us now, for I'm thinking the ten shillings in gold is a good price for the like of you, and you near burst with the fat.(43)

There is little wonder that the priest, who realizes now that nothing will save Sarah from becoming an "old, wicked heathen," retorts:

> I wouldn't have you coming in on me and soiling my church; for there's nothing at all, I'm thinking, would keep the like of you from hell.(43)

Certainly, Sarah is acting as a "divil" of a woman. The priest's attempted blackmail,

> for if ever I set an eye on you again you'll hear me telling the peelers who it was stole the black ass belonging to Philly O'Cullen, and whose hay it is the grey ass does be eating, (43-45)

is replied to vigorously and in kind. Sarah reviles him, having forgotten her rage at Mary. This new adversary threatens not only her marriage but also her freedom:

> If you do, you'll be getting all the tinkers from Wicklow and Wexford, and the County Meath, to put up block tin in the place of glass to shield your windows where you do be looking out and blinking at the girls. It's hard set you'll be that time, I'm telling you, to fill the depth of your belly the long days of Lent; for we wouldn't leave a laying pullet in your yard at all.(45)

A "great clout in the lug" now certainly would not stop her; it would infuriate her further.

When the priest loses his temper, Michael, who until now has been quietly and gloomily awaiting his bondage, suddenly springs into action and, showing his own lack of scruples, storms at him. Both women join in the fray. After the priest cries for help, Mary quickly claps her hand over his mouth and suggests gagging him with the sack that held the can. The violent Sarah goes even further:

> Tie the bag around his head, and if the peelers come, we'll put him headfirst in the boghole is beyond the ditch.(45)

Mary regains her equanimity and, left in charge of the priest, gently teases him. She pats him on the head like a child, taking a rather perverse delight in his discomfort, while not forgetting to address him correctly:

> Be quiet, your reverence. What is it ails you, with your wrigglings now? Is it choking maybe? /She puts her hand under the sack, and feels his mouth, patting him on the back./ It's only letting on you are, holy father, for your nose is blowing back and forward as easy as an east wind on an April day. /In a soothing voice./ There now, holy father, let you stay easy, I'm telling you, and learn a little sense and patience, the way you'll not be so airy again going to rob poor sinners of their scraps of gold.(47)

Mary puts the entire blame on the priest. She is the only one who is enjoying this; he obviously cannot, and the other two are too intent on fleeing to exult in their victory over him - the marriage has been forgotten. Once again Mary reveals her

ignorance of formal religion, and, more significantly, mentions that there is no place for the priest's sacraments in their world:

> It's sick and sorry we are to tease you; but what did you want meddling with the like of us, when it's a long time we are going our own ways - father and son, and his son after him, or mother and daughter, and her own daughter again - and it's little need we ever had of going up into a church and swearing - I'm told there's swearing with it a word no man would believe . . . .(47)[33]

Two traditions are counterpoised: the Catholic and the pagan; the priest's and the tinkers'.[34] Mary resents the priest's interference in her world; Sarah's meddling with his is the initial cause of the confusion.[35]

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[33]The word "swearing" is ambiguous here, implying "profanity" as well as the usual oath in church; Mary seems to be playing on this double-meaning in teasing the priest. In her next speech, she uses it unambiguously.

[34]Cf. Bourgeois, p. 182. Henn(p. 44), on the other hand, says that the tinkers are neither natural nor pagan. Donna Gerstenberger (p. 64) says: "The conflict between the priest as the representative of organized, authoritarian life and the tinkers and the freedom they represent is familiar material in the Synge canon. The instinctive natural life must ultimately flee the more sophisticated but quite meaningless repression of the civilized world." Later (p. 70) she says that the portrayal of the tinkers as cowardly, superstitious and thieving,"should suggest that Synge is interested not in the presentation of opposite kinds or classes of people but in the dialectic of the opposing ways of life that his characters represent. It is only on the level of commerce or ceremony that the two worlds of the play meet: there is never any really meaningful interchange on the individual or human level." Cf. also Price, pp. 127-30.

[35]Ann Saddlemyer (p. 18) says: "Both Sarah Casey and the priest are justly paid for their foolishness in meddling with worlds to which neither is constitutionally attuned." Price (p. 136) remarks that Mary "feels (and here she is expressing one of Synge's deepest convictions) that misunderstanding and tension arise when an attempt is made to impose alien standards and habits upon a living tradition; the main requisite is mutual toleration."

The ring exemplifies the discrepancy between Christianity and paganism.[36] While making it, Michael finds it a "divil's job" which will have his "hands destroyed in a short while."(7) He hands the ring to Sarah but it is tight and has sharp edges, suggesting the diversity between the confinements of organized religion and the free-living, free-loving life enjoyed by the tinkers. Sarah's intention of imposing restrictions on them (even though nothing can bind her) is contrary to their kind of life and could harm their well-being, as symbolized in Michael's scalding himself. Mary points out this incompatibility in telling the priest that rings

> would be cutting our skins maybe when we'd be taking the ass from the shafts, and pulling the straps the time they'd be slippy with going around beneath the heavens in rains falling.(47)

Michael comes over and talks of murdering him:

> We're fixed now: and I have a mind to run him in a boghole the way he'll not be tattling to the peelers of our games to-day.(47)

Sarah agrees, but Mary calms them. She mentions his acceptance of their hospitality as a mark in his favour, points out the risk of the act suggested by Michael, and arrives at the solution acceptable to all:

> Let you not be rough with him, Sarah Casey, and he after drinking his sup of porter with us at the fall of night. Maybe he'd swear a mighty oath he wouldn't harm us, and then we'd safer loose him; for if we went to drown him, they'd maybe hang the batch of us, man and child and woman, and the ass itself.(47)

Even in this sombre reflection, the inclusion of the ass lends a certain light-heartedness to the speech. Mary's experience tells and she knows that the priest will not go back on his word: "Don't you know his like do live in terror of the wrath of God?"(49) This, of course, implies that the rest have no fear of the

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[36]Cf. Price, p. 136; Henn, pp. 46-47; Gerstenberger, p. 70.

Christian God. The old woman is also sufficiently shrewd to advise holding the priest until he has sworn. They do, and he makes his oath.

Sarah, like Mary, accuses the priest of fooling with them:

> There's the ring, holy father, to keep you minding of your oath until the end of time; for my heart's scalded with your fooling; and it'll be a long day till I go making talk of marriage or the like of that.(49)

She is cured of her whim. It is appropriate that Sarah puts the ring on the priest's finger to remind him of his oath "until the end of time";(49) it belongs on his finger, not on hers, as he is wedded to his faith.

Mary stresses that the tinkers find his way of life quite unnecessary:

> She's vexed now, your reverence; and let you not mind her at all, for she's right surely, and it's little need we ever had of the like of you to get us our bit to eat, and our bit to drink, and our time of love when we were young men and women, and were fine to look at.(49)[37]

The last part of this speech briefly throws light on Mary's earlier life; it is "a last reminder of the passing of beauty."[38]

The priest reveals his resources in not calling on other men for aid but in calling on "the fire of heaven from the hand of the Almighty God,"(49) and he "begins saying a Latin malediction in a loud ecclesiastical voice." Mary's reaction seems to be admiration more than anything else:[39] "There's an old villain."(49) The tinkers run off, not so much because they fear the curse, but rather because they are afraid that the

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[37]Cf. Martin Doul's speech to the saint in The Well of the Saints: "What call have the like of you to be coming in where you're not wanted at all, and making a great mess with the holy water you have and the length of your prayers?(III, 145)

[38]Ganz, op. cit., p. 63. [39]Price, p. 137.

peelers will hear this loud malediction.[40]

At the end all are contented, even though Sarah, the most dominant character, does not have what she wanted at first; the priest has his freedom, Michael has his doxy (without a document or a ring) and his money,[41] and Mary has her wish fulfilled – hearing a priest "speaking Latin to the saints above,"[42] which, ironically, sends her scuttling off with the others. The ending is the best for all concerned as they return to follow their individual ways of living.[43]

Sarah, the primary cause of the disturbance, is Synge's angriest and most turbulent woman, and no mere puppet.[44] She is headstrong and, although she initially tries more gentle kinds of persuasion with Mary and the priest to achieve her purpose, resorts to a form of terrorism. She, who is a Katharina, browbeats Michael, who is no Petruchio, into submission, she frightens Mary almost to distraction (admittedly, with cause), and she snarls maliciously at the priest. The wench is self-willed, ill-tempered and irrational, a scoundrel and a thief, volatile, vicious and vain. But she is provoked, and, apparently, much of her behaviour is caused by the change of the moon. Skelton, who refers to this influence, remarks:

> This is not intended to exculpate Sarah entirely; it is, however, intended to suggest that those wandering folk who live in close proximity to the natural world, a proximity emphasized many times in the play, can be affected by the

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[40]Cf. Bourgeois, p. 182; Price, p. 130.

[41]Cf. Weygandt, op. cit., p. 174. [42]Cf. Henn, p. 49.

[43]Strong (p. 34) holds that nobody really suffers in the play: "The disappointment [of Sarah] is healed almost before the play is done, the visionary will lose her sorrows in a pint, and no one is left to remind the priest of a discomfiture he will soon forget."

[44]Corkery (p. 150) says that Mary is the one character in The Tinker's Wedding who "has a trace of roundness in her . . . . The others are the merest puppets."

seasonal changes in their environment. Like the people in Riders to the Sea and The Shadow of the Glen, Sarah Casey is the victim of the elements, and also is "in harmony with some mood of the earth."[45]

Mary, who appreciates the fine things of both nature and youth, is not affected in this way, however, and retains her good temper,[46] even if not her composure, throughout. She is easy-going and generally cheerful, when both tipsy and otherwise, but, although full of zest and humour as well as of mischief, is occasionally melancholy. She is apprehensive of Sarah and, like her, is dishonest, stubborn and has a wild imagination. But Mary, who is worldly, discerning and tolerant, is less impetuous than Sarah, more sensible, and resorts to her wits rather than to her fists. She accepts her natural life ardently, delightfully and completely[47] - a "richly Falstaffian character"[48] who "stands for the traditionally anarchic freedom of her pagan breed."[49]

The squabbling wench dreams, but the drouthy old woman knows that marriage for Sarah would be contrary to her character and upbringing. Mary realizes that match-making for the year to come is part of their lives, and only if both Sarah and Michael want to remain together will they do so; church, ceremony or ring will not influence them. Her advice on marriage for their kind would be the same as the Chouska's in "Etude Morbide": "Do not talk of it . . . but cling rather to the heaven . . . /you/ know."[50]

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[45]Skelton, pp. 75-76. Cf. "Etude Morbide," CW II, 35.

[46]Cf. Price, p. 134.

[47]ibid., p. 132; Donna Gerstenberger, "Yeats and Synge: 'A Young Man's Ghost,'" in W. B. Yeats 1865-1965: Centenary Essays on the Art of W. B. Yeats, ed. D. E. S. Maxwell and S. B. Bushrui (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1965), p. 84.

[48]Coxhead, p. 16. Cf. Henn, p. 45.

[49]Skelton, p. 56. Skelton (p. 74) also points out that in her outlook Mary combines the pagan and the ostensibly Christian. He adds (p. 78) that "the drunken old tinker woman . . . embodies both the folly and the wisdom of the play."

[50]"Etude Morbide," CW II, 35.

Chapter 8

THE DREAMING WENCH AND THE SCHEMING WIDOW: PEGEEN MIKE AND THE WIDOW QUIN

> This play [The Playboy of the Western World] was not about an Irish peculiarity, but about a universal weakness of mankind: the habit of admiring bold scoundrels.[1]

> . . . Neither Synge's preface, the anthropological school of criticism, the 500 policemen, nor Yeats's idealization of the peasantry can conceal the fact that the play is about the effect on women - on Pegeen Mike, the Widow Quin, and the famous drift of girls standing in their infamous shifts - of a man's fraudulent reputation for being a dangerous rogue.[2]

Isolated as they are from intruders and excitement, the Mayo villagers of The Playboy of the Western World lead a dull existence with neither heroes nor scoundrels to admire, and with materialistic security as their chief goal.

Such a person is Pegeen Mike who is preparing to marry one of the remaining yokels in the area. Like any bride, she is concerned about her appearance, as seen in her ordering of her wedding outfit when her betrothed arrives. Showing no interest in Shawn who is awkward at finding her alone, Pegeen seems attracted to the idea of marriage, not to the man. His faint-heartedness is apparent in his fearful comprehension that her father is going far away "in the dark night,"(59) and he blunders over his attempt at humour:

> . . . When we're wedded in a short while you'll have no call to complain, for I've little will to be walking off to wakes or weddings in the darkness of the night.(59)

He also, it appears, has "little will" to be doing anything - let alone going to funerals. It is no wonder that Pegeen regards him with scornful good humour: "You're making mighty

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[1] [George] Bernard Shaw, "The Irish Players," The Matter with Ireland, ed. David H. Greene and Dan H. Laurence (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), p. 63. This quotation is part of an "interview," written entirely by Shaw, which appeared in the New York Evening Sun on December 9, 1911.

[2] "The 'Ascendancy' Writer," TLS, July 2, 1971, p. 750.

certain, Shaneen, that I'll wed you now."(59)

In referring to the good bargain that they have made regarding the terms of marriage, Shawn introduces the communal notion that such a guarantee is necessary to a satisfactory union.[3] Pegeen teases him and points out the type of person in the neighbourhood:

> It's a wonder, Shaneen, the Holy Father'd be taking notice of the likes of you, for if I was him, I wouldn't bother with this place where you'll meet none but Red Linahan, has a squint in his eye, and Patcheen is lame in his heel, or the mad Mulrannies 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. (59)

Shawn is evidently the most eligible bachelor, and Pegeen has to make do with him or else, presumably, not marry at all.

P. D. Kenny's description of her predicament is valid:

> Who could think of loving Shaneen? Love could not occur to her through him. . . . Yet there is nothing unusual in the marriage of such a girl to such a person, and it does not occur to her that love ought to have anything to do with the matter.
>
> Why is Pegeen prepared to marry him? "God made him; therefore let him pass for a man," and in all his unfitness, he is the fittest available![4]

Although she is prepared to marry Shawn, Pegeen does not respect him. She bases her judgment of good, gallant men

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[3]Cf. The Shadow of the Glen: "What way would I live and I an old woman if I didn't marry a man with a bit of a farm, and cows on it, and sheep on the back hills?"(III,49), supra, p. 95; and The Well of the Saints: "She's no call to mind what way I look, and I after building a house with four rooms in it above on the hill"(III,111), supra, p. 127. Cf. Bourgeois, p. 195; Gerstenberger, p. 84.

[4]Pat [P. D. Kenny], "That Dreadful Play," Irish Times, January 30, 1907; quoted by A. C. Ward (ed.), Specimens of English Dramatic Criticism: XVII-XX Centuries (London: Geoffrey Cumberledge, 1946), p. 255.

on their violent deeds and tale-telling prowess. Such men cannot be found any more:

> Where now will you meet the like of Daneen Sullivan knocked the eye from a peeler, or 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?(59)

This speech presages the entrance and approval of Christy Mahon. Prudish and spiritless Shawn, who is the complete opposite of these men, is dependent on his paternal figure, Father Reilly, the person always in the foreground of his thoughts.[5]

When Pegeen admits her fear of remaining alone at night - "I'm asking only what way I'll pass these twelve hours of dark, and not take my death with the fear,"(59-61) - and Shawn suggests the Widow Quin for company, she replies: "Is it the like of that murderer?"(61) This disparagement is not based on a dread of being with a killer, otherwise Pegeen would be afraid of Christy; it is founded on the rivalry that appears later. The suitor, whose lack of "love-talk" indicates their absurd relationship, cannot offer to stay with Pegeen to protect her.

On his fearfully mentioning that there is "a kind of fellow above in the furzy ditch,"(61) Pegeen mocks him for not finding out who the person is:

> Well, you're a daring fellow! And if they find his corpse stretched above in the dews of dawn, what'll you say then to the peelers or the Justice of the Peace?(61)[6]

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[5]Cf. Bourgeois, p. 195. Henn (p. 66) remarks: "The unseen Father Reilly hovers in the background of the Playboy as the guardian of peasant morality, the supporter of the cowardly and feeble Shawn, whose comments on each situation are yet those of the ordinary moral man."

[6]Pegeen's contempt of Shawn is even more explicit in an earlier draft: "I'm thinking maybe the dead men itself is better company than the like of you, Shaneen Keogh, who'd quit the harps of Heaven for to save your skin."(60)

The cowardly young man is scared to investigate and also worried about the men's reaction. Pegeen teases him: "I'll maybe tell them, and I'll maybe not."(61)

When Michael James enters, Pegeen upbraids her father for leaving her alone, displaying her sharp tongue, and using vivid imagery which presages the striking language in her love-scene with Christy:

> If I am a queer daughter, it's a queer father'd be leaving me lonesome these twelve hours of dark, and I piling the turf with the dogs barking, and the calves mooing, and my own teeth rattling with the fear.(63)

Jimmy flatters her for her sturdiness, but Pegeen is afraid of the numerous drunkards, tinkers and soldiers in the vicinity. Shawn refuses to keep her company because he is

> afeard 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?(63)

This conjures up the delightful picture of the Pope and Cardinals in conclave to discuss the misdemeanour of a Mayo peasant, but it hardly endears the young man to Pegeen and the others. He ascribes his reluctance to a fear not only of Father Reilly but also of succumbing to temptation: "Let you not be tempting me and we near married itself,"(65) he tells the others. But Shawn has revealed as much lust as a eunuch. So terrified is he of staying with the nubile Pegeen that he calls on saintly aid to save him from this ignominious predicament. Michael James predicts a future free of jealousy for Pegeen - at least she will not have to worry about Shawn chasing other girls. But Pegeen, who is obviously dissatisfied with this suitor, defends her property, seeing the situation in proper perspective by blaming her father for being miserly:

> What right have you to be making game of a poor fellow for minding the priest when it's your own the fault is, not paying a penny pot-boy to stand along with me and give me courage in the doing of my work?(65)

On cue, when Michael James asks where he could find a pot-boy, Shawn announces the arrival of Christy, who seems as unexciting a figure as any lad possibly left in the village: he is "a slight young man, . . . very tired and frightened and dirty," has "a small voice," admits he is "destroyed walking,"(67) and sighs and moans. He seems another Shawn Keogh - but without the excuse of a Father Reilly.[7] At first he is the object of curiosity rather than admiration, and Michael James, not trusting him, removes stockings and other items from his range.

In trying to find out why Christy is afraid of the police, Pegeen treats him like a little boy: "Were you never slapped in school, young fellow, that you don't know the name of your deed?"(69) His shocked reaction to Jimmy's lewd suggestion that "he followed after a young woman on a lonesome night,"(69) once more gives the impression that he is something like Shawn Keogh: "Oh, the saints forbid, mister. I was all times a decent lad."(69)

Christy has begun to excite the people, and their delighted curiosity grows as they realize that he has a secret. As the interest in him increases, Christy grows in his own estimation. Jimmy's drawing a parallel between the new-comer and other attractions - "He'd beat Dan Davies' Circus or the holy missioners making sermons on the villainy of men,"(71) - shows up the dearth of rousing events in the neighbourhood; it also indicates why Pegeen and the other girls find the lad so fascinating.[8]

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[7] Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 79. Price (p. 163) says: "Christy provides the sensation. Yet, entering, he seems quite incapable of doing so. But this is part of Synge's method of establishing Christy, at first, as a downtrodden, inoffensive creature, in order that his eventual transformation may be the more marked and glorious."

[8] Cf. W. B. Yeats, "Preface to the First Edition of John M. Synge's Poems and Translations," The Cutting of an Agate, Essays

Pegeen takes control, accusing Christy of lying and of being incapable of crime. In so doing, she employs a jarring and violent image that indicates her own wildness and vehemence of character: "You did nothing at all. A soft lad the like of you wouldn't slit the windpipe of a screeching sow."(71) It is significant that Christy yields neither to the men's wheedling nor to Pegeen's taunting, but to her rage and threats:[9] she is the strong one, he the weakling. As soon as he blurts out his story, she is amazed and the men are respectful, and after more questions he reveals that he

> just riz the loy and let fall the edge of it on the ridge of his skull, and he went down at my feet like an empty sack, and never let a grunt or groan from him at all.(73)

Here is a man, indeed, and Michael James promptly signs to Pegeen to fill Christy's glass.

Christy is committed to the tale when he admits burying his father,[10] and after his shrewd answer about the place of burial, Philly approves, considering him wise. Because of this sagacity, Pegeen proposes Christy for pot-boy:

> That'd be a lad with the sense of Solomon to have for a pot-boy, Michael James, if it's the truth you're seeking one at all.(75)

None of the older men contradicts her. The culmination of the

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and Introductions, p. 309: "And what is it but desire of ardent life . . . that makes his young girls of The Playboy of the Western World prefer to any peaceful man their eyes have looked upon, a seeming murderer?" Corkery (p. 192) does not appear to consider this in objecting to the idolization of Christy. He says that "the falling of a whole countryside at the feet of a self-declared parricide simply on account of his gamey heart and his fine bit of talk, is an assumption to which we cannot give more than grudging acceptance." Cf. also R. Reed Sanderlin, "Synge's Playboy and the Ironic Hero," Southern Quarterly, VI (April 1968), 297.

[9] Cf. Howe, p. 63; Johnston, p. 34.

[10] Cf. Henn, p. 342.

case for employment is Pegeen's assertion that a murderer inside would protect her from murderers outside the shebeen.[11] She evinces no fear whatsoever: ". . . If I'd that lad in the house, I wouldn't be fearing the loosèd khaki cut-throats, or the walking dead."(75) Only Shawn, displaying conventional sense and solicitude, objects,[12] but his betrothed, angry at his mention of Christy as a "bloody-handed murderer,"(77) silences him.

She makes the initial advance "in a honeyed voice,"(77) and, in persuading Christy, uses an image from the animal world again:

> Aren't you destroyed walking with your feet in bleeding blisters, and your whole skin needing washing like a Wicklow sheep.(77)

Pegeen might have romantic designs on Christy but she certainly lacks delicacy, although this would be a natural expression for one of her kind.

Only when they are leaving does it strike Michael James to ask Christy's name; he is quite content to leave his daughter with a parricide - whoever he might be. They go off, with everybody content: Christy has a place to stay and will be safe from the police; the men can go to the wake without being plagued by conscience (if ever they are); Pegeen has companionship and protection. Even Shawn has stopped complaining and offers to remain: Father Reilly would not object to two men staying with a girl. But Pegeen spurns him, telling him to go to the priest, "and let him put you in the holy brotherhoods."(79) Her ordering him to "leave that lad to me"(79) is significant when considered in the light of her reaction to the Widow Quin

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[11]Cf. J. L. Styan, The Elements of Drama (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 60-61.

[12]ibid., p. 62.

and the village girls. The lad is hers and she will not surrender this claim easily, just as she defended her property in the shape of the less worthy Shawn earlier.

Pegeen bolts the door in order to exclude her betrothed and to shut herself in with her protecting murderer. She is described as bustling about and taking off her apron, pinning it up in the window as a blind.[13] This not only makes the shebeen more homelike and reveals that Pegeen desires privacy, but also suggests that she wants Christy to regard her as an attractive girl, not a mere employer or barmaid.

Alone with Christy, she starts building her image of him:

> You should have had great people in your family I'm thinking, with the little small feet you have, and you with a kind of a quality name, the like of what you'd find on the great powers and potentates of France and Spain.(79)

Christy likes the idea and plays along. His ejaculation - "Is it me?"(79) - when Pegeen tells him that he is "a fine, handsome young fellow with a noble brow,"(79) indicates that he is finding the new Christy, the one who will take pride in himself and who will attract all. Price notes that this rejoinder conveys Christy's delight and surprise perfectly:

> It is not he yet, but it will be. Christy finds some difficulty at first in recognizing himself in Pegeen's image, but every instinct urges him not to cast doubts upon it, but to believe in it and confirm it.[14]

Pegeen wastes no time in being coy but flatters the young man unreservedly. His reaction, "Oh, they're bloody liars in the naked parish where I grew a man,"(79) shows his growing

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[13]Cf. In West Kerry, CW II, 249: "Then she [the little hostess] took off her apron, and fastened it up in the window as a blind, laid another apron on the wet earthen floor for me to stand on, and left me to myself."

[14]Price, p. 164.

appreciation of the world of fantasy that she is concocting. She is basing her evaluation on a false belief, but it gradually becomes the truth as Christy develops to fit it.

Pegeen again mentions the poets of passion - the men she obviously admires more than any others:

> If you weren't destroyed travelling you'd have as much talk and streelecn, I'm thinking, as Owen Roe O'Sulli-an or the poets of the Dingle Bay, and I've heard all times it's the poets are your like, fine fiery fellows with great rages when their temper's roused.(81)

So far, Christy has described his passionate deed but the poetry is lacking.

He, who is shy of young girls, is relieved to find that she is single. It is noteworthy that she asks: "What would I want wedding so young?"(81) Pegeen, the opportunist, has started to discard the idea of marrying Shawn - Christy seems a better proposition. She denies her fiancé now just as she betrays Christy later. Pegeen admires him for having had the courage to kill his father - she could never do such a thing. But in rejecting Shawn, Pegeen is also acting against her father's authority, which, of course, is not a very formidable obstacle.

Christy tells her confidentially: "Up to the day I killed my father, there wasn't a person in Ireland knew the kind I was . . . ."(83) But it has really been up to now, when Pegeen starts forming this new image, that nobody, let alone he, has known the kind he is.[15]

Pegeen keeps referring to "the girls"; she understands the sort of reaction that Christy will have on them - the same as he is having on her. She is disappointed that he is not the rogue with a penchant for women that she wants him to be. In saying that she thought he "should have been living the like of

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[15] Cf. Howe, p. 173.

a king of Norway or the Eastern world,"(83) Pegeen suggests that she would have preferred Christy to be experienced in the ways of love. The first reference conjures up a picture of a gallant Viking sovereign - no doubt, a "fine, fiery fellow." The mention of an Eastern king brings to mind a ruler with a vast harem. Similar experience would have enhanced Christy's reputation and value, and, consequently, it is implied, Pegeen's prestige in her final triumph over the other girls.

As the conversation progresses, Christy becomes more eloquent and descriptive:

> . . . There I'd be as happy as the sunshine of St. Martin's Day, watching the light passing the north or the patches of fog, till I'd hear a rabbit starting to screech and I'd go running in the furze.(83)

The poet is emerging:

> It's that you'd say surely /"Providence and Mercy, spare us all!"/ if you seen him and he after drinking for weeks, rising up in the red dawn, or before it maybe, and going out into the yard as naked as an ash tree in the moon of May, and shying clods again the visage of the stars till he'd put the fear of death into the banbhs and the screeching sows.(83-85)

Christy's description of his father as a ferocious man makes the murder all the more magnificent, and, under Pegeen's interest, the deed has grown: he says he split Old Mahon's skull in two now.

At Christy's boasting - ". . . and I a seemly fellow with great strength in me and bravery . . ."(85) - somebody knocks and immediately he is back to his old self.[16] His clinging

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[16]This is the first of Christy's setbacks, usually received when either the Widow Quin or Old Mahon enters. Price (p. 178) says that "the development of Christy from weakling to hero is a wave-like movement, an undulation with steep troughs, and the last and greatest wave, lifting him from the bottom of the deepest trough, throws up the new man." Cf. Howe, p. 72. Corkery (p. 194) takes a contrary and less perceptive view in saying that "once it is seen for what it is, the graph of his progress is so direct as not to be interesting."

to Pegeen indicates his need for her in the building of and belief in the new vision of himself. But it is not the peelers: it is the Widow Quin.

Pegeen's antagonism to her is apparent even before she enters. She tells Christy to appear tired - she does not want the widow's company for any length of time. The barmaid greets her in a temper, but the woman is more interested in Christy, the "curiosity man,"(87) than in retorting in kind. She delivers Shawn and Father Reilly's instruction that she must take Christy home with her, and is not averse to the idea: "'It isn't fitting,' says the priesteen, 'to have his likeness lodging with an orphaned girl,'"(87) she tells Pegeen. It is fitting, evidently, to have him staying with a widowed woman. In her appraisal of Christy, she sees him as he still is, not as Pegeen wants him to be: "Well, aren't you a little smiling fellow?"(87) Like Pegeen in the beginning, she treats him as a little boy:

> . . . It'd soften my heart to see you sitting so simple with your cup and cake, and you fitter to be saying your catechism than slaying your da.(87)

Pegeen rebuts her: Christy is her own and so is the image she is making. The woman who made herself a widow does not give up so easily, however, and mentions their similarity. Her deed, too, is worthy of commemoration in song. But Pegeen will have none of this and derides her rival's claim to kinship. Although she might be a murderer, her act was contemptible and not of the same calibre:

> She hit himself with a worn pick, and the rusted poison did corrode his blood the way he never overed it and died after. That was a sneaky kind of murder did win small glory with the boys itself.(89)

The widow keeps her good humour and flings her first words of abuse at Pegeen, whom she regards as sexually motivated:

> If it didn't, maybe all knows a widow woman has buried her children and destroyed her man is a wiser comrade for a young lad than a girl the like of you who'd go helter-skeltering after any man would let you a wink upon the road.(89)

Now comes the first "flyting match" between the two, with Pegeen the more reviling, embroidering on the widow's failings and lack of morals or qualms. The Widow Quin remains composed and more of the "lady" throughout. Pegeen is described as "breaking out into wild rage":

> And you'll say that, Widow Quin, and you gasping with the rage you had racing the hill beyond to look on his face.(89)

Again the widow hints that Pegeen finds Christy sexually attractive, but this reflects on herself:

> There's great temptation in a man did slay his da, and we'd best be going, young fellow; so ri-e up and come with me.(89)

In her eagerness to take him with her, she appears to find him such a temptation. She has one of Christy's arms and Pegeen grabs the other - each asserting her right to have him. Christy remains quiet and passive throughout this "Rabelaisian sex-struggle."[17] Pegeen claims him:

> He'll not stir. He's pot-boy in this place and I'll not have him stolen off and kidnabbed [sic] while himself's abroad.(89)

The widow retorts:

> It'd be a crazy pot-boy'd lodge him in the shebeen where he works by day, so you'd have a right to come on, young fellow, till you see my little houseen, a perch off on the rising hill.(89)

The publican's daughter, seeming desperate to keep him, disparages the Widow Quin's abode:

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[17] Saddlemyer, p. 16. Henn (p. 58) remarks on the "satire in the pursuit of man by woman, the comic reversal of the conventional view . . . ."

> Wait till morning, Christy Mahon; wait till you lay eyes on her leaky thatch is growing more pasture for her buck goat than her square of fields, and she without a tramp itself to keep in order her place at all.(89)

In the girl's eyes, the widow is slovenly; the woman speaks of her qualities:

> When you see me contriving in my little gardens, Christy Mahon, you'll swear the Lord God formed me to be living lone and that there isn't my match in Mayo for thatching or mowing or shearing a sheep.(89)

Pegeen scorns her, adding to the picture of sluttishness in vivid, imaginative and, possibly, far-fetched invective:

> It's true the Lord God formed you to contrive indeed! Doesn't the world know you reared a black ram at your own breast, so that the Lord Bishop of Connaught felt the elements of a Christian, and he eating it after in a kidney stew? Doesn't the world know you've been seen shaving the foxy skipper from France for a threepenny bit and a sop of grass tobacco would wring the liver from a mountain goat you'd meet lepping the hills?(89)[18]

The widow is amused, turning Pegeen's railing to her advantage: "Do you hear her now, young fellow? Do you hear the way she'll be rating at your own self when a week is by?"(91) But Pegeen continues to insult: "Don't heed her. Tell her to go on into her pigsty and not plague us here."(91)

Unused to two women ranting over him, Christy grows timid, but the spectacle must cause him to rise in his own estimation. Again it takes Pegeen's threatened violence to make him respond - she shakes him and he chooses her, being happily ensconced in the shebeen.

The widow resorts to subterfuge and proposes remaining with the two because, she says, her walk back will be lonesome.

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[18] Howe (p. 186) says of this speech: "For fertility and resource, and a power to pile image on image, Pegeen, at her noisiest, is nearly his /Christy's/ equal."

But Pegeen will not agree to this and, being on home-ground, orders her opponent out. The Widow Quin cannot leave without some malice (which, at the same time, is a practical warning to prevent Christy from being hurt) and tells the lad to beware of flirting because of Pegeen's being plighted to another. Once more, Pegeen denies Shawn: "I wouldn't wed him if a bishop came walking for to join us here."(91)

She closes the door between the rooms, and the young people are safe from each other, the Widow Quin, Shawn Keogh and Father Reilly.

Christy is content:

> Well it's a clean bed and soft with it, and 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 I a foolish fellow not to kill my father in the years gone by.(93)[19]

He has romanticized little about his character up to this point, but Pegeen, with her fancies and fighting, and, to a lesser extent, the Widow Quin, with her scheming and enticement, have caused his transformation to get well under way.

Christy's counting of the items in the shebeen in the second act is reminiscent of Pegeen's detailing of her wedding outfit. Like the publican and his daughter, who accepted Shawn because of his relative material wealth, Christy places value on possession of goods. He is considering his employer's prosperity now and, regarding Pegeen as a good prospect, has already asked

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[19]Corkery (p. 203) says that perhaps this speech where Christy "half regrets not having killed his father long ago, is the only blunder in the play. It is the only passage in which the Playboy is truly a playboy, consciously rogue." He finds (p. 204) Christy an innocent rather than a rogue.

whether she is married. Although she disregards property as a prerequisite when she turns to Christy, she cannot follow him in the end because she is irretrievably wed to the world of Shawn Keogh and her father.[20]

Pegeen's compliment on Christy's appearance has its effect and he preens himself while looking in the mirror:

> Didn't I know rightly I was handsome, though it was the divil's own mirror we had beyond, would twist a squint across an angel's brow, and I'll be growing fine from this day, the way I'll have a soft lovely skin on me and won't be the like of the clumsy young fellows do be ploughing all times in the earth and dung.(95)

But, again, as his self-regard increases he receives another setback. He is still timid with girls - four arrive: "Stranger girls. God help me, where'll I hide myself away and my long neck naked to the world."(95)

The girls, like Pegeen and the Widow Quin, are starved of exciting male company, and are less powerful examples of the typical feminine attitude in this western district. Such is the dearth of incident that they are all bored and stifled leading their drab, blameless existence, and have risen early, "destroying" themselves running in order to catch a glimpse of "a man killed his father."(97) The one who craves spectacle most is Sara Tansey, who drove ten miles to see "the man bit the yellow lady's nostril,"(97) and who smells the boots.[21] To make the excitement more personal and sinful, Sara puts them on:

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[20]Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 84.

[21]Howarth (op. cit., pp. 222-23) says of this action: "This is one of the two dozen masterly stage-strokes in The Playboy. It is at once social realism and farce; it belongs to the special Irish family of olfactory comedy, that extravagant distillation of the unwashed; it is essentially conceived as drama, notates the actresses' business, and requires them to perform as well as speak the combined realism, poetry, lowness, exaltation."

> There's a pair do fit me well, and I'll be keeping them for walking to the priest, when you'd be ashamed this place, going up winter and summer with nothing worth while to confess at all.(97)

Christy does not have the courage to leave his hiding-place voluntarily - the girls must call him. When he enters he is "as meek as a mouse," and his appearance is quite as unprepossessing as the first time anybody sees him. It takes the girls' interest to awaken him to his potential once more, which happens when they treat him like a demigod, bearing gifts like four wise women at an epiphany;[22] they bring eggs, butter, cake and a fowl. "Will you pinch it?" asks Sara. "Is your right hand too sacred for to use at all?"(99) But the lad is not holy, he is vain and is trying to hide the mirror to prevent them from realizing this.

The Widow Quin arrives, immediately taking charge. She has entered Christy for the games, and the confidence in him continues, with Sara being exuberant: "That's right, Widow Quin. I'll bet my dowry that he'll lick the world."(101) They prepare their feast of welcome. While the girls make breakfast, the widow acts as overseer and sets about wooing the murderer.

His story demanded, Christy relates it, and the widow suggests the reason for the squabble - marriage. However, where she thinks Christy was willing, he reveals the opposite, his description of the proposed marriage partner indicating his reason for rebelling:

> A walking terror from beyond the hills, and she two score and five years, and two hundredweights and five pounds in the weighing scales, with a limping leg on her, and a blinded eye, and she a woman of noted misbehaviour with the old and young.(101)

At which point Christy begins gnawing a chicken leg, the girls "Glory be!" and the Widow Quin stakes her claim in kinship by taking a bit of the chicken. Being the centre of attraction,

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[22]Cf. Skelton, pp. 119-20, 126.

Christy becomes increasingly satisfied with his position. The widow, like Pegeen, an opportunist, hints at the allure of her position: "There's maybe worse than a dry hearth and a widow woman and your glass at night."(103)

The more attention he gets, the more descriptive Christy becomes and, under the girls' urging, details his feat, the hit with the loy becoming the basis of a poetic flight of fancy:

> With that the sun come out between the cloud and the hill, and it shining green in my face. "God have mercy on your soul," says he, lifting a scythe; "or on your own," says I, raising the loy.
> . . . .
> . . . He gave a drive with the scythe, and I gave a lep to the east. Then I turned around with my back to the north, and I hit a blow on the ridge of his skull, laid him stretched out, and he split to the knob of his gullet.(103)

The reaction during the narration is significant: Susan calls it a grand story and Honor says he "tells it lovely."(103) It is not exclusively the deed that makes Christy grow as a hero, but also his telling of it. Susan promptly makes a match:

> I'm thinking the Lord God sent him this road to make a second husband to the Widow Quin, and she with a great yearning to be wedded though all dread her here.(103-105)

The widow wants to be married again and it is seen that she would not be against the idea of Christy as a companion. This speech reveals that she is considered something of a virago, although the men's fear of her could largely be the result of her single deed.

Susan deflates Christy somewhat by, just as Pegeen and the Widow Quin before, treating him like a little boy (and the widow as a mother-figure): "Lift him on her knee, Sara Tansey."(105) Although the widow has teased him as well, she feigns compassion now, possibly to endear herself to Christy. She accepts him for what she sees him to be, not for what he and the others pretend he is. She is the one person not to express

overt conviction in his story, and has merely questioned him in detail without answering with an "I believe" or by telling him that he is a wonder. Even when she mentions their similarity,(87) it is not an expression of belief but cunning to entice him from Pegeen.

Sara regards them both as illustrious, and proposes a toast. The abundant alliteration shows that "a fine bit of talk" does not belong to Christy and Pegeen alone:

> Drink a health to the wonders of the western world, the pirates, preachers, poteen-makers, with the jobbing jockies, parching peelers, and the juries fill their stomachs selling judgments of the English law.(105)[23]

And as Christy is being celebrated, in walks Pegeen who throws a damper on the proceedings. She gets rid of all the admirers, including her arch-rival who surrenders more readily this time after Pegeen's derision:

> And you without a white shift or a shirt in your whole family since the drying of the flood. I've no starch for the like of you, and let you walk on now to Killamuck.(105)

Pegeen orders Christy about, imperiously using her status as mistress of the shebeen. Her annoyance is understandable as she has already marked him for herself. She, a jealous girl, is roused at finding competitors surrounding her intended sweetheart. She would enjoy his having a reputation as a great lover, but is hurt and offended to find him popular in the present - a reaction which presages the one after he "kills" his father in front of her.

Mary Rose Sullivan finds symbolic implications in

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[23]Skelton (p. 126) says: "The lumping together of the preachers with the pirates and poteen-makers, and of the peelers with the jockies and bribed juries, indicates the cynical realism as well as the romantic love of wildness and roguery which is characteristic of this western world."

Pegeen's reaction to the mirror being out of place:

> Pegeen's anger when she notices the misplaced glass, suggests that even she, much as she wants Christy a hero, recognizes that his continuing efforts to objectify his self-image will eventually destroy his dependence on her approval.[24]

The mirror can be regarded as objectifying what happens to and changes Christy,[25] but it does not carry such symbolic overtones in Pegeen's disapproval. She notices its being out of place as part of the general disarray.

Christy, meek once more and dependent on her approbation,[26] tries to both appease and frighten Pegeen by picking up a loy and mentioning his deed. He succeeds in drawing neither such reaction from her, as she rejoins: "You've told me that story six times since the dawn of day."(107) This retort suggests that Christy believes he can call on the incident at almost any time to redeem himself. Pegeen still appears the stronger of the two, and, when he tells her that the girls were "walking four miles to be listening to me now,"(107) scoffs at his inflated opinion of himself, for "that lot come over the river lepping the stones. It's not three perches when you go like that."(107) She teases and threatens him in order to retaliate for his unfaithfulness, and tells of "looking on the papers":

> PEGEEN. . . . A story filled half a page of the hanging of a man. Ah, that should be a fearful end, young fellow, and it worst of all for a man destroyed his da, for the like of him would get small mercies, and when it's dead he is, they'd put him in a narrow grave, with cheap sacking wrapping him round, and pour down quicklime on his head, the way you'd see a woman pouring any frish-frash from a cup.
>
> CHRISTY /very miserably/. Oh, God help me. Are you thinking I'm safe? You were saying at the fall of night, I was shut of jeopardy and I here with yourselves.

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[24] Mary Rose Sullivan, "Synge, Sophocles and the Un-making of Myth," MD XII (December 1969), 246.

[25] Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 79. [26] Price, p. 167.

> PEGEEN /severely/. You'll be shut of jeopardy no place if you go talking with a pack of wild girls the like of them, do be walking abroad with the peelers, talking whispers at the fall of night.(107-109)

Michael James's comment that Pegeen would not have to fear her betrothed's straying (65) is seen to apply as much to Pegeen's character as to that of Shawn. She resents any flirtation by her men and takes a sadistic pleasure in depicting Christy's hanging:

> It's queer joys they have, and who knows the thing they'd do, if it'd make the green stones cry itself to think of you swaying and swiggling at the butt of a rope, and you with a fine, stout neck, God bless you! the way you'd be a half an hour, in great anguish, getting your death.(109)

When she considers that she is wronged, she responds maliciously. Pegeen's method in settling her score draws the comment from Christy: "It's more than judges this place is a heartless crew."(109)[27]

Christy talks about his loneliness on the run, a condition also endured while living with his father. He desires the companionship of girls:

> And isn't it a poor thing to be starting again and I a lonesome fellow will be looking out on women and girls the way the needy fallen spirits do be looking on the Lord?(109)

Christy hungers for love and approval, both of which he has been winning in the shebeen:

> It's well you know it's a lonesome thing to be passing small towns with the lights shining sideways when the night is down, or going in strange places with a dog nosing[28] before you and a dog nosing[28] behind, or drawn to the cities where you'd hear a voice kissing and talking deep love in every shadow of the ditch, and you passing on with an empty hungry stomach failing from your heart.(109)

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[27] Howe (p. 65) says that Christy takes Pegeen's severity bitterly and grimly here "rather than in the abject spirit he would have taken it the night before . . . ."

[28] The Maunsel edition has "noising"; The Works of John M. Synge, Vol. II (Dublin: Maunsel, 1910), p. 56.

Pegeen responds:

> I'm thinking you're an odd man, Christy Mahon. The oddest walking fellow I ever set my eyes on to this hour to-day.(111)

"Odd" means "peculiar" and "extraordinary" here. She is both dazzled by Christy the lad and amazed at his fine words - her own loneliness has not produced such oddity. Christy starts his love-talk in replying:

> How would a lovely handsome woman the like of you be lonesome when all men should be thronging around to hear the sweetness of your voice, and the little infant children should be pestering your steps I'm thinking, and you walking the roads.(111)

Pegeen cannot understand why such a "coaxing fellow" like Christy should be lonesome. She still has not forgiven him and, when he turns to go, first reminds him of his conditions of employment before relenting. He has suffered sufficiently for his deviation. His rapture embarrasses her, but she acknowledges that she "wouldn't give a thraneen for a lad hadn't a mighty spirit in him and a gamey heart."(113)

This heralds the entry of Shawn with the Widow Quin. They contrive to get rid of Pegeen so that he can bribe Christy with half a ticket to the Western States, a hat, breeches and a coat, not forgetting his blessing and, of course, that of Father Reilly.[29] Christy has acquired a certain arrogance and Shawn needs the widow's help. She lets slip, however, that everybody is regarding him as having displaced Shawn as the object of Pegeen's affections. Shawn compares the fierce Pegeen and Christy with

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[29] Donna Gerstenberger (p. 80) draws attention to the clothing metaphor in this play: Shawn Keogh loses his coat in the first act "as he seeks to escape the duties of manhood, the defence of his betrothed"; here, he "tries to bribe the Playboy to abandon the field of sexual battle by offering him a fine suit of clothes, and Christy, in new-found arrogance, assumes Shawn Keogh's clothing as he usurps Shawn's prerogatives with Pegeen Mike."

his own meek self:

> She wouldn't suit you, and she with the divil's own temper the way you'd be strangling one another in a score of days. . . . It's the like of me only that she's fit for, a quiet simple fellow wouldn't raise a hand upon her if she scratched itself.(115)

While Christy tries on the clothes, the widow jeers at Shawn: "It's true all girls are fond of courage and do hate the like of you."(117) Her opportunism comes to the fore when she proposes to wed Christy and get Shawn to pay her in the process:

> Would you give me the red cow you have and the mountainy ram, and the right of way across your rye path, and a load of dung at Michaelmas, and turbary upon the western hill?(117)

He would, of course, and more.

Shawn leaves, and the Widow Quin courts the swaggering Christy. As he reaches a new peak of pride, recounting his immense blow which has reached to "the breeches belt" by now, his world collapses.[30] The "walking spirit of /his/ murdered da" arrives, and the brave lad, who has won the admiration or envy of all, hides fearfully. The Widow Quin, the only one not wholly committed to Christy's story, is amused. It is important that she is the one to confront Old Mahon:[31] Pegeen would have ordered Christy out, she being the stronger of the two; Shawn would have jumped at the chance to unmask Christy; the girls would have blabbed to the whole county; the men would have scoffed at him and also told all. But the widow sees her chance: she can find out the real story and use her knowledge to her advantage. She will have another husband after all if she can convince Christy that Pegeen will spurn him: "She'll knock the head of you, I'm thinking, and drive you from the door."(125)

The Widow Quin neither lies nor denies having seen Christy, but she counters Old Mahon's gruff inquiry with a

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[30]Howe (pp. 174-75) notes the progressive stages by which Christy's deed of parricide increases, "the deed by which he grew a man." Cf. Henn, p. 344

[31]Cf. Price, p. 169.

reprimand: "You're a queer kind to walk in not saluting at all."(119) Then she stiffly answers question with question:

MAHON. Did you see the young lad?

WIDOW QUIN. . . . What kind was he?

MAHON. An ugly young streeler with a murderous gob on him and a little switch in his hand. . . .

WIDOW QUIN. . . . For what is it you're wanting him, my poor man?(119-21)

She is tickled, enjoying Old Mahon's description of his son as lazy and "a dirty, stuttering lout."(121) The widow speaks from experience in warning the old man about his injury:[32]

> You'd best be wary of a mortified scalp, I think they call it, lepping around with that wound in the splendour of the sun."(121)

Her own blow resulted in the poisoning and death of her husband. Just as Pegeen shows Christy another side to himself, so the Widow Quin enjoys doing the same to his father: "It was a bad blow surely, and you should have vexed him fearful to make him strike that gash in his da."(121) The answer of father and son is the same when they are made to view themselves in a new light: "Is it me?"(121)

The widow presses more deeply in pursuit of the truth: "What way was he so foolish? It was running wild after the girls maybe?"(123) Old Mahon's answer and the following exchange throw a most unfavourable light on the marvellous murderer held in adulation by the girls:

MAHON [with a shout of derision]. Running wild, is it? If he seen a red petticoat coming swinging over the hill, he'd be off to hide in the sticks, and you'd see him shooting out his sheep's eyes between the little twigs and leaves, and his two ears rising like a hare looking out through a gap. Girls indeed!

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[32] Cf. Henn, p. 344.

WIDOW QUIN. It was drink maybe?

MAHON. And he a poor fellow would get drunk on the smell of a pint! He'd a queer rotten stomach, I'm telling you, and when I gave him three pulls from my pipe a while since, he was taken with contortions till I had to send him in the ass cart to the females' nurse.

WIDOW QUIN [clasping her hands]. Well, I never till this day heard tell of a man the like of that.

MAHON. I'd take a mighty oath you didn't surely, and wasn't he the laughing joke of every female woman where four baronies meet, the way the girls would stop their weeding if they seen him coming the road to let a roar at him, and call him the looney of Mahon's.(123)

This "looney of Mahon's" appears even worse than Shawn now. The Widow Quin, who loves all this, increases Christy's anguish and the old man's interest by admitting to having seen him.[33] She digs at both of them with her description: "A hideous, fearful villain, and the spit of you."(123) But she sends Old Mahon off and gives him advice - for the benefit of both men:

> Let you give him a good vengeance when you come up with him, but don't put yourself in the power of the law, for it'd be a poor thing to see a judge in his black cap reading out his sentence on a civil warrior the like of you.(125)

The widow is in command and laughs, with good humour, at the cowering Christy: "Well, you're the walking playboy[34] of the western world, and that's the poor man you had divided to his breeches belt.(125)

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[33]Contrary to Bourgeois' opinion (p. 198), the widow is not malicious in misinforming Old Mahon, if by "malicious" one understands "active ill-will."

[34]Bourgeois (pp. 193-94, n. 1) comments that the word "playboy" means "humbugger" or "hoaxer"; with Synge it seems to mean, at different times, "one who is played with," or "who plays like a player," or "who is full of the play-spirit" - "a wild dare-devil." Cf. Mary Hayden and Marcus Hartog, "The Irish Dialect of English: Its Origins and Vocabulary," FR, n.s., LXXXV (April 1909), 779. Christy is played with in the sense that Pegeen tries to make him something he is not at first; he "plays like a player" in winning the games; he has the play-spirit in his continuing the illusion and making it real. The Widow Quin's remark here refers to his imposture or hoaxing. Cf. Greene and Stephens, pp. 140-41.

Christy is furious:

> To be letting on he was dead, and coming back to his life, and following me like an old weazel [sic] tracing a rat, and coming in here laying desolation between my own self and the fine women of Ireland, and he a kind of carcase [sic] that you'd fling upon the sea. . . .(125)

The Widow Quin seems to disapprove of this rhetoric: "There's talking for a man's one only son."(125) But Christy, who is unrepentant, bursts out:

> His one son, is it? May I meet him with one tooth and it aching, and one eye to be seeing seven and seventy divils in the twists of the road, and one old timber leg on him to limp into the scalding grave. [Looking out.] There he is now crossing the strands, and that the Lord God would send a high wave to wash him from the world.(125)

This final imprecation scandalizes the widow. She might have a certain savagery but such wickedness falls outside her field, and she rebukes him: "Have you no shame?"(125)

Christy, who is almost in tears, can only think of Pegeen and his relationship with her:

> 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.(127)

But the widow scorns this lyric mood and contradicts his flattery by coarse observation and realism:

> There's poetry talk for a girl you'd see itching and scratching, and she with a stale stink of poteen on her from selling in the shop.(127)

She drops her caution and makes her play for Christy, revealing her loneliness and desire for the companionship of men. She is clearly sexually motivated and frustrated:

> . . . I'm above many's the day, odd times in great spirits, abroad in the sunshine, darning a stocking or stitching a shift, and odd times again looking out on the schooners,

> hookers, trawlers is sailing the sea, and I thinking on the gallant hairy fellows are drifting beyond, and myself long years living alone.(127)

She adds enticingly:

> I've nice jobs you could be doing, gathering shells to make a whitewash for our hut within, building up a little goose-house, or stretching a new skin on an old curagh I have,[35] and if my hut is far from all sides, it's there you'll meet the wisest old men, I tell you, at the corner of my wheel, and it's there yourself and me will have great times whispering and hugging . . . (127)

But Christy scorns her because all he wants is Pegeen. He is infatuated with the girl who inspires him to dream of himself as a hero. This belief in himself is not fixed enough yet for him to accept others who could not infuse a similar feeling of greatness into him. He asks the widow:

> Aid me for to win her, and I'll be asking God to stretch a hand to you in the hour of death, and lead you short cuts through the Meadows of Ease, and up the floor of Heaven to the Footstool of the Virgin's Son.(127-31)

She reacts not with fury at being rejected, but with irony: "There's praying!"(131) The Widow Quin is the one character who does not pay lip-service to religion or indulge in religious verbiage. Skelton says that her attitude to "the hectic religious language of the others" is well-shown in this retort. He comments:

> By her candid self-seeking she reveals the moral confusion of her friends and neighbours. They swear by their God, and take His name in vain. The widow rarely uses the name of God. Indeed, in the whole play she uses the word only twice.[36]

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[35] This image alone could be taken as sexually suggestive.

[36] Skelton, pp. 128-29. He notes that the first time she uses the name of God is when she tells Christy: "When you see me contriving in my little gardens, Christy Mahon, you'll swear the Lord God formed me to be living lone . . ."(89); the second instance is also with Christy, when she refers to Pegeen: "God help her to be taking you for a wonder, and you a little schemer making up a story you destroyed your da."(125) Skelton overlooks a third time;

In an echo of her bargain scene with Shawn, she decides to make a similar business arrangement with Christy:

> 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 Michaelmas, the time that you'll be master here?(131)

She always retains her quick-wittedness and makes the most of her situation.

The widow tells Christy that she is willing to swear that his father is mad, and eventually does succeed in doing this. She understands the others, knowing that if the truth is revealed everybody else will turn against the Playboy. Although she would not betray him, she has not relinquished her designs on him yet:

> 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.(131)

When Old Mahon arrives the second time and shows his wound to the tipsy men, the horrified, and almost omnipresent, widow is true to her word and thinks quickly. After a bit of blarney with the old man, she tells Philly and Jimmy about him:

> Do you know what? That man's raving from his wound to-day, for I met him a while since telling a rambling tale of a tinker had him destroyed. Then he heard of Christy's deed, and he up and says it was his son had cracked his skull. Oh, isn't madness a fright, for he'll go killing someone yet and he thinking it's the man has struck him so!(137)

Although the old man's emotional telling of the hardship suffered in looking after his feeble son catches her unawares, she is sufficiently astute to remain with her contention that he seemed mad:

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this is when Christy turns to the widow for aid after Pegeen's order to leave; the Widow Quin says: "I've tried a lot, God help me! and my share is done."(163)

"To hear you talking so quiet, who'd know you were the same fellow we seen pass to-day?"(137) The Widow Quin cleverly phrases her next question to confuse Old Mahon:

> Was your son that hit you a lad of one year and a score maybe, a great hand at racing and lepping and licking the world?(139)

He rages at her furiously and as she has hoped:

> Didn't you hear me say he was the fool of men, the way from this out he'll know the orphan's lot with old and young making game of him and they swearing, raging, kicking at him like a mangy cur.(139)

When he asks why the villagers are cheering, she confidently replies "with the shade of a smile": "They're cheering a young lad, the champion playboy of the western world."[37] Old Mahon has just been trapped into denying that his son could be anything like this. Again, on his asking about the leader of the race, the widow replies emphatically: "He's the champion of the world I tell you, and there isn't a hap'orth isn't falling lucky to his hands to-day."(139)

Christy wins the race, significantly with "the mountain girls hooshing him on."(141) Mahon is sure of the victor's identity, but the Widow Quin is agile enough, both physically and mentally, to keep him from running out. She orders Jimmy to aid her: "Stop him, or you'll get a month for the abetting of manslaughter and be fined as well."(141) Although refuting Old Mahon's charge that the Playboy is his son, the widow craftily tells him of Christy's prospects, so that he might realize that he should retract his statement for the benefit of all:

> That's not your son. That's a man is going to make a marriage with the daughter of this house, a place with fine trade, with a licence, and with poteen too.(143)

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[37] The widow's meaning of "playboy" here is both "hoaxer" and "sportsman"; the others understand only the latter by it.

But he charges that they are insane; she promptly contradicts him, insists that he is "a sniggering maniac"[38] and convinces him that the prodigy is not his son the "dribbling idiot." The Widow Quin persists in her cunning and succeeds in getting Old Mahon to leave quickly:

> If you're a wonder itself, you'd best be hasty, for them lads caught a maniac one time and pelted the poor creature till he ran out raving and foaming and was drowned in the sea.(145)

The "darlint boy," winner of the races, the one who has been

> bringing bankrupt ruin on the roulette man, and the trick-o'-the-loop man, and breaking the nose of the cockshot-man, and winning all in the sports below, racing, lepping, dancing, and the Lord knows what,(133)

enters, the subject of much wonder. His prizes are those for both poet and fighter;[39] but Christy has not forgotten his original brag:

> 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.(147)

The girls' adulation and Pegeen's fancy have enabled him to find qualities never evinced before. He has conquered all. It must be borne in mind, however, that his opposition must have come from members of this degenerate society - each of the Shawn Keogh ilk. Such is Christy's transformation that he proposes to Pegeen. She replies:

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[38]In saying that Old Mahon accepts this suggestion far too easily, Strong (p. 40) does not take into account that the old man's concept of Christy is completely opposed to what he sees of his son now; although playboy and idiot look alike, he finds it difficult to reconcile the two in his mind. The Widow Quin adds to his confusion.

[39]Cf. Ganz, op. cit., p. 64.

> You've right daring to go ask me that, when all knows you'll be starting to some girl in your own townland, when your father's rotten in four months, or five.(147)

Pegeen knows that Christy would not desert her for this reason. She wants his confirmation of loyalty but, as seen before, she also enjoys the notion of having triumphed over the maids of other counties as well as of her own. This makes Christy all the more worth having in a place where decent men are rare. When she teases him that he would make a "poacher's love," he romanticizes her and builds images that make her worthy of him:

> It's little you'll think if my love's a poacher's or an earl's itself when you'll feel my two hands stretched around you, and I squeezing kisses on your puckered lips till I'd feel a kind of pity for the Lord God is all ages sitting lonesome in his golden chair.(147)[40]

In admitting that any girl would be spellbound by his eloquence, Pegeen draws out the lyricism in him:

> Let you wait to hear me talking till we're astray in Erris when Good Friday's by, drinking a sup from a well, and making mighty kisses with our wetted mouths, or gaming in a gap of sunshine with yourself stretched back unto your necklace in the flowers of the earth.(149)

Pegeen is moved, and he continues rapturously:

> If the mitred bishops seen you 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 a nosegay in her golden shawl.(149)[41]

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[40] Howe (p. 182) points out that this image is not irreverent, but "is the grotesque realism of faith. It is what Synge, in regard to a girl on Aran, calls 'the innocent realism of childhood.'" Cf. The Aran Islands, CW II, 114.

[41] Corkery (pp. 95-96) remarks that these passages "are not truly passionate at all. At such times Synge is attempting the impossible: he will have the intensity of delight, the ecstasy, but he will also have copiousness and lusciousness of language, forgetting that ecstasy is spare of speech."

Christy proves to Pegeen that he is not only a man of passion but also one of poetry. He is another Marcus Quin, and, in his eyes, Pegeen is the loveliest and most marvellous girl in the world. She is amazed that he adores her so, and asks, "with real tenderness":

> And what is it I have, Christy Mahon, to make me fitting entertainment for the like of you that has such poet's talking, and such bravery of heart?(149)

He responds beautifully:

> Isn't there the light of seven heavens in your heart alone, the way you'll be an angel's lamp to me from this out, and I abroad in the darkness spearing salmons in the Owen or the Carrowmore.(149)

She suggests accompanying him under the stars, but he warns: "You, is it! Taking your death in the hailstones or the fogs of dawn."(149) Pegeen implies that she will be happy anywhere as long as they are together, but she is afraid that he will leave her:

> Yourself and me would shelter easy in a narrow bush, /with a qualm of dread/[42] but we're only talking maybe, for this would be a poor thatched place to hold a fine lad is the like of you.(149)

Christy allays her fears, and both get carried away in their odes to each other:[43]

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[42]The Maunsel edition (II,92) has different punctuation, which changes the implication of the stage direction: "Yourself and me would shelter easy in a narrow bush /with a qualm of dread/; but we're only talking maybe . . . ." Here it appears that Pegeen dreads sheltering in a bush, not losing him.

[43]The Playboy's imagination and fine talk are usually more vivid than Pegeen's. Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 84. Bourgeois (p. 206) takes an opposing view, saying that Pegeen "very soon becomes his equal, if not indeed his superior, in the game of imaginative love-making . . . ."

John Butler Yeats comments: "And in the lovetalk between the lovers, he is all imagination and poet's make-believe, and she all

CHRISTY /putting his arm round her/.[44] If I wasn't a good Christian, it's on my naked knees I'd be saying my prayers and paters to every jackstraw you have roofing your head, and every stony pebble is paving the laneway to your door.

PEGEEN /radiantly/. If that's the truth, I'll be burning candles from this out to the miracles of God have brought you from the south to-day, and I with my gowns bought ready the way that I can wed you, and not wait at all.(149)

Pegeen does not recognize herself in this love-duet. Her "biting tongue" has shown itself in her treatment of the girls and Christy, and, particularly, in her slanging at the Widow Quin. But "the heart's a wonder"(151) - it has changed Christy into a poet and man of prowess and Pegeen into his match. Both are joyous at the discovery of an experience and a lover they have only dreamed of.

Michael James and Shawn arrive with the dispensation but they are too late; Pegeen has decided on the "little frisky rascal" who has indeed, borne out Father Reilly's fears. Michael James tells her:

> Father Reilly's after reading it in gallous Latin, and "It's come in the nick of time," says he; "so I'll wed them in a hurry, dreading that young gaffer who'd capsize the stars."(153)

To her father's horror, Pegeen reveals her plans and gives her reasons, noticeable as they have been from the start:

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heart and passion and actuality, which is the peasant woman's good sense!" Essays Irish and American (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1918), p. 59.

[44] Johnston (pp. 36-37) notes the "absence of physical contact" here: "In the case of Synge's play the reason for this restraint lies in the fact that both parties are discovering for the first time unplumbed depths of emotion in themselves that they have never experienced before. . . . The fact that they do not touch each other - apart from a tentative arm around a waist - is not an expression of prudery, but of the terrifying joy of an entirely new experience for both of them. All of this adds reason and point to the two major reversals in the last act - Old Mahon's delight in his newly aggressive son, and Pegeen's violent response to the laughter of the other girls."

> Wouldn't it be a bitter thing for a girl to go marrying the like of Shaneen, and he a middling kind of a scarecrow with no savagery or fine words in him at all?(153)

Shawn reacts typically: "I'd be afeard to be jealous of a man did slay his da."(155) So does Pegeen:

> Well, it'd be a poor thing to go marrying your like. I'm seeing there's a world of peril for an orphan girl, and isn't it a great blessing I didn't wed you, before himself came walking from the west or south.(155)

She also points out Shawn's lack of fine words and poetic sensibility:

> And you think you're a likely beau to go straying along with, the shiny Sundays of the opening year, when it's sooner on a bullock's liver you'd put a poor girl thinking than on the lily or the rose.(155)

Shawn pleads the weight of his passion, his gifts and, of course, the holy dispensation. Pegeen's reply, tongue in cheek, is worthy of Christy in its imagery:

> I'm thinking you're too fine for the like of me, Shawn Keogh of Killakeen, and let you go off till you'd find a radiant lady with droves of bullocks on the plains of Meath, and herself bedizened in the diamond jewelleries of Pharaoh's ma.(155)

The publican's reaction to Christy's threat to murder Shawn portends the common reaction when the lad "kills" his father in front of them:

> Murder is it? Is it mad yous are? Would you go making murder in this place, and it piled with poteen for our drink to-night? Go on to the foreshore if it's fighting you want, where the rising tide will wash all trace from the memory of man.(155)

He is interested in self-preservation and will not allow anything that might have dire consequences for himself. A hilarious scene follows of Shawn, "simmering in passions to the end of time,"(155) and Michael James, afraid that the father-slayer

will become a father-in-law slayer, trying to get each other to fight Christy.

When Shawn flees, Christy and Pegeen ask for her father's blessing: "Bless us now, for I swear to God I'll wed him and I'll not renege,"(157) says Pegeen. She does "renege," however, and soon, too. Michael James consents, Christy has attained his goal, the young ones are ecstatic - and in rushes Old Mahon, followed by the crowd and the Widow Quin.

When the old man reveals his identity, Pegeen turns on her lover immediately, and, being completely disillusioned, orders him off.[45] She is adamant, regards Christy as treacherous and betrays him:[46]

> It's there your treachery is spurring me, till I'm hard set to think you're the one I'm after lacing in my heart-strings half-an-hour gone by. /To MAHON./ Take him on from this, for I think bad the world should see me raging for a Munster liar and the fool of men.(161)

Christy has made a fool of her and she cannot forgive him for

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[45] In "Synge's Playboy as Mock-Christ, MD, VIII (December 1965), 305, Howard D. Pearce says that "though Pegeen can follow him in romantic flights, her hold on the illusion is so weak, so tentative, that it takes only one assertion by Old Mahon to prove to her that Christy is a liar and 'nothing at all.'"

[46] Pegeen's betrayal of Christy is reminiscent of the actions of Judas Iscariot and Peter, especially when considering that she has promised not to renege. Pearce (op. cit., pp. 303-310) and Stanley Sultan - "The Gospel According to Synge," Papers on Language and Literature, IV (Fall 1968), 428-41 - both concentrate on the similarities between Christ and Christy. Sultan propounds a parallel between The Playboy of the Western World and the ministry and crucifixion of Christ. But the analogy is inexact and intermittent. For instance, he sees the Widow Quin and Sara Tansey as the "true devoted women of Bethany and Magdala" (p. 439); but what would Pegeen be in this case, and how does the love-talk come into the picture? Also, how does Old Mahon fit into the scheme of things? It is he and not Christy who is resurrected. Cf. Skelton, p. 121.

this.[47]

The people turn on him and jeer, abandoning their adoration of a murderer, a story-teller and a sportsman; all they see is a liar. How is the mighty one fallen. Christy turns to the Widow Quin, but even she is unable to aid him. He cannot accept the idea of returning to his previous state. Sara suggests that Pegeen might help as "her like does often change" (163); but Pegeen seems only to alter a decision if conditions appear favourable. Christy still loves her, but she believes that her hopes of a better life have been thwarted. She is "half laughing, through her tears"(163) both because of her frustration and fear of the derision that she expects to meet, and also because of her attempt to appear uninterested in him. Pegeen, who has believed Christy to be her perfect man, cannot defend him; she cannot see that even without a murder, even with falsity as the basis of his skill in all things, he is still the embodiment of her dream to find a man worthy of herself. Her illusions dashed, she sees only the disagreeable in him: "That's it, now the world will see him pandied, and he an ugly liar was playing off the hero and the fright of men!"(163)

The crowd shouts for combat, but Christy silences them, showing his awareness of their part in his transformation:

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[47] Bourgeois (p. 201) asks: ". . . If Pegeen loves him because he has killed his father, is it so obvious a counterpart that she must cease to love him because he has not killed him?" /Bourgeois' italics/ Howe and Skelton would seem to answer this question. Howe (p. 171) remarks: "It is characteristic of her proud heart, that when her playboy proves not to be all he had claimed and she had thought him, he should at once be nothing." Skelton (p. 128) says: "Pegeen Mike differs from the other girls in the energy of her passions, the liveliness of her tongue, and the decisiveness of her temper. . . . Pegeen's intensity of feeling leads her towards both total acceptance and total rejection. Her spirit is akin to the Playboy's in its extreme vitality, and it is this that attracts her to him and also causes her to reject him."

> Shut your yelling, for if you're after making a mighty man of me this day by the power of a lie, you're setting me now to think if it's a poor thing to be lonesome, it's worse maybe go mixing with the fools of earth.(165)

He chases his father outside and "kills" him again. This deed is brought on not only by Old Mahon's threats and by the crowd's taunts, but also by a desire to please Pegeen and to win her back.[48]

After this act, the Widow Quin tries to save Christy, but he refuses to go. In asking, "What good'd be my life-time if I left Pegeen?"(165) he reveals that he still needs her. The widow calls on his penchant for talking – ". . . you with a double murder this time to be telling to the girls."(165) But the lad is obdurate. She, the realist, who has regarded him as a pleasant-enough young man with a good story throughout, does not turn against him, but tries to make him see things in her way. The others, who have worshipped Christy as a romantic hero, now condemn him as a murderous intruder. The widow has no cause to betray him as she neither has idolized him nor is offended at seeing his violence; she also helps him out of charity and because she sees a similarity in their both being social outcasts. She offers to take him away and give him better girls than Pegeen:[49]

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[48] Mary Rose Sullivan (op. cit., p. 250) says that "when Christy finally attempts to repeat the original deed, he is really aware that the second killing will not satisfy Pegeen and the villagers who will find it only a 'dirty deed': his doing it anyway indicates that he has reached the stage of self-knowledge where he can begin to transcend the need for others' approval and face their ultimate rejection." But Christy has not reached this stage yet, as seen in his subsequent conversation with the Widow Quin, and does not attain it until Pegeen prepares to burn him.

[49] Skelton (p. 128) says that the Widow Quin "offers him other girls as if she were to be his procuress rather than his bride . . . ." But she has given up any plans to marry Christy and just wants to save him now.

> Isn't there the match of her in every parish public, from Binghamstown unto the plain of Meath? Come on, I tell you, and I'll find you finer sweethearts at each waning moon. (165)

But Christy is in love with one girl and will not abandon her for any number of houris:[50]

> It's Pegeen I'm seeking only, and what'd I care if you brought me a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself maybe, from this place to the Eastern World. (167)

An offer of help comes from a surprising quarter: Sara Tansey, one of the adoring village girls. She and the Widow Quin try to fasten a petticoat round Christy in an effort to disguise him. Earlier Shawn surrendered his manhood by giving Christy his clothes; the Playboy is not prepared to do the same now by putting on a petticoat. Although he deperded on the widow's protection when his father arrived, he has developed sufficiently now to refuse to turn to her again.[51] He is also blind to the fact that he has done wrong and that Pegeen will not accept him. Christy accuses the Widow Quin of being jealous of his beloved, but she is not and has no ulterior motive this time.[52] She sees derangement in his stupor and proposes saving him even if it means having him committed to an asylum.

The Widow Quin is, in many ways, the antithesis of Pegeen.[53] Sceptical where Pegeen is gullible, realistic where

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[50]Cf. Howarth, op. cit., p. 231.

[51]Cf. Gerstenberger, pp. 81-82; Mary Rose Sullivan, op. cit., pp. 246-47.

[52]Pearce (op. cit., p. 307) remarks: "Seemingly her motives are still practical and selfish, but on the other hand she appears poignantly aware of the Syngean vision of the mutability of youth and beauty, trying to save him, not merely for herself, but because it would be a shame for him to die."

[53]Being the opposite of Pegeen, she throws light on both lovers' characters; she is much more than the minor character which Chandler (op. cit., p. 273) considers her to be.

Pegeen is romantic,[54] scheming where Pegeen is impetuous, and experienced where Pegeen is innocent, she is able to watch Christy's rise and fall with amusement, compassion and detachment from illusion.[55] She is neither the "detestable" Widow Quin as seen by Bickley,[56] nor the old hag as viewed by Pritchett;[57] she is also neither the "witch woman" of Seamus Deane,[58] nor the "coarse-spoken virago" of "A Western Girl."[59] Contradicting all aspersions to her pugnacity, she retains her composure better than any of the other major characters. Although she is basically good-hearted, she is also self-seeking; she is both a lone and a lonely woman with nobody to support her, so she uses her craft candidly in order to achieve a certain amount of security.[60] The widow is sexually motivated and frustrated; of dubious morality,[61] she engages in a sex-struggle with Pegeen to win Christy. Like Pegeen, she is a stubborn woman and an opportunist, but, unlike Pegeen, she can forgive and is magnanimous in her efforts to save Christy.

Pegeen, the only person courageous enough to put the rope over Christy's head, defends her action:

> I'll say a strange man is a marvel with his mighty talk; but what's a squabble in your back-yard and the blow of a

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[54]Cf. Mary Rose Sullivan, op. cit., p. 252.

[55]Cf. Skelton, p. 129. The Widow Quin has been referred to as "among the most memorable women cynics" - "The 'Ascendancy' Writer," TLS, July 2, 1971, p. 750.

[56]Bickley, op. cit., p. 39. [57]Pritchett, op. cit., p. 156.

[58]Seamus Deane, "Synge's Poetic Use of Language," in Harmon, p. 138.

[59]Cf. James Kilroy, The "Playboy" Riots (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1971), p. 10; Kilroy quotes a letter containing this criticism by "A Western Girl" in the Freeman's Journal of January 28, 1907.

[60]Cf. Reid, op. cit., p. 89. [61]Cf. Skelton, p. 128.

> loy, have taught me that there's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed. (169)[62]

The extreme difference between the reactions to Christy's two deeds is understandable. The men and girls regard the first slaying as a necessary act which renders the question of crime irrelevant.[63] They believe, through Christy's description of his father, that the old man was terrible to live with, but also comprehend that no man would murder his father after premeditation.[64] Christy's blow must have arisen from the passion of the moment, and the boy, who seems wretched at first, appears to have suffered for his deed.[65] Nobody reacted violently to the

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[62] In "J. M. Synge's Playboy: A Necessary Reassessment," MD, XIII (September 1970), 114, Eric Salmon quotes this speech in remarking that Pegeen "is much the most clear-sighted and honest person in the play in the long run . . . ." Cf. Michael MacLiammoir /Micheál Mac Liammóir/, "Problem Plays," in Robinson, p. 223. Price (p. 171), on the other hand, holds that Christy and Martin Doul of The Well of the Saints have a much firmer grasp on reality than anybody else.

Strong (p. 43) says that the "particular application" of this speech by Pegeen "is falsified immediately by what follows" - referring no doubt, to the capture of Christy.

[63] Cf. Norman Podhoretz, "Synge's Playboy: Morality and the Hero," Essays in Criticism, III (1953), 338.

[64] Howarth (op. cit., p. 223) says that Christy's early speeches show his fear and anger with his father, but also reveal the inner warmth; he also notes that while the comedy of the play comes from "audacious, close looks at the Oedipean struggle between father and son, it ends with father and son united." Cf. Mary Rose Sullivan, op. cit., pp. 242-52.

[65] Cf. The Aran Islands, CW II, 95: "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

Widow Quin's act either, because it was also impetuous; they merely condemned her because she made a bad job of it, resulting in her husband's lingering. Donna Gerstenberger finds another explanation for the attitude to the first "murder" by Christy:

> In a very real sense, Old Mahon "deserves" to die because he has sought, in his treatment of his son, to thwart the natural process, the cycle of growth and supersession of the father by the son.[66]

Christy's second "parricide" is motivated both by his desire to get rid of his father and by his wish for approbation. He is also driven to it by the taunting of those who have worshipped him.[67] The people reject him because he has not acted impetuously, because they see the blow inflicted in all its bloodiness, and because they are implicated in the apparent killing, which might bring official censure - they want to save themselves from any charge of "aiding and abetting."[68] Michael James tells Christy:

> If we took pity on you, the Lord God would maybe bring us ruin from the law to-day, so you'd best come easy, for hanging is an easy and a speedy end.(169)

The first murder is regarded as symbolic as much as anything else; the second is too real.

Gassner stresses the crowd's culpability in the matter:

> The deeper irony is that the villagers do not realize that they are guiltier than Chris [sic], for it is they who gave him social sanction for his second assault on his father by glorifying him for his first. No wonder Chris [sic] is bewildered rather than repentant when they bind him with

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life, and if you suggest that punishment is needed as an example, they ask, 'Would any one kill his father if he was able to help it?'"

[66]Gerstenberger, p. 85.

[67]Cf. Patricia Meyer Spacks, "The Making of the Playboy," MD, IV (December 1961), 319; Johnston, p. 37.

[68]Cf. Sanderlin, op. cit., p. 296.

> ropes. Here, if we wish to labour the moral, is the whole history of mankind in a nutshell - punishment for crimes hallowed as heroism under different circumstances.[69]

Pegeen, who holds the same views as the others, is as blameworthy as them, and even more so as she is Christy's main inspiration and he acts misguidedly to win her favour.

Christy, originally incited by Pegeen's adulation, is driven to act by her cruelty now.[70] He rises to the attack, and, in threatening the others, employs the poetic language fostered through her encouragement:

> If I can wring a neck among you, I'll have a royal judgment looking on the trembling jury in the courts of law. And won't there be crying out in Mayo the day I'm stretched upon the rope with ladies in their silks and satins snivelling in their lacy kerchiefs, and they rhyming songs and ballads on the terror of my fate? /He squirms round on the floor and bites Shawn's leg./(171)

Christy might be violent but he is in an equally outrageous, and hypocritical, community. There has been much talk of the villagers' savagery - Marcus Quin's maiming of ewes(59), Jimmy Farrell's hanging of his dog(73), and the Widow Quin's striking of her husband(89) being the most arresting examples.[71] Now this attribute is seen in Pegeen when she burns her lover's leg. She is a proud girl and her pride has suffered a severe blow. Victorious over all before, she is the victim of Christy's unmasking, and has to attack him in an exaggerated manner to try to convince the others that she does not care for him. Her love has not died - as evident in her final cry - but

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[69] Gassner, The Theatre in our Times, p. 540.

[70] Cf. Price, p. 173.

[71] Cf. Thomas R. Whitaker, "Introduction: On Playing with The Playboy," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of "The Playboy of the Western World": A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Thomas R. Whitaker (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 17.

she is grievously hurt and, both in defence and in retaliation, acts barbarously.

At last dream becomes reality with Christy.[72] He knows the consequences but, on seeing his for ever resurrected father, is prepared to slay in order to live up to his own ideal. "Are you coming to be killed a third time or what ails you now?"(171) he asks. He agrees to go with Old Mahon, but on his terms. Christy might not be his father's murderer, but he is his master;[73] he has overthrown the paternal image, is a man in his own right, and, like the Widow Quin, can disregard society. Because of his son's behaviour, Old Mahon is willing and happy to accept the widow's suggestion at last: "I am crazy again!"(173)

Christy, realizing the part that the others have played in the evolution of his manhood, is grateful:

> Ten thousand blessings upon all that's here, for you've turned me a likely gaffer in the end of all, the way I'll go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgment day.(173)

He needs Pegeen no more and leaves without any direct remark to her. He is everything that she has wanted him to be; but now that he is wholly convinced and she has proved disloyal, he does not crawl to her again. Sufficiently emancipated to do what pleases him, he knows that he will impress others. Christy is able to triumph over the rejection of these people who have made him and who are not all that different from his acquaintances at home.[74]

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[72] Cf. Coxhead, p. 18. [73] Cf. Skelton, p. 129.

[74] Malone (op. cit., p. 152) says that at the end Christy "is thrown from his pedestal." But although he is thrown off when his father appears, he gains an even higher footing eventually; supra, pp. 16-17.

Sanderlin (op. cit., pp. 292-93) comments: "If the Mayoites are fools, Christy is even more of one for having taken them so

Shawn, grabbing his opportunity with relief and lack of pride, is delighted to have Pegeen for himself again. But she has been in love and cannot abide him. On clouting and spurning the cowardly, whining bumpkin, she laments: "Oh my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only playboy of the western world."(173)[75] She comprehends that she has not been able to keep up with Christy - he has outgrown his chief creator.[76] Now she is doomed to a time of dullness, her chance has eluded her, and her vision of a life with a real man of power, passion and poetry is in ruins. Pegeen is bereft and bound to a restrictive world that she despises.[77] She yearns for the romantic illusion she savoured before, but it is too late.[78]

Pegeen admires Christy for rebelling against his father. She, too, is oppressed by paternal power, and, like Old Mahon,

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seriously when they praised him for his bravery and compared him to a poet." He goes on to say, in referring to the ending, that "it is precisely the Irish penchant for dream-making and poetic fantasy that Synge is making fun of, and Christy, as the embodiment of that tendency in the form of a poet-hero, is worse off than the villagers when he takes himself more seriously than they do." Christy might be a fool when he accepts the dream at first, but he develops into a real hero and is certainly not worse off than the others at the end: he faces the future with assuredness and is joyous at the discovery of his new self.

[75]"Playboy" takes on all its meanings here, but particularly that of a person with play-spirit.

Roger McHugh (Preface in Harmon, p. xii) remarks that in the last known draft of the play, "Synge makes Pegeen Mike rush out after the Playboy to make sure she hasn't lost him. In the play as we have it in its acting version, she throws her shawl over her head and wails that she has lost him. [McHugh's italics] It is much better so." Cf. CW IV, 175.

[76]Cf. Johnston, p. 36.

[77]Cf. Gerstenberger, pp. 83-84; Saddlemyer, p. 26.

[78]Ann Saddlemyer (p. 26) comments that even though Pegeen has learned the lesson of reality, "that can never compensate for the loss of a wonder once tasted, a dream once lived. The greatest loneliness, the bitterest irony, is the vision of what might have been."

Michael James has arranged his child's marriage for his own benefit.[79] She has the urge for self-liberation, and, in pursuing Christy, defies her father as well as clerical authoritarianism embodied by Shawn Keogh and his own father-figure (whom he could never consider opposing), Father Reilly.[80]

The dreaming lass is the one who forfeits the most.[81] The others can continue living as they did before the Playboy brought light briefly to their world: the girls have their hopes of spectacle, the men their drink, and Shawn Keogh his Father Reilly; the Widow Quin, who is accustomed to her life alone (although she would prefer companionship) might still be able to coax the promised cow, ram and dung from Shawn. But Pegeen, in lacking the initiative and courage to follow Christy, has lost her only opportunity. Her individuality has been stifled by convention; all she has left is her invective.

Pegeen encourages Christy to find himself a virile man of prowess. The deception makes him but it destroys her because she cannot accept the basis of their reciprocal love. Professor Bradbrook remarks:

> When two individuals meet whose fantasies complement each other, they will be able to enjoy at least that form of happiness which is "the perpetual possession of being well deceived." The person who needs to be thought important and the person who needs someone to look up to may succeed in satisfying each other, whatever the world may think of both, and notwithstanding the possibility that the "hero" may be extremely inefficient or dependent in other ways upon the hero-worshipper. Fantasy will reinforce, underlie and sustain a planned course of activity.[82]

Pegeen and Christy's mutual love and dependence are threatened

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[79] Cf. Bourgeois, p. 197; Greene and Stephens, p. 252.

[80] Cf. Skelton, p. 128.

[81] Cf. James F. Kilroy, "The Playboy as Poet," PMLA, LXXXIII (May 1968), 441-42; Sultan, op. cit., p. 435.

[82] M. C. Bradbrook, English Dramatic Form: A History of its Development (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), p. 25.

when the fantasy is exposed; when Christy no longer depends on his foremost hero-worshipper, and she fails him, they are destroyed.

Roy says that Pegeen comes to "the sudden realization that her idol has feet of very inferior clay."[83] But her final comprehension and the cause of her lament is her recognition of the opposite. She concludes that while Christy has become the kind of man she desires to capture, she has remained only a publican's daughter.[84] Like melancholy Nora Burke, quick-tempered Pegeen needs a man to talk to and to understand her; Christy is such a man, but she is unable to hold the hero who is adored because of his reputation.

Pegeen has been called

> one of the most striking feminine creations of dramatic literature, romantic, realist, obstinate, and tender all at once . . . .[85]

Corkery, a less friendly critic, describes her as "poverty-stricken" and

> the commonest thing in Synge, pert, bright-eyed, quick-witted, efficient in love-making as in bar-tending. She is the stock figure in amateur play-writing . . . .[86]

He also says that Christy "is the only character that changes and grows."[87] On the contrary, Pegeen develops while building her dream around Christy; she, too, acquires "poetry talk," and, at the end, attains insight into her and her lover's condition. Christy is the hero and protagonist, but Pegeen is

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[83]Roy, op. cit., p. 141. Cf. Bourgeois, p. 198.

[84]Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 40; Thomas Kilroy, "Synge and Modernism," in Harmon, p. 173.

[85]"The 'Ascendancy' Writer," TLS, July 2, 1971, p. 750. Pegeen, however, begins viewing life realistically only towards the end of the play.

[86]Corkery, pp. 194-95. [87]ibid., p. 194.

indispensable in the making of the Playboy.[88] Christy triumphs but Pegeen fails, and in so doing she is tragic. Podhoretz remarks:

> The tragic implications of The Playboy of the Western World are that the type represented by Pegeen - those who can perceive greatness but cannot rise to it, who are weighed down by the "society" within them - can neither live in the lonesome west playing out their days, nor be happy in the little world of daily preoccupations. The Christies are somehow taken care of, and so are the Shawns; it is the Pegeens who suffer most from the radical incompatibility of Hero and society.[89]

Pegeen is wafted along on a dream that she helps create, a fantasy that promises to bring her joy and fulfilment. She believes that she has met the man who combines the virtues of both poetry and fierceness that she desires so much in a lover; but she rejects him when she realizes that both are based on a lie, and, on seeing him act to make this lie the fact she has believed it to be, she is horrified. When she understands that her lover really is the Playboy, it is too late. From having little she rises to the promise of obtaining everything she craves for, but she falls, possessing nothing of this in the

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[88] O'Connor (Robinson, p. 47) is mistaken in saying that "Pegeen is not a major character at all; she has not been acted upon by the dramatic machinery . . . ." Williams (pp. 163-64), who has a more valid view, holds that the whole community helps build Christy's illusion and that he is not the only one who is transformed. Cf. Roy, op. cit., p. 141; Ellis-Fermor, p. 179.

[89] Podhoretz, op. cit., pp. 343-44. For other views on and references to the tragic status of Pegeen and the tragic elements in The Playboy of the Western World as a whole, cf. Bickley, op. cit., p. 40; Roy, op. cit., p. 141; Howe, pp. 69-70, 144; Malone, op. cit., p. 151; Ellis-Fermor, p. 179; Henn, The Harvest of Tragedy, pp. 204-205; Greene and Stephens, p. 252; Coxhead, p. 20; Henn, pp. 57-59; Gerstenberger, pp. 82-83; Wallace H. Johnson, "The Pagan Setting of Synge's Playboy," Renascence, XIX [1966], 121; Sultan, op. cit., p. 440; Reid, op. cit., p. 89.

end.[90] There is no hope. She has lost "a wonder once tasted, a dream once lived."[91]

Synge wrote to Maire O'Neill:

> . . . We both have a poetical strain in us, and we should take care of it - as one takes care of some rare flower in one's garden, that dies easily and leaves one the poorer for ever.[92]

Pegeen and Christy cultivate such a "flower" through their love. But Christy outgrows her and, when he leaves, his talent promises to flourish; Pegeen's cannot, and she is the poorer for ever.

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[90]Skelton (p. 130) comments: "Pegeen is another of Synge's passionate, disturbed women hungry for freedom and romance, and she comes closer to success than her predecessors. Nevertheless, her pride and the fundamental puritanism of her temperament make it impossible for her to accept the consequences of her own dream. She cannot accept the Romancer that is Christy, nor can she face his loss without grief."

[91]Saddlemyer, p. 26.

[92]Letters to Molly: John Millington Synge to Maire O'Neill 1906-1909, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 81; letter of December 27, 1906.

Chapter 9

A WOMAN WILL BE YOUNG FOR EVER: DEIRDRE OF THE SORROWS

> And then he /Cathbad the Druid/ took the child in his arms, and it is what he said: "O Deirdre, on whose account many shall weep, on whose account many women shall be envious, there will be trouble on Ulster for your sake, O fair daughter of Fedlimid.
>
> "Many will be jealous of your face, O flame of beauty; for your sake heroes shall go to exile. For your sake deeds of anger shall be done in Emain; there is harm in your face, for it will bring banishment and death on the sons of kings.
>
> "In your fate, O beautiful child, are wounds, and ill-doings, and shedding of blood.
>
> "You will have a little grove apart to yourself; you will be a tale of wonder for ever, Deirdre."[1]

The legend of Deirdre and the Sons of Usna is the oldest and foremost love-story in early Celtic literature.[2] About the flight of a beautiful girl and her beloved from her betrothed, an older, but powerful man, and the lovers' consequent death, the tale is archetypal. What Helen is to the Greeks, Deirdre is to the Irish.[3]

In turning to Celtic saga for the material of his final play, Synge was presented with a donnée for the only time. Interpretation of such a work and particularly of its characters can result in a certain amount of contention:[4] the end of Deirdre of the Sorrows is known from the start - Deirdre must be the cause of the death of her lover and his brothers and of the destruction of Emain Macha;[5] the problem is how far she brings this about

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[1] Lady Gregory, "Fate of the Sons of Usnach," Cuchulain of Muirthemne: The Story of the Men of the Red Branch of Ulster (London : John Murray, 1907), pp. 105-106.

[2] Cf. Eleanor Hull (ed.), The Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature (London: David Nutt, 1898), p. 22; Greene and Stephens, p. 218.

[3] Bourgeois, p. 213; Squire, op. cit., p. 190.

[4] The problem is increased by the fact that the play is unfinished.

[5] It is not a pre-condition that Deirdre must die immediately after Naisi. Cf. Eleanor Hull, op. cit., pp. 49-53; Rees and Rees, op. cit., p. 281; Thomas Kinsella (trans.), The Tain

through her own nature and voluntary actions, or how far are all mere victims of fate.

Howe says that throughout the play there is

> a feeling that whatever happens is foretold, a feeling of inevitability almost Greek - Deirdre does but what it is ordained for her to do . . . .[6]

He adds[7] that even if "the man of old" had not foretold Deirdre's story, it would be the same. Lucas also considers the inevitability of the denouement:

> It is one of those tragedies that tell of a doom that cannot be averted - that is accepted - that is even invited.[8]

Ganz remarks in the same vein:

> The prophecies that surround Deirdre suggest an atmosphere of determinism, but more significantly, she and those about her seem from the first conscious of being no more than elements in an already conceived legend.[9]

These opinions would seem to belie the possibility of Deirdre's being anything more than a puppet.

Corkery, who validly points out that Synge "gave himself . . . whole-heartedly to what was eternally human in the legend,"[10] takes an opposite view to that of Howe in particular:

> The *leit-motif* in the original tale of Deirdre is of course the prophecy that gave her her name, the meaning of which is alarm. Synge was no Greek; he could not give himself

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(London: Oxford University Press in assocation with the Dolmen Press, 1970), pp. 16-20; Ann Saddlemyer, "*Deirdre of the Sorrows*: Literature First . . . Drama Afterwards," in Harmon, p. 101.

[6]Howe, p. 93. [7]ibid., p. 94.

[8]Lucas, op. cit., p. 228. Cf. also Peacock, op. cit., p. 108.

[9]Ganz, op. cit., p. 67; Cf. Skelton, p. 142.

[10]Corkery, p. 209.

> to anything so metaphysical as prophecy. That original leit-motif was particular, concerning Deirdre alone. As an active principle in the play, he replaced it by one that was, in his eyes, common to the human race: the horror of old age, the decay of love consequent on the passing of youth; replaced it, therefore, by something whose utterance gave him, the scorner of metaphysics, the passionate lover of beauty, some modicum of personal relief . . . .[11]

Donna Gerstenberger also underlines Synge's concentration on the characters' mortal limitations, saying that they are

> betrayed by their human frailties, a betrayal which does not deny their heroic actions but does deny the possibility of heroic action which is meaningful in the face of individual life and reality.[12]

She adds that

> Synge's people are not doomed in the usual sense by the working out of chance or by overriding, universal fate; instead, they are defeated from within, by what is frail and pitiful in all human beings - terror before the demands of life, death, and the end of love and youth.[13]

Ann Saddlemyer holds that the characters know both that they are subject to the inevitable laws of nature and that their own stories are pre-ordained and irrevocable, but she remarks that each is given the choice of action and self-realization:

> Impelled by their own natures, Deirdre, Naisi, Conchubor and even Owen give voice and meaning to their desires through the ancient words of the prophecy; the past mingles with the present, each illuminating and enlarging the significance of the other. Because each is what he is, the ancient prophecy merely reflects the inevitable outcome of this interaction of characters.[14]

Farris, who pays attention to the role of the characters in deciding events, comments that

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[11] Corkery, p. 218.

[12] Gerstenberger, p. 98.

[13] ibid., p. 99.

[14] Saddlemyer, p. 19.

> the prophecy merely initiates Synge's tragedy; he does not rely upon it to bring Deirdre to destruction. The prophecy does not simply "come true"; it is fulfilled by the revelation that the destructive force is a part of Deirdre herself. /Farris's italics/ The prophecy is not made to motivate or even to explain the events in the action of the play; the action proceeeds from characterization. Rather than as a plot device, Synge uses the prophecy for mood, for a sense of the inevitable.[15]

In Deirdre of the Sorrows, the prophecy serves only as background or atmosphere. The donnée provides the basic plot, but the characters determine each event. They are aware of the story which has been foretold but are not ruled by it. Any inevitability would appear to be the result of their acting according to their nature, rather than of the prophecy. The crises centre on Deirdre's resolutions and actions - her decisions to flee with Naisi rather than to marry Conchubor, and, later, to return to Ireland, her quarrel with Naisi, and her suicide.

The prophecy is that Deirdre will be the cause of envy and destruction. Her behaviour gives rise to agitation even at the beginning of Deirdre of the Sorrows. Old Woman and Lavarcham[16] are perturbed that their charge is out late, especially as Naisi and his brothers "are above chasing hares."(183)

Although Lavarcham tries to influence Deirdre's conduct at times, she is constantly aware that she cannot change any of her decisions. Her answer to Old Woman's reprobation that she should look after and chide Deirdre, "and she turning a woman that was meant to be a queen,"(183) is significant:

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[15] Jon R. Farris, "The Nature of the Tragic Experience in Deirdre of the Sorrows," MD, XIV (September 1971), 245. Cf. Henn p. 74.

[16] In the Oxford edition, Lavarcham is described in the cast list as "a wise woman and servant of Conchubor, about fifty," and Old Woman as "cook and Deirdre's foster-mother."(181) The Maunsel edition (II,116) refers to Lavarcham as Deirdre's nurse and to Old Woman as Lavarcham's servant.

> Who'd check her like was made to have her pleasure only, the way if there were no warnings told about her you'd see the troubles coming when an old king is taking her, and she without a thought but for her beauty and to be straying the hills.(183)

She regards Deirdre as self-willed and born to enjoy life, but not as a conventional queen: Deirdre, a child of nature,[17] is "gathering new life"(183) on Slieve Fuadh - life which could not flourish in Emain.[18] Lavarcham understands that Deirdre finds abundant joy in her rural life, and that, even without the prophecy, Conchubor's designs and the girl's love of freedom will lead to distress: the two are irreconcilable. Old Woman, who seems more disposed to Conchubor than Lavarcham is, sees his viewpoint:[19]

> Shouldn't she be well pleased getting the like of Conchubor, and he middling settled in his years itself? I don't know what he wanted putting her this wild place to be breaking her in, or putting myself to be roasting her suppers, and she with no patience for her food at all.(183)

Her description of Conchubor as "settled" conveys something of his character: it means both established (regarding status and possessions) and mature, but it also implies that he is fixed in his ways.[20] The words "breaking her in" suggest that Deirdre's life in the country has left her untamed and that she will not submit easily to the restrictive life countenanced by Conchubor -

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[17] Cf. Bourgeois, p. 215; Henn, p. 349.

[18] Una Ellis-Fermor (p. 182) holds that the spirit and passion of Synge's people are revealed "so closely in terms of that beauty of nature which is a part of them that the two become an inner and an outer aspect of the same spiritual reality." She regards <u>Deirdre of the Sorrows</u> as the consummation of Synge's dual power of dramatist and of nature-mystic; supra, pp. 21-22.

Skelton (p. 140) notes that the play opens in the autumn: "It is a time of fruition, both for her girlhood and for the long-known prophecy." Henn (p. 349), however, does not regard "the flowers, nuts, and sticks" as symbolic.

[19] Cf. Price, p. 193.

[20] Cf. Henn, p. 350.

she cannot be broken in to adopt anything contrary to her spirit.[21]

Lavarcham's instruction to Old Woman not to prepare Deirdre for Conchubor reveals her understanding of him: "Would you have him see you, and he a man would be jealous of a hawk would fly between her and the rising sun."(185) The warning foreshadows the High King's unremitting jealousy when Naisi, like a bird of prey, takes Deirdre from him. Conchubor is the setting rather than the rising sun. Lavarcham hopes that if he sees Deirdre as she always is he will realize their incompatibility and will give up his scheme. The wise woman, torn between her loyalty to both, is being driven to distraction:

> It'd be best of all maybe if he got in tempers with herself, and made an end quickly, for I'm in a poor way between the pair of them.(185)

The difference between the attitudes to nature of the king and the girl is suggested after his entrance: "A night with thunder coming is no night to be abroad,"(185) he tells Lavarcham, to which she replies:

> She's used to every track and pathway and the lightning itself wouldn't let down its flame to singe the beauty of her like.(185)

Deirdre, at home in a natural environment, is in harmony with her surroundings. This is one of the reasons for her instructions to keep the mats and hangings in the press:

> She wouldn't wish to be soiling them, she said, running out and in with mud and grasses on her feet, and it raining since the night of Samhain. The silver skillets and the golden cups, we have beyond locked in the chest. (187)

The trappings of civilization and wealth are opposed to the freedom she finds in her preferred way of life. It is ironic that Conchubor orders them to be taken out, as Deirdre employs them later to indicate her standing in her bid to capture Naisi.

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[21]Cf. Price, pp. 193-94.

Lavarcham's pride in her faculty for tapestry-work suggests, once more, her charge's inclination: Deirdre does not have an equal "at fancying figures and throwing purple upon crimson, and she edging them all times with her greens and gold."(187) The figures are of three young hunters (Naisi and his brothers), symbolizing youth; the colours are those of royalty, passion, and, surrounding them, nature.[22]

Lavarcham speaks candidly to the king right through the play. She does now, and, in warning him of the unsuitability of the match, stresses both Deirdre's beauty and her accord with the world:

> . . . I'll tell you this night Conchubor, she's little call to mind an old woman when she has the birds to school her, and the pools in the rivers where she goes bathing in the sun. I'll tell you if you seen her that time, with her white skin, and her red lips, and the blue water and the ferns about her, you'd know maybe, and you greedy itself, it wasn't for your like she was born at all.(187-89)

But Conchubor is determined to have her: "It's little I heed for what she was born; she'll be my comrade surely."(189) Even though he is obtuse and selfish, he arouses sympathy in his need of a companion like Deirdre to bring some comfort. When he examines Deirdre's workbox, Lavarcham upbraids him:

> I'm in dread, so, they were right saying she'd bring destruction on the world, for it's a poor thing when you see a settled man putting the love he has for a young child, and the love he has for a full woman, on a girl the like of her, and it's a poor thing, Conchubor, to see a High King the way you are this day, prying after her needles and numbering her lines of thread.(189)[23]

Reference is made to "the troubles are foretold," but,

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[22]Cf. Henn, p. 349.

[23]Howe (p. 135) says that this shows "the tragic absurdity of the old man who insists upon wooing when the half of his feelings are the feelings of a father." Cf. Ann Saddlemyer, "Deirdre of the Sorrows," in Harmon, p. 102.

Lavarcham says: "It's not the dread of death or troubles that would tame her like,"(189) a comment that gives warning of the end. Deirdre is self-willed and, although she knows that any relationship with Naisi will cause disquiet, she cannot be subdued or subjected to others' decisions which will deprive her of joy.

Conchubor tells Lavarcham that he is pleased that Deirdre is "light and airy."(189) Henn[24] says that these words suggest Deirdre's grace, waywardness and irresponsibility. Lavarcham does not believe the king, indicating that she regards the words as implying perverse as much as anything else: "It's a queer thing the way the likes of me do be telling the truth and the wise are lying all times!"(189)

The incompatibility of the old man and the girl is pronounced immediately on her entrance.[25] He announces that he has come "bringing . . . rings and jewels from Emain Macha";(189) she has come bringing a bag of nuts and twigs from the hillside. At once they betray their conflict of purpose:

> CONCHUBOR. . . . And it's that way you're picking up the manners will fit you to be Queen of Ulster?
>
> DEIRDRE. . . . I have no wish to be a queen.(191)

He derisively accuses her of wishing to be "like the common lot scattered in the glens."(191) But Deirdre does not. She points out why Conchubor does not attract her:

> A girl born, the way I'm born, is more likely to wish for a mate who'd be her likeness . . . a man with his hair like the raven maybe and his skin like the snow and his lips like blood spilt on it.(191)

Here Deirdre reveals her sense of poetry: her lover must be as magnificent as she is.[26] There is dramatic irony in her description

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[24] Henn, p. 350

[25] Cf. Price, pp. 194-95.

[26] It must be remembered, however, that this is the stock-image of the beautiful lover. Cf. particularly Eleanor Hull,

of his lips, because her preference for such a mate leads to bloodshed. The speech touches on a motif developed later: the beauty of youth and the ugliness of old age. The youthful Deirdre has no faculty for devoting her time or attention to Conchubor. Marriage to the High King would involve self-betrayal.[27]

Conchubor resorts to cajolery and admires her work. Deirdre is hard, deliberately telling him that she is figuring "three young men, and they chasing in the green gap of a wood."(191) The prophecy and the brothers occupy her thoughts even before she decides to escape from Conchubor.[28] Donna Gerstenberger contends that the implications of this scene are clear:

> Naisi and his brothers are being woven into her tapestry just as they are to be woven into her destiny and into that of Ireland.[29]

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op. cit., p. 24; Squire, op. cit., p. 191; Rees and Rees, op. cit., pp. 279-80; Thomas Kinsella, op. cit., p. 11.

Skelton (p. 141) says that by this description one realizes that "Deirdre thinks of her life not in terms of 'political' reality, but in terms of the working out of an ideal myth. It may be even that knowledge of the prophecy has turned her mind to thinking of her life as a heroic drama; to avoid or attempt to escape her fate would be to live her life on a lesser plane than that possible to her." But this is not revealed at this stage.

[27]One is reminded of Nora and Dan Burke. Deirdre and Conchubor are as incompatible as they are: both women are sensitive; both men supply material security but little else. In referring to this point, Price (p. 193) says: "From this impasse Naisi and [the] tramp provide the way out, with the difference that the tramp has to offer their course to Nora, while Naisi has to be helped to see their course by Deirdre. . . . The influence of the natural world on character is important in both plays, and both women dread the surroundings associated with the older men: Nora dreads the glens around Dan's farm, and Deirdre dreads the great, bare palace Conchubor has prepared for her. The difference is that in the beginning Deirdre is in her right environment in the natural world (from which Conchubor wishes to take her) while this is the kind of environment which Nora and [the] tramp seek." Cf. also Henn, p. 74; Gerstenberger, pp. 100-101; Johnston, p. 43.

[28]Cf. O'Connor, in Robinson, p. 49.

[29]Gerstenberger, p. 100.

Her defiance continues. She admires Naisi's, not Conchubor's, way of life. The king tells her:

> It's soon you'll have dogs with silver chains to be chasing in the woods of Emain, for I have white hounds rearing up for you, and grey horses, that I've chosen from the finest in Ulster and Britain and Gaul.(191)

Even the colours he describes seem monotonous and less vivid than those loved by Deirdre.

Conchubor reveals that he sees her as an outlet, a relief from the trials of rule and position. An unhappy man, he believes that only Deirdre can bring lasting pleasure:

> The like of me have a store of knowledge that's a weight and terror; it's for that we do choose out the like of yourself that are young and glad only. I'm thinking you're gay and lively each day in the year?(193)

She admits to occasional loneliness, however, acknowledging that it can come to anybody anywhere: "There are lonesome days and bad nights in this place like another."(193)

Conchubor persists in portraying to Deirdre his dream of her; he has been waiting for her and now, in the autumn of his life, he is determined to unite with her:

> How would I be happy seeing age come on me each year when the dry leaves are blowing back and forward at the gate of Emain, and yet this last while I['m] saying out when I'd see the furze breaking and the daws sitting two and two on ash-trees by the Duns of Emain, "Deirdre's a year nearer her full age when she'll be my mate and comrade," and then I'm glad surely.(193)

She is adamant in her refusal, but he does not heed her: "What we all need is a place is safe and splendid, and it's that you'll get in Emain in two days or three."(193) His speech is unconsciously ironic. The "safe and splendid" place for him is in Emain, but Deirdre enjoys only the splendour of nature. When she finally finds a place safe from Conchubor, it is in the grave.[30] He tells her that he will stand between her "and the great

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[30] Cf. Henn, p. 350.

troubles are foretold";(193) but his jealousy is one of the causes of these "great troubles." Deirdre is stubborn but frightened, and keeps rejecting his proposal:

> I will not be your mate in Emain.(193)
>
> I'd liefer stay this place, Conchubor.(193)
>
> I will not be your queen in Emain when it's my pleasure to be having my freedom on the edges of the hills.(195)
>
> I cannot go, Conchubor.(195)

The king first pleads with her to go with him, but even after commanding her to leave for Emain shortly, he appears a lonely, desperate and, for a while, almost pitiful old man:

> It's my wish to have you quickly, and I'm sick and weary thinking of the day you'll be brought down to me and seeing you walking into my big empty halls. I've made all sure to have you - and yet all said there's a fear in the back of my mind I'd miss you and have great troubles in the end. It's for that, Deirdre, I'm praying that you'll come quickly. And you may take the word of a man has no lies you'll not find with any other the like of what I'm bringing you in wildness and confusion in my own mind.(195)

Notably the halls are "empty"; they hold no promise of joy for Deirdre - and her presence will not be enough to fill them with gaiety. Conchubor refers to himself as "a man has no lies"; this is why Fergus trusts him. But the king proves to be treacherous.

Deirdre is asked:

> Wouldn't you liefer be my comrade growing up the like of Emer and Maeve, than to be in this place and you a child always?(195)

This is relevant to her later realization that she does want to stay young for ever. Although she wants to remain in her natural surroundings, she finally understands that nowhere on earth can she escape the passing of youth if she lives. The passage of time does not distress her now as she tells Conchubor of her strong independence of will:

> You don't know me, and you'd have little joy taking me, Conchubor. . . . I'm too long watching the days getting a great speed passing me by, I'm too long taking my will and it's that way I'll be living always.(195)

Deirdre plays for time, suggesting that she sees Lavarcham's house as providing shelter from a harsh future:

> Leave me a short space longer, Conchubor. Isn't it a poor thing I should be hastened away when all these troubles are foretold? Leave me a year Conchubor, it isn't much I'm asking.(195)

But Conchubor insists that he loves her, and cannot wait any longer while she grows "lonesome and shy": "I'm a ripe man and I've great love and yet, Deirdre, I'm the King of Ulster."(195) He implies that he is passionate, and refers to his status only as a final inducement here. He chides her: "Young girls are slow always; it is their lovers that must say the word."(195) Deirdre, however, shows no hesitation in courting Naisi.

The king leaves, but not before Fergus says:

> We're late already, and it's no work the High King to be slipping on stepping stones, and hilly pathways when the floods are rising with the rain.(197)[31]

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[31] In Seven Types of Ambiguity (2nd ed.; London: Chatto & Windus, 1949), pp. 38-42, William Empson examines the imagery of the storm and the grave in Deirdre of the Sorrows. In pointing out the several implications of Conchubor's crossing the river during the storm, he says (p. 39): "If we are to conceive that he has got across the stepping-stones already, then their flooding means that Deirdre's way of safety to Conchubor and his palace and the life which is expected of her, has been cut off; that it is high time she behaved like the stepping-stones and isolated herself with Naisi; that what in the story is done heroically by her own choice is, in dumb show, either as an encouragement or as an ironical statement of the impotence of heroic action, done by the weather; and that all these troubles which she is bringing on herself have been foretold and are beyond her control." He adds (p. 40) that "we compare the storm with the plot and are surprised into a pathetic fallacy. It is not that nature is with her or against her, is her fate or her servant; the fallacy here claims more generally that nature, like the spectators, is excited into a variety of sympathies, and is all these four together." Cf. also Farris, op. cit., p. 247.

Conchubor leaves Deirdre because of the inclement weather; the elements bring Naisi to her.[32]

Lavarcham blames Deirdre for causing the sudden command, but the girl denies this. She seems prepared to do anything to escape Conchubor and asks Lavarcham to take her away. The sensible woman refuses: Deirdre would be captured and her own life would be endangered. Now Deirdre is "terrified with the reality that is before her"(197)[33] and asks who can go against Conchubor; Lavarcham mentions Maeve of Connaught; Deirdre suggests Fergus, and then Naisi and his brothers, but is told:

> In the end of all there is none can go against Conchubor, and it's folly that we're talking, for if any went against Conchubor it's sorrow he'd earn and the shortening of his day of life.(197-99)

This points to the end and the deaths of Deirdre and the Sons of Usna.

Lavarcham's forecast that "the night will be the worst I'm thinking we've seen these years gone by,"(199) takes on a deeper meaning when one considers that it is this storm which brings Naisi, resulting first in the lovers' seven years of joy, but finally in their deaths and in the destruction of Emain: it is, in this way, both the worst and the best night for the young Deirdre.

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[32]Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 103.

[33]Price (p. 195) remarks on this stage direction: "Here the predominant theme of the play, developing perfectly out of the opening theme, begins to be heard. Reality is death. Existence with Conchubor would crush all that is precious in Deirdre's nature, and physical death would probably follow." But Price is straining interpretation to fit his theme here. Reality implies not physical death at this stage but death of freedom; Deirdre realizes that she must act now in order to try to safeguard her liberty; she cannot postpone decision or action any longer.

To Lavarcham's surprise, Deirdre orders the house to be prepared as one befitting a queen while she garbs herself accordingly:[34]

> I will dress like Emer in Dundealgan or Maeve in her house in Connaught. If Conchubor'll make me a queen I'll have the right of a queen who is a master, taking her own choice and making a stir to the edges of the seas. . . . Lay out your mats and hangings where I can stand this night and look about me. Lay out the skins of the rams of Connaught and of the goats of the west.[35] I'll put on my robes that are the richest for I will not be brought down to Emain as Cuchulain brings his horse to its yoke, or Conall Cearneach puts his shield upon his arm. And maybe from this day I will turn the men of Ireland like a wind blowing on the heath.(199)

If the donnée is disregarded, this speech would seem ambiguous. At first it appears that Deirdre is proud: she is determined to enter Emain regally, and, by her beauty and actions, draw the men of Ireland to her. But her intention is to deceive. Naisi tells Lavarcham later:

> We met a young girl in the woods who told us we might shelter this place if the rivers rose on the pathways and the floods gathered from the butt of the hills.(201)

Deirdre, who expects the brothers to come, has decided to ask Naisi for protection and for love. She will not be brought to Emain as Cuchulain's horse is brought to yoke because she has no intention of going there. She knows that her action will cause dissension but she is prepared to do this for the sake of her own happiness "though she'd spoil the world."(201) This is the first time that she has exercised her authority in this way: "Who'd have thought we'd run before her and she so quiet till tonight,"(201) exclaims Old Woman. But Lavarcham is not surprised. She knows

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[34]Donna Gerstenberger (p. 100) says that Deirdre puts off her wild and free childhood as she puts on her queenly robes. Price (p. 196) believes that she does this to make Naisi realize that she is both a woman and a queen.

[35]The Maunsel edition(II,133) adds: "I will not be a child or plaything." This stresses Deirdre's determination to rule her own life."

that Deirdre will not submit to the wishes of anybody: "When all's said it's her like will be the master till the ends of time."(201) Deirdre does get her way - at a price.

Lavarcham, the seer, foresees that Deirdre's conduct heralds disaster: "It's more than Conchubor'll be sick and sorry, I'm thinking, before this story is told to the end."(201) But even she is startled when Naisi arrives, and she realizes that Deirdre has begun to take her fate - and that of everybody else - into her own hands. She tries to prevent the brothers from coming in, but they are as determined as Deirdre to have their own way. Old Woman's "I couldn't keep her. I've no hold on her,"(203) applies to all other characters, too. Nobody can stop Deirdre doing what she wants: Conchubor tries to gain a hold on her, but fails; Naisi's hold is one of love, but he accepts her decisions.

The two men contrast totally: the king is dour, scheming and irascible; Naisi, bright, impetuous and good-humoured on his entrance, is described as speaking hilariously(203,205) and cheerfully.(205,207)[36] Conchubor is age to his youth, and Deirdre is attracted to the latter.

In upbraiding the brothers for imposing themselves upon her hospitality, Lavarcham asks:

> If you'd a quiet place settled up to be playing yourself maybe with a gentle queen, what'd you think of young men prying around and carrying tales?(205)

This is realized later in Alban (the "quiet place") with Deirdre (the queen). Lavarcham is shrewd and knows that Naisi will accept her story if she pretends to take a bribe:

> We're decent people, and I wouldn't put you tracking a young girl, not if you gave me the gold clasp you have, hanging on your coat.(205)

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[36]Cf. Farris, op. cit., p. 247.

On his giving it to her, she tells him confidentially where to find the "young and flighty girl."(205)

Lavarcham is greatly angered when the youths discover that the golden mug is Conchubor's. She realizes that this intrusion will lead to the events she fears:

> How dare young fools the like of you /speaking with vehement insolence/ come prying around, running the world into troubles for some slip of a girl? What brings you this place straying from Emain? /Very bitterly./ Though you think maybe young men can do their fill of foolery and there is none to blame them.(205-207)

She cannot tell them why she is so agitated, but her anxiety is revealed in this outburst.

As they are leaving, Deirdre calls the man who can save her: "Naisi. . . . Do not leave me, Naisi . . . ."(207) She refers to herself as Deirdre of the Sorrows; aware of the prophecy, she calls him, nevertheless. Deirdre, who rejected the queenly accessories when they were offered by Conchubor in his bid to entice her, now adopts these same trappings to seduce Naisi.[37]

On seeing her in this new magnificence, Naisi realizes that she is the girl he met in the woods. He is "transfixed with amazement":

> And it is you who go around in the woods, making the thrushes bear a grudge against the heavens for the sweetness of your voice?(207)

She orders the others to leave, saying that Lavarcham will tell them stories of Maeve, Nessa and Rogh. But her action will make her as famous a queen as the others, the subject of tales in turn.

Significantly, Deirdre sits on the high chair of state

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[37]Skelton (pp. 141-42) remarks: "Deirdre is not, however, to be mastered by the casual lust of Naisi any more than by the wealth of Conchubor. When she reveals herself to Naisi in all her finery it is she and not he who is in control of the situation, and his lust is transformed into romantic love."

and invites Naisi to take the stool.' Dressed for the part, she acts as a queen, and Naisi must obey. She offers him the favours that Conchubor desires so zealously: "If it's low itself the High King would sooner be on it this night, than on the throne of Emain Macha."(207) She speaks of the prophecy:

> Do many know what is foretold, that Deirdre will be the ruin of the Sons of Usna, and have a little grave by herself, and a story will be told forever?(209)[38]

Naisi acknowledges that many know of her, her gifts and her unequalled beauty, and he admits that kings would give much to be in his place. She responds: "It isn't many I'd call, Naisi."(209) She has called him because she believes him worthy of her.

Deirdre starts courting Naisi in earnest but he is hesitant because of the prophecy. He suggests that she is lonely, as she was "born for great company."(209) She answers: "This night I have the best company in the whole world."(209) Again Deirdre stresses that she will not be queen in Emain, and when Naisi reminds her of Conchubor's oath, she replies:

> It's for that maybe I'm called Deirdre, the girl of many sorrows . . . for it's a sweet life you and I could have Naisi. . . . (209)

She states her motivation: "It should be a sweet thing to have what is best and richest if it's for a short space only."(209) It is better to have enjoyment for a short while than to be miserable for years - a belief that is repeated throughout the play. Naisi resists: "And we've a short space only to be triumphant and brave."(209) He is a warrior who finds glory in victory. Deirdre is asking him to relinquish the life he loves for one with her, and he does not know yet whether she is worth

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[38] In the Oxford edition of Deirdre of the Sorrows, "for ever" is spelt as one word instead of the more usual two.

the sacrifice.[39]

In depicting the life that she would lead as Conchubor's queen, Deirdre points out that she would be stifled in Emain:

> You must not go Naisi, and leave me to the High King, a man is ageing in his Dun, with his crowds round him and his silver and gold. . . . I will not live to be shut up in Emain and wouldn't we do well paying, Naisi, with silence, and a near death? . . . I'm a long while in the woods with my own self, and I'm in little dread of death, and it earned with richness would make the sun red with envy and he going up the heavens, and the moon pale and lonesome and she wasting away. . . . Isn't it a small thing is foretold about the ruin of ourselves, Naisi, when all men have age coming and great ruin in the end?(211)

This speech presages Deirdre's lamentations just before she dies. It is suggested that she has something of a death-wish in that she would rather not live under certain circumstances. Although she aspires after a glorious end which will make her a wonder and "a story will be told forever," she still wants to delight in life before the coming of old age, decay and death - the universal human lot. She understands one kind of reality; Naisi apprehends another: "Yet it's a poor thing it's I should bring you to a tale of blood, and broken bodies and the filth of the grave."(211) She sees only glory in a sudden end while young; he knows that such a death could be sordid.

Naisi suggests a liaison rather than an elopement, but Deirdre explains its impossibility. At last he realizes the immorality of committing her to an existence out of nature in Emain Macha, and, with pride, agrees to save her. Dreaming of

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[39] His speech in an early draft is more explicit: "I'd be proud to lead you with me for an hour only, but what would we gain, going forward to face destruction and the ending of our lives. There isn't many'd have the heart to say this to your like maybe but I and my two brothers aren't lives that any'd do well to be casting away. Isn't it a short space only Deirdre /we/ have to be young and triumphant and brave? /He goes to the door./(208)

their future, he woos her now, the images, appropriately, all drawn from nature:

> Then it isn't I will give your like to Conchubor, not if the grave was dug to be my lodging when a week was by. . . . The stars are out Deirdre, and let you come with me quickly, for it is the stars will be our lamps many nights and we abroad in Alban, and taking our journeys among the little islands in the sea. There has never been the like of the joy we'll have Deirdre, you and I having our fill at the evening and the morning till the sun is high.(211)

But this time Deirdre hesitates because she fears leaving her accustomed environment; she is scared of becoming nostalgic, and, suddenly, thinks of the probable consequences of their rashness:

> And yet I'm in dread leaving this place where I have lived always. Won't I be lonesome and I thinking on the little hill beyond and the apple trees do be budding in the spring-time by the post of the door? Won't I be in great dread to bring you to destruction, Naisi, and you so happy and young?(211)

Either way, Deirdre must leave; her choice is between the absolute and the partial. If she goes to Conchubor, it is implied that she will be able to return occasionally; but she will be miserable with the High King. If she flees with Naisi, she can never return; she must give up all of this if she takes all that he has to offer. Significantly, she thinks of the appearance of Slieve Fuadh and Lavarcham's house as they are in the spring; Deirdre is leaving the springtime of her own life now; her childhood will remain but a memory. As she falters, Naisi gains strength:

> Are you thinking I'd go on living after this night, Deirdre, and you with Conchubor in Emain? Are you thinking I'd go out after hares on the hillside when I've had your lips in my sight?(211)

On finding them embracing, Lavarcham asks: "Are you choosing this night to destroy the world?"(213) They are, but Deirdre blames Conchubor: "It's Conchubor has chosen this night, calling me to Emain."(213)

Deirdre is seen to be appreciative in thanking Lavarcham for enabling her to have "great freedom and joy"(213) - things which she intends keeping by running away with Naisi. The woman points out that their proposed action is inadvisable, but she realizes that there is no satisfactory alternative. Deirdre must have a mate, who is her counterpart, with her constantly:

> Isn't [it] a hard thing you're doing, but who can help it? Birds go mating in the spring of the year, and ewes at the leaves falling, but a young girl must have her lover in all the courses of the sun and moon.(213)

Deirdre tells Ainnle and Ardan that she is going away with Naisi "to face the troubles are foretold,"(213) but it is this decision which will cause such troubles.

In character, Lavarcham declines to marry Deirdre and Naisi: "What would I want meddling in the ruin you will earn?"(213) She does not want to incur the wrath of her master, and, also, although she will always stand by Deirdre, she does not want to play any active part in her eventual downfall.[40]

Ainnle's benediction is apt: it calls on the blessing of all nature:

> By the sun and moon and the whole earth, I wed Deirdre to Naisi. . . . May the air bless you, and water and the wind, the sea, and all the hours of the sun and moon.(215)

Deirdre enjoys seven rich years in Alban with Naisi and his brothers. When Lavarcham arrives with the news that Fergus is coming with Conchubor's message of peace, her dolefulness

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[40]Ann Saddlemyer ("Deirdre of the Sorrows" in Harmon, p. 96) comments: "It is significant that Lavarcham, learned wise woman that she is, cannot wed them; she is committed to the rule of the High King, who is at war with time, careless of nature, and ambiguous in his feelings towards Deirdre."

contrasts with the queen's apparent light-heartedness. At first Deirdre does not seem at all perturbed and says that she sees no reason for them to return: "Naisi and his brothers are well pleased this place and what would take them back to Conchubor in Ulster?"(217) But the confidence and joy are seen to be a mere facade.[41]

Lavarcham's comment, "Their like would go any place where they'd see death standing,"(217) foreshadows Naisi's final decision to go to his brothers' aid. The older woman's sense and perception are revealed in her fear of Conchubor, and, as in the first act, Deirdre is causing her anxiety:

> I'm in dread Conchubor wants to have yourself, and to kill Naisi, and that that'll be the ruin of the Sons of Usna. I'm silly maybe to be dreading the like, but those have a great love for yourself have a right to be in dread always.(217)

Deirdre agrees that "Emain should be no safe place"(217) for her and Naisi - all she wants is to be left alone.

In trying to impress upon her the gravity of the situation, Lavarcham mentions the earth, sun and moon once more:

> It's a hard thing surely, but let you take my word and swear Naisi by the earth, and the sun over it, and the four quarters of the moon he'll not go back to Emain for good faith, or bad faith, the time Conchubor's keeping the high throne of Ireland. . . . It's that would save you surely.(217)

It is Deirdre and not the others who decides to return, however.

Lavarcham tries in vain to influence Deirdre who suddenly appears passive and defeated. She shows herself aware of her destiny and, in contrast to her earlier decisions, acknowledges that she is subject to the prophecy, suggesting that she is a mere puppet:

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[41]Cf. Price, pp. 197-98. Donna Gerstenberger (p. 104) says that "the Deirdre of the second act is a woman resigned to her fate, almost wearily ready for it." She adds that Deirdre "has resigned herself at the sight of Fergus on the shore to the conclusion of their fated course . . . ."

> There's little power in oaths to stop what's coming, and little power in what I'd do Lavarcham, to change the story of Conchubor and Naisi and the things old men foretold.(217)

The older woman persists in trying to aid her, reminding Deirdre of her action in deciding to run away with Naisi:

> It was power enough you had that night to bring distress and anguish, and now I'm pointing you a way to save Naisi, you'll not stir stick or straw to aid me.(219)

The queen in Deirdre is revealed as she retorts "a little haughtily": "Let you not raise your voice against me Lavarcham, if you have great will itself to guard Naisi."(219) The two women love each other but, being troubled, are quick-tempered. In trying to protect Deirdre, Lavarcham bickers with her - a portent of the quarrel between Deirdre and Naisi when she tries to save him. Lavarcham, who dreads the thought of the young woman's suffering, breaks out angrily:

> Naisi is it? I didn't care if the crows were stripping his thigh-bones at the dawn of day. It's to stop your own despair and wailing, and you waking up in a cold bed, without the man you have set your heart on, I am raging now. /Starting up with temper./ Yet there's more men than Naisi in it, and maybe I was a big fool thinking his dangers, and this day, would fill you up with dread.(219)

The sharp retort both indicates Deirdre's great love for Naisi and foreshadows her suicide after his death:

> Let you end such talking is a fool's only, when it's well you know if a thing harmed Naisi it isn't I would live after him.(219)

Now Deirdre admits that she has been dreading this call to return to Emain all the time:

> It's well you know it's this day I'm dreading seven years, and I, fine nights, watching the heifers walking to the haggard with long shadows on the grass /with a thickening in her voice/, or the time I've been stretched in the sunshine when I've heard Ainnle and Ardan stepping lightly, and they saying, "Was there ever the like of Deirdre for a happy and a sleepy queen?"(219)

Evidently she has enjoyed her life of freedom in the open, and seems to have been adored not only by Naisi but also by his brothers. Yet she adds:

> I've dread going or staying, Lavarcham. It's lonesome this place having happiness like ours till I'm asking each day, will this day match yesterday, and will tomorrow take a good place beside the same day in the year that's gone, and wondering all times is it a game worth playing, living on until you're dried and old, and our joy is gone forever.(219)

Deirdre fears that she is too happy. Such a perfect life, she believes, cannot continue, and she becomes "lonesome" and afraid when thinking of being less than ecstatic.[42] Her death-wish appears tacitly in that she dreads growing old and losing joy. Paradoxically, therefore, Deirdre is unhappy in her extreme happiness.

Lavarcham tries to appease her fears by adopting the conventional approach to ageing:[43]

> If it's that ails you, I tell you there's little hurt getting old, though young girls and poets do be storming at the shapes of age. /Passionately./ There's little hurt getting old, saving when you're looking back, the way I'm looking this day, and seeing the young you have a love for breaking up their hearts with folly. . . . Take my word and stop Naisi, and the day'll come you'll have more joy having the sense of an old woman and you with your little grandsons shrieking round you, than I'd have this night putting on the red mouth, and the white arms you have, to go walking lonesome byeways with a gamey king.(221)

But Lavarcham's philosophy of life is not for Deirdre. It is just this "looking back" at the joys of youth when it is too late to regain them that she shrinks from.[44] Lavarcham notes

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[42]Ellen Douglass Leyburn (op. cit., p. 88) holds that in Deirdre, "Synge gives his subtlest portrayal of loneliness, for he makes the sense of it suffuse her very ecstasy."

[43]Cf. Henn, p. 75.

[44]Price (p. 214) remarks on the way Lavarcham unwittingly reveals the flaw in her case with this speech, and adds:

that Deirdre has changed all of a sudden:

> You'll not stop him this day, and isn't it a strange story you were a plague and torment since you were that height to those did hang their life-times on your voice.(221)

It is not long before Deirdre asserts her will once more, but in the opposite way to that pleaded for by Lavarcham.

Deirdre has expressed concern with the passing of youth and beauty, and Owen's conversation with her reinforces her views. The spy is an example of the common man - the one who can never win Deirdre's notice and favour, but who always wishes to. Although she refutes the suggestion that she might be growing tired of Naisi, Owen persists: "Tell me now, . . . are you well pleased that length with the same man snorting next you at the dawn of day?"(223)[45] She answers: "Am I well pleased seven years seeing the same sun throwing light across the branches at the dawn of day?"(223) Deirdre implies that she is as dependent on Naisi's love as she is on nature to keep her contented: out of these, or similar, surroundings she would be smothered; without Naisi, she could not live. Yet she chooses to leave this environment. Again she complains about transience: "It's a heart-break to the wise that it's for a short space we have the same things only."(223)

Owen savagely refers to her choice:

> Stay here and rot with Naisi, or go to Conchubor in Emain. Conchubor's a swelling belly, and eyes falling down from his shining crown, Naisi should be stale and weary . . . . (223)

"Lavarcham's existence is proof that life, once youth and love are gone, is nightmare, yet she clings to it, and tries to persuade others to do the same." Lavarcham, however, does not find her life a "nightmare"; admittedly, it is filled with anxiety, but in this speech she explains that she does have ways of enjoying it.

[45]This is a brutal contrast to Deirdre's own view, expressed later, of "the two lovers who slept so sweetly with each other."(267) Cf. Henn, p. 353.

The end is the same - decay and, eventually, death. Owen has a reason in enforcing his view: by making her recognize the sameness of all men, he hopes that she will grant him indulgence: ". . . I'd liefer be bleaching in a bog-hole than living on without a touch of kindness from your eyes and voice,"(223) he tells her, adding: "There are none like you, Deirdre."(223) Conchubor's spy, ostensibly Deirdre's enemy, like all others is in love with her. On his asking whether she is to return, Deirdre stresses her passive outlook and dependence on Naisi again: "I will go where Naisi chooses."(223)

Owen continues his efforts to disillusion Deirdre. He does not spare her the truth and drives home the fact that her halcyon days cannot last - Naisi will grow tired of her:

> It's Naisi, Naisi is it? Then I tell you you'll have great sport one day seeing Naisi getting a harshness in his two sheep's eyes and he looking on yourself.(223)

The mention of Naisi's "sheep's eyes" refers to his doting upon Deirdre but also implies his following her will and whims - which is contrary to her remarks up to now. Owen's examples become increasingly appropriate to Deirdre's state, each effective in impressing the horror of growing old upon her:

> Would you credit it, my father used to be in the broom and heather kissing Lavarcham, with a little bird chirping out above their heads and now she'd scare a raven from a carcass on a hill.(223)

Deirdre is now like Lavarcham once was; Lavarcham is now what Deirdre will become if she lives:[46]

> Queens get old Deirdre, with their white and long arms going from them, and their backs hooping. I tell you it's a poor thing to see a queen's nose reaching down to scrape her chin.(223-25)

His parting words offer a way of escape, one which is in accordance with Deirdre's death-wish:

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[46] Cf. Price, p. 213.

> I'll give you a riddle, Deirdre. Why isn't my father as ugly and as old as Conchubor? You've no answer? . . . It's because Naisi killed him. . . . Think of that and you awake at night hearing Naisi snoring, or the night you'll hear strange stories of the things I've done in Alban or in Ulster either.(225)

He intends killing himself and, in so doing, will escape old age and decay. Deirdre has the same outlook now and adopts the same action later. Both fear losing their youth; both commit suicide and preserve it.

One tempter leaves Deirdre, and another arrives. Both entice Deirdre to death - Owen wittingly, Fergus not. Fergus mentions the call of home: "Let you come this day for there's no place but Ireland where the Gael can have peace always."(225) But there can be no peace while the High King's will is thwarted, and the peace that Deirdre and the Sons of Usna meet is the peace of death; even now, Deirdre has no peace of mind - the fear of losing contentment plagues her.

When Naisi refuses the offer, implying that Conchubor intends treachery, Fergus repeats the obsession with time:

> You'll not be young always, and it's time you were making yourselves ready for the years will come, building up a homely Dun beside the seas of Ireland, and getting in your children from the princes' wives. It's little joy wandering till age is on you and your youth is gone away, so you'd best come this night, for you'd have great pleasure putting out your foot and saying "I am in Ireland surely."(225-27)

He taunts Deirdre for being "a timid woman" and for having such a strong hold over brave warriors. Fergus accuses her of not thinking of the future, but Deirdre's thoughts dwell constantly on the time to come.

Once more she reveals her apparent passivity: "I leave the choice to Naisi."(227)[47] At this point, she, like Naisi, has no wish to leave, because she foresees perfidy:

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[47] Styan (op. cit., p. 127) says it seems that Deirdre is trying Naisi here.

> Yet you'd do well Fergus to go on your own way, for the sake of your own years, so you'll not be saying till your hour of death, maybe it was yourself brought Naisi and his brothers to a grave was scooped by treachery.(227)

He replies, "It's a poor thing to see a queen so lonesome and afraid."(227) Deirdre's lonesomeness is not only relative isolation in Alban; it is also her feeling of desolation when pondering on the future. Her fear is not only of Conchubor; it is also, even primarily, of old age, of the death of beauty and love, and of being left to live after Naisi dies.

Owen tells Deirdre that Naisi will grow tired of her; Fergus uses the same argument to win him. Naisi's reply echoes Deirdre's conversation with Lavarcham. Although he still loves her, he is afraid that their love will wane; he admits to being too much in love now, which might spoil the future:

> There have been days a while past when I've been throwing a line for salmon, or watching for the run of hares, that I've had a dread upon me a day'd come I'd weary of her voice . . . and Deirdre'd see I'd wearied.(227)

He is as concerned with Deirdre's reaction to his diminishing love as with the decline itself; he wants to spare her any distress. Fergus says that Deirdre has seen Naisi's dread, but until now, when she overhears them, she has not been aware that he shares her apprehension, just as he does not suspect that her brightness hides her preoccupation with this problem:

> Deirdre's no thought of getting old or wearied, it's that puts wonder in her ways, and she with spirits would keep bravery and laughter in a town with plague.(229)

Naisi regards his thoughts that love might decline as mere fancy: "I've had dreams of getting old and weary, and losing my delight in Deirdre, but my dreams were dreams only."(229)[48]

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[48] Balachandra Rajan - "Yeats, Synge and the Tragic Understanding," _YS_, No. 2 (1972), p. 78 - says: "It is a passing apprehension which he almost immediately sets aside, but it is enough to indicate that for him life is more than love, whereas for Deirdre love is more than life." Cf. Gassner, _Masters of the Drama_, p. 562.

Like Deirdre, he contemplates the passing of joy continually; but he is happy with her in Alban and wants their delight in this life to continue for as long as possible:

> . . . I see we're as happy as the leaves on the young trees and we'll be so ever and always though we'd live the age of the eagle and the salmon and the crow of Britain.(229)

Deirdre, however, has overheard enough to decide otherwise. Owen is right. Naisi can prevail over this dread, she cannot. After appearing passive, she starts acting to bring fulfilment of the prophecy closer, and says to Naisi: "With the tide in a little while we will be journeying again, or it is our own blood maybe will be running away."(229-31)[49] She wishes to return to keep their passion from abating, but the last phrase is ambiguous and ironical: by going back, their blood does "run away."

Deirdre shrewdly and gradually convinces Naisi that they must return to Emain. She bases her argument on the temporariness of felicity and beauty:

> The dawn and evening are a little while, the winter and the summer pass quickly, and what way would you and I Naisi, have joy forever?(231)

Naisi's response is that of a man content in his present situation:

> We'll have the joy is highest till our age is come, for it isn't Fergus's talk of great deeds could take us back to Emain.(231)

Deirdre tries guile to make Naisi agree that he wants to return; she, in turn, admits fearing to leave Alban as she knows that harm is in store for them. Her telling him that she blames herself for not having the power to make him remain, is an odd

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[49] Donna Gerstenberger (p. 106) comments: "The image of the tide turning is as constant in this section as that of the storm in the first act. The tide of their lives is at its crest; and the return journey, to be made on the turning tide, represents Deirdre's acceptance of the natural cycle of life and necessity." Cf. also Barnett, op. cit., p. 125.

attempt to induce him to announce his decision to leave, however:

> It isn't to great deeds you're going but to near troubles, and the shortening of your days the time that they are bright and sunny and isn't it a poor thing that I, Deirdre, could not hold you away?(231)

Naisi merely replies: "I've said we'd stay in Alban always?"(231)[50] Again Deirdre hints that it is time to go, and exquisitely describes her days of love in Alban:

> There's no place to stay always. . . . It's a long time we've had, pressing the lips together, going up and down, resting in our arms, Naisi, waking with the smell of June in the tops of the grasses, and listening to the birds in the branches that are highest. . . . It's a long time we've had, but the end has come surely.(231)

It is only in the grave that the lovers find the 'place to stay always." Deirdre implies that no particular condition can ever remain the same, everything is in a state of flux. It is time for them to leave their life of bliss, and she stresses that their ecstasy has lasted relatively long; this is counterpoised to her earlier remark to Owen that "seven years are a short space for the like of Naisi and myself."(223) Their love has been such that Deirdre regards it as the highest point in their lives: they have relished a consummate love - nothing can surpass it. This is suggested particularly by the nature images: June is midsummer, evidently the most beautiful time of the year, when everything flourishes; in referring to the tops of the grasses and the trees, it is implied that Deirdre and Naisi have surpassed all in love - they have reached the peak of perfection. But now they must go.

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[50]This appears as a question, even if rhetorical, in CW but as a statement in other editions. In an editorial note, Ann Saddlemyer says: "Although the Cuala and Maunsel editions omit it, it is evident from the typescript that Synge wished the question mark to be printed at the end of Naisi's speech."(230) In earlier editions Naisi appears determined to stay; in the Oxford edition it seems that although he is not prepared to remain permanently, he has no wish to leave now.

Naisi finds no ground to return, but Deirdre does. When he points out that he knows no valid reason to leave, she ignores him, speaking as though he has said quite the opposite:

> There's reason all times for an end that's come. . . . And I'm well pleased, Naisi, we're going forward in the winter the time the sun has a low place, and the moon has her mastery in a dark sky, for it's you and I are well lodged our last day, where there is a light behind the clear trees, and the berries on the thorns are a red wall.(231)

Significantly it is winter, a time of desolation - they are leaving at the year's death to meet their own deaths. The light is described as behind the trees, indicating that the days of brightness have passed; the sky is dark just as their future is black. The berry image suggests blood and implies the flowing of the blood of Deirdre, the Sons of Usna and the men of Ulster.

Naisi believes that she is tired of their present way of life, and he proposes that the two of them go away "to the woods of the East,"(231) not to Ireland. Deirdre, described as "broken-hearted,"(231) realizes that disintegration and destruction are inevitable, and repeats her complaint: "There's no safe place, Naisi, on the ridge of the world."(231) She finds that the only haven from the ravages of time is death, and prophesies theirs: "And it's in the quiet woods I've seen them digging our grave, throwing out the clay on leaves are bright and withered."(231) The leaves symbolize Deirdre and the Sons of Usna - the lovers of the world of nature. Donna Gerstenberger remarks:

> The season is winter, and the image of the leaves bright and withered, suggests frostbitten leaves, withered in their brightness, before the season for their natural decay and fall.[51]

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[51] Gerstenberger, p. 105. Cf. also Henn, p. 355.

Once more Naisi tries to entice Deirdre away from this line of thought, but she is not to be thwarted. The more eager and passionate he gets, the graver and sadder she becomes because it is this very love he is expressing that she cannot bear to lose, and the more he shows it the more it must hurt her to decide as she does. She expresses her dread of decline and desire for an early death explicitly, her picture of torpid, miserable old age contrasting markedly with the earlier one drawn by Lavarcham:[52]

> It's this hour we're between the daytime and a night where there is sleep forever, and isn't it a better thing to be following on to a near death, than to be bending the head down, and dragging with the feet, and seeing one day, a blight showing upon love where it is sweet and tender?(231-33)[53]

The pattern is repeated with Naisi declaring his love and pleading with Deirdre to go to the woods, and she refusing to listen. It is preferable to die when love is strong than when it has been consumed.[54] She is aware of the inevitability

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[52]Boyd (Renaissance, p. 331) holds that the only meaning of old age for Deirdre is death. But this is not so: she fears the decline it brings and sees death as an escape from old age.

[53]Cf. Andromache's speech in The Trojan Dames:

> Not to be born, I argue, and to die,
> Are equal: but to die is better far
> Than to live wretched; for he knows not grief,
> Who hath no sense of misery: but to fall
> From fortune's blessed height, to the low state
> Of abject wretchedness, distracts the soul
> With the keen sense of former happiness.(ll. 675-81)

Euripides, The Tragedies, trans. R. Potter, Vol. II (London: J. Mawman and others, 1814), p. 134.

[54]O'Connor (Robinson, p. 43) is mistaken in saying that "Synge does not even bother to motivate the return of the lovers and it is precipitated merely by the desire of Deirdre to complete the action." Her fear of losing love, joy and beauty is motivation enough.

Peacock (op. cit., p. 108) believes that Deirdre's motive in returning is a psychological twist which weakens the tragedy, "for when Deirdre wishes for death from this motive it is no longer a catastrophe." /Peacock's italics./

Ganz (op. cit., p. 67) says that Deirdre's reason is "singularly inadequate" and not "psychologically credible." "But," he adds,

of deterioration and, in a realistic statement, calls upon the image of the tide to depict the turning-point in their lives:

> There are as many ways to wither love as there are stars in a night of Samhain, but there is no way to keep life or love with it a short space only. . . . It's for that there's nothing lonesome like a love is watching out the time most lovers do be sleeping. . . . It's for that we're setting out for Emain Macha when the tide turns on the sand. (233)

Her love for Naisi is constant and preoccupies her thoughts. In watching for it to wane, something she deems unavoidable, she feels desolate. She admits to lying awake at night, and now Owen's suggestion that at such times she should consider how his father escaped old age takes on additional significance: the way out was death, and Deirdre accepts this as the obvious means to prevent love from dying. She is determined, and Naisi surrenders at last.[55]

Deirdre's reasoning might be perverse, but now she appears quite irrational in saying that even if they were to continue living they would be more satisfied in Emain (a place she abhors) because it would offer distraction; she would not mind growing old in company. She is willing to sacrifice temporary happiness, followed by a possible decline in love and delight, for permanent discontentment, a contradiction of

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"since her essential motives are aesthetic rather than psychological, perhaps it is not surprising that Deirdre's conduct should seem perverse."
Cf. also Gaskell, op. cit., p. 244.

[55] Ann Saddlemyer ("Deirdre of the Sorrows," in Harmon, p. 101) remarks: "Just as Naisi had more to lose in their flight to Alban, now he has greater troubles to bear: the prophecy foretells the ruin of the Sons of Usna, while Deirdre's fate is left undetermined. He must carry with him the memory of their love and the bitter possibility of being superseded by another; and he stands to lose not only Deirdre's love but the perfect comradeship of his warrior brothers, a double loneliness in the grave."

all she has just expressed; but this is most likely merely an additional inducement to convince Naisi to go. In pointing out that they will either die or forget in Emain, she dwells on her seven years of bliss:

> We're seven years without roughness of growing weary, seven years so sweet and shining, the gods would be hard set to give us seven days the like of them. . . . It's for that we're going to Emain where there'll be a rest forever, or a place for forgetting, in great crowds and they making a stir.(233)

One recalls Blake's"Eternity" throughout:

> He who binds to himself a joy
> Does the winged life destroy;
> But he who kisses the joy as it flies
> Lives in eternity's sun rise.[56]

But joy has not flown past Deirdre and Naisi yet; they are neither preventing happiness from leaving them nor accepting it for as long as it lasts; they are annihilating it by their intended action. This has little to do with the prophecy - it is Deirdre who has taken the initiative; it is Naisi who has submitted to her.

After this decision both lovers are dejected and are described as having their heads bowed. Ainnle, Ardan, Fergus and Lavarcham come in - "all subdued like men at a queen's wake,"(233) as well they might be.

Owen, who startles Naisi, knows that Conchubor will break faith, and he runs off to kill himself - the first to die for Deirdre's beauty;[57] in so doing, he has saved himself from the

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[56]William Blake, Poetry and Prose, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Nonesuch Press, 1939), p. 99. (There are other versions of this poem, too.) Price (p. 194) also refers to "Eternity" but in the sense - also appropriate - of Conchubor wishing to bind to himself the joy that is Deirdre.

[57]Cf. Price, p. 212.

horror of ageing. Lavarcham believes that he has spoken the truth: "There was ill luck this day in his eye. And he knew a power if he'd said it all."(235)[58]

Ainnle and Ardan, who evince a more sensible attitude than the lovers, strive to keep them from going. When Naisi says that his friends will come to his aid, Ainnle remarks pointedly: "Your friends will bind your hands and you out of your wits."(237) Deirdre and Naisi appear somewhat insane to the others because of their unconventional attitude to life.

The Sons of Usna quarrel because of Deirdre's decision, but she pacifies them;[59] they all depend on her and cannot envisage living without her. When Conchubor and Naisi confront each other over her, she almost succeeds in reconciling them, too. She causes dissension but cannot always end it. Deirdre, who expresses her authority now, can neither be disobeyed nor be commanded by others:

> There is no one could take me from you. . . . I have chosen to go back with Fergus. Will you quarrel with me Ainnle, though I have been your queen these seven years in Alban?(237)

She suggests the reasons for her decision, cleverly mentioning those that each of the others will think fit:

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[58]Donna Gerstenberger (pp. 104-105) regards Owen as "the wise fool of Renaissance drama, who speaks in excesses and in riddles, yet makes consummate sense." But she seems to disregard his primary motivation of preserving youth in committing suicide; Professor Gerstenberger says that Owen is "unable to endure a world in which Deirdre stubbornly accepts inevitable death, although she does so, in part, in response to what he has told her." Cf. also Ann Saddlemyer, "Deirdre of the Sorrows," in Harmon, p. 103.

[59]Price (p. 201) says that "the quarrel between Naisi and his brothers is an adumbration of the quarrel which later severs Deirdre and Naisi at the grave's edge."

> It is my wish. . . . It may be I' will not have Naisi growing an old man in Alban with an old woman at his side, and young girls pointing out and saying "that is Deirdre and Naisi, had great beauty in their youth." . . . It may be we do well putting a sharp end to the day is brave and glorious, as our fathers put a sharp end to the days of the kings of Ireland,. . . or that I'm wishing to set my foot on Slieve Fuadh where I was running one time and leaping the streams . . . , and that I'd be well pleased to see our little apple-trees Lavarcham, behind our cabin on the hill, or that I've learned Fergus, it's a lonesome thing to be away from Ireland always.(237)

She is not homesick for Slieve Fuadh but is nostalgic for her youth, and she does not agree with Fergus's contention - Deirdre is no more lonesome in Alban than she would be anywhere else. She has an instinct for death which has been strengthened by the arguments of Fergus and Owen. It is evident that Deirdre, who believes she will meet an early death in Ireland, sees glory in this; kings have died in this way, and such a death would be worthy of her. Conchubor's offer of a safe return is her excuse to go to a timely end.

Lavarcham despairs: "I'm old surely, and the hopes I had my pride in, are broken and torn."(239) She is as helpless now as she was when Deirdre decided to run away from Conchubor.

As Deirdre prepares to leave her idyllic life, she realizes that death, although it might bring her even more renown than she has at present, can never compare with the rich life she has led. She accepts that it is sordid, just as Naisi explained before they fled to Alban:

> Woods of Cuan, woods of Cuan. . . . It's seven years we've had a life was joy only and this day we're going west, this day we're facing death maybe, and /goes and looks towards OWEN/ death should be a poor untidy thing, though it's a queen that dies.(239)[60]

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[60] Boyd (Renaissance, pp. 331-32) regards this as the leit-motif of Deirdre of the Sorrows; it is this which "gives the play a tragic intensity, a human note absent from any other modern retelling of the Deirdre saga. The heroic legend

This is a cry of despair, but Deirdre is determined to go to her death.[61]

Deirdre and the Sons of Usna return to Emain with Lavarcham, who is "a great wonder for jogging back and forward through the world."(241) The wise woman, torn between Ireland and Alban for seven years, is bound to both Conchubor and Deirdre. She endeavours to assuage the desire of the king for the benefit of all, and is forthright on meeting him:

> This is a queer place to find you, and it's a queer place to be lodging Naisi and his brothers, and Deirdre with them, and the lot of us tired out with the long way we have been walking.(241)

There is irony in her weary statement that she has "no call to be wandering that length to a wedding or a burial or the two together."(241) Conchubor intends marrying Deirdre and having the Sons of Usna killed; all four young people meet death.

Lavarcham's comment on Conchubor's age highlights the disparity between him and the lovers. She maternally advises the king to look after himself:

> It's a poor thing the way me and you is getting old, Conchubor, and I'm thinking you yourself have no call to be loitering this place getting your death, maybe, in the cold of night.(241)

Although she does care about him, she also has another reason for her counsel: she suspects him of intending ill and wants to prevent the treachery. As part of her attempt, Lavarcham craftily

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is translated into terms of universal tragedy, where the very real interest in the emotion of the protagonists by no means detracts from their value as legendary figures of symbolic significance. As Synge sees her, Deirdre is no less the passionate Queen of romance than the eternal victim of love, woman as she resigns herself to the inevitable passing away of what she holds dearest."

[61] Cf. Farris, op. cit., p. 248.

draws a disagreeable picture of Deirdre, suggesting that the journey and the years have marred her beauty:

> And yet you'd do well to be going to your Dun, and not be putting shame on her meeting the High King, and she seamed and sweaty, and in great disorder from the dust of many roads. /Laughing derisively./ Ah, Conchubor, my lad, beauty goes quickly in the woods, and you'd let a great gasp, I tell you, if you set your eyes this night on Deirdre.(243)

When he insists that he has a right to see her, Lavarcham stresses that Deirdre is unhappy and that he will obtain no joy from her:

> Haven't the blind a good right to be seeing and the lame to be dancing, and the dummies singing tunes? It's that right you have to be looking for gaiety on Deirdre's lips.(243)

Like so many others in the play, the old man, obstinate and determined to win Deirdre, is ravaged by thoughts of mortality:

> You think I'm old and wise, but I tell you the wise know the old must die, and they'll leave no chance for a thing slipping from them, they've set their blood to win.(243)

He is as desperate as ever for Deirdre.

Lavarcham knows that the king is grasping at a dream impossible to realize, and her words are ominous:

> If you're old and wise, it's I'm the same, Conchubor, and I'm telling you, you'll not have her though you're ready to destroy mankind, and skin the gods to win her. . . . There's things a king can't have, Conchubor, and if you go rampaging this night you'll be apt to win nothing but death for many, and a sloppy face of trouble on your own self before the day will come.(243)

Her lie that Deirdre is lined and ugly is refuted by a soldier. Everybody is spellbound by Deirdre's magnificence,and, appropriately, the description compares her to the brightest objects of all:

> Naisi's coming surely, and a woman with him is putting out the glory of the moon is rising, and the sun is going down.(245)

Lavarcham's foresight is revealed in the soldier's telling Conchubor

that the wise woman has sent a messenger to Fergus for help. She has done her best, but to no avail, and knows that it is too late to help now. Lavarchom predicts the fall of Emain:

> . . . I'll walk up now into your halls and I'll say . . . it's here nettles will be growing, and beyond thistles and docks. I'll go into your High Chambers, where you've been figuring yourself stretching out your neck for the kisses of a queen of women, and I'll say it's here there'll be deer stirring, and goats scratching, and sheep, waking and coughing when there is a great wind from the north.(247)

On arrival, Naisi immediately notices the "strange place" that Conchubor has prepared for them, but Deirdre appears quite unsuspecting and is unwittingly ironic: "He's likely making up a welcome for us, having curtains shaken out and rich rooms put in order . . . ."(247) The rich rooms, however, are intended only for her. Naisi, who notes that Emain is unsuitable for them, longs for "the ferns only, and cold streams and they making a stir "(247) But Deirdre says:

> We want what is our right in Emain /looking at hangings/ . . . and though he's riches in store for us it's a shabby ragged place he's put us waiting, with frayed rugs and skins are eaten by the moths.(247)

The "riches" of which Deirdre is thinking are material goods, not a splendid death. She, who reveals pride in her domestic ability, seems to have forgotten about her romantic decision to die in her prime,and appears prepared to live in Emain.

She discovers the grave, and the lovers understand its significance. Deirdre is frightened. When Naisi asked her in Alban to go away with him to the safety of the woods, she refused(231); now, confronted with the immediacy of harsh reality, she asks him to take her to hide in the rocks, "for the night is coming quickly."(249) The night implies both the time of day and death. She becomes faint-hearted:

> Come away to the places where we're used to have our company. . . . Wouldn't it be a good thing to lie hid in the high ferns together?(249)

Naisi despairs as his brothers are not with him to meet death: "Isn't it a hard thing that we three who have conquered many may not die together?"(249) he asks rhetorically. Deirdre is not so wearily inclined to die any more:[62]

> And isn't it a hard thing that you and I are this place by our opened grave, though none have lived had happiness like ours those days in Alban that went by so quick.(249)

Naisi adopts her original argument that a quick end is a good thing, and foresees the day when she will grow tired of mourning and when Conchubor will court her. On Deirdre's asserting that she will "not be here"(249,251) at that time, Naisi acts roughly and envisages a lonely life for her:[63]

> You'd best keep him off maybe, and then, when the time comes, make your way to some place west in Donegal, and it's there you'll get used to stretching out lonesome at the fall of night, and waking lonesome for the day.(251)

She regards this as the worst possible existence: "Let you not be saying things are worse than death."(251)

Although his love for her is undiminished, Naisi says that he would not object to Deirdre's remarrying. She is "half-surprised," and after she asks what he would do if he were to outlive her, he replies "mournfully":

> It's little I know. . . . Saving only that it's a hard and bitter thing leaving the earth, and a worse and harder thing leaving yourself alone and desolate to be making lamentation on its face always.(251)

Naisi considers Deirdre's welfare before his own and finds the thought of his death less repugnant than that of her being left alone.

Deirdre is prepared to stay with her beloved, even if

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[62] Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 106.

[63] Price (p. 202) says that "Naisi's motive in behaving harshly to Deirdre is to persuade her not to die with him, but to make terms with Conchubor and save her life."

it means joining him in the grave:

> I'll die when you do, Naisi. I'd not have come from Alban but I knew I'd be along with you in Emain, and you living or dead.(251)

She finds Naisi's talk "strange and distant"(251) as the notion of each other accepting a different life is foreign to them. He is brutal in his explanation:

> There's nothing surely the like of a new grave of open earth for putting a great space between two friends that love.(251)

But again Deirdre stresses that she has no intention of surviving him, and returns to her conception that death will afford an escape from ageing. She points out that their relationship has been without flaw, and if they both die shortly it will always remain so:

> If there isn't maybe it's that grave when it's closed will make us one forever, and we two lovers have had a great space without weariness or growing old or any sadness of the mind.(251)

When Conchubor enters and Naisi threatens to throttle him, Deirdre tries to reconcile the two. She mentions their common fear of death and Conchubor's age - his own end cannot be far away.[64] She envisages happiness for all and an easy conscience for the king if he spares them:

> I'll say so near that grave we seem three lonesome people, and by a new made grave there's no man will keep brooding on a woman's lips, or on the man he hates. It's not long till your own grave will be dug in Emain and you'd go down to it more easy if you'd let call Ainnle and Ardan, the way we'd have a supper all together, and fill that grave, and you'll be well pleased from this out having four new friends the like of us in Emain.[65]

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[64]Ellen Douglass Leyburn (op. cit., p. 89) says: "The three are bound together, linked in loneliness."

[65]Price (p. 203) remarks: "Her plea is the now well-known one of Synge: the equality of all men in the face of the great

This "friendly word," this call for compassion, is sufficient to assuage Conchubor's jealousy, harboured for so long, and make him understand, even forgive, Naisi for taking Deirdre from him. Naisi, as usual, also submits to her wish.

But agreement comes too late, and Ainnle and Ardan call on their brother for help. Death has come between him and Conchubor, and the gulf of hatred can never be bridged.

Deirdre tries her utmost to keep Naisi. First she lies, "There is no battle,"(255) then suggests that they

> creep up in the darkness behind the grave. . . . If there's a battle, maybe the strange fighters will be destroyed, when Ainnle and Ardan are against them.(255)

She is, in effect, asking Naisi to be a coward. But the man of valour necessarily finds loyalty in battle and in brotherhood more compelling than that of love.[66] He must choose this course of honour.

Three times Deirdre begs, "Do not leave me, Naisi,"(225) and then pleads: "Do not leave me broken and alone."(255) She is terrified of his going because she knows that it will be to certain death; this would leave her alone and crushed by grief. Once before she appealed to him not to go - when he came to Lavarcham's house.(207)[67] But now the loneliness will be more acute: she has experienced Naisi's comfort and companionship, and not even a liaison could be considered now; earlier she was in danger of losing her joy, but now her beloved will also be taken from her. Deirdre even proposes going with him, but for once he is firm: "You cannot come."(225) He cannot but go.

Now Deirdre succeeds in hurting the man she loves:

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commonplaces of life, and of death - the reality, and the need therefore for compassion between men.

[66]Cf. Henn, pp. 76-77.

[67]Cf. Howe, pp. 95.

"Go to your brothers. . . . For seven years you have been kindly, but the hardness of death has come between us."(255) This is their first quarrel, and the "death of kindness," as Donna Gerstenberger notes,[68] is neither clean nor quick. Fear of their love becoming less than perfect has materialized a moment too soon. Bitter reality faces them:

> We've had a dream, but this night has waked us surely. In a little while we've lived too long, Naisi, and isn't it a poor thing we should miss the safety of the grave, and we trampling its edge?(255)

They cannot meet their deaths secure in their memories of consummate joy with each other any more, and they pain each other irremediably:

> DEIRDRE. Let you go where they are calling! /She looks at him for an instant coldly./ Have you no shame loitering and talking and a cruel death facing Ainnle and Ardan in the woods?
>
> NAISI /frantic/. They'll not get a death that's cruel and they with men alone. It's women that have loved are cruel only, and if I went on living from this day I'd be putting a curse on the lot of them I'd meet walking in the east or west, putting a curse on the sun that gave them beauty, and on the madder and the stone-crop put red upon their cloaks.
>
> DEIRDRE /bitterly/. I'm well pleased there's no one this place to make a story that Naisi was a laughing-stock the night he died.
>
> NAISI. There'd not be many'd make a story, for that mockery is in your eyes this night will spot the face of Emain with a plague of pitted graves.(255-57)

Farris notes:

> Even the attempt to sever the sweetness of life at its sweetest has turned into bile, and the last sounds from her lover's mouth brand Deirdre a disease.[69]

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[68]Gerstenberger, p. 106.

[69]Farris, op. cit., p. 249. Corkery (p. 222) says: "The passage in its own place in the drama is still more significant, for, following swiftly and suddenly on a moment of blessed relief, in which Deirdre has almost brought about reconciliation between

Not tenderness, but gratuitous cruelty brought on by mutual taunting and a dread of parting, marks their farewell, and, with these bitter words, the lovers are separated for ever. The zenith of their love has passed, perfection is ruptured, and remembrance is soured by one brief altercation. The "deathless courage of love"[70] is a chimera.[71]

Conchubor makes his demands directly after Naisi is killed, ignoring Deirdre's assertion that she will not be his queen. His acknowledged attributes - "a man is old and desolate and High King also"(257)[72] - certainly do not recommend him to her. Although he shows some understanding of her grief, she, not unnaturally, turns on him savagely:

> I have pity surely. . . . It's the way pity has me this night, when I think of Naisi, that I could set my teeth into the heart of a king.(257)

Conchubor replies: "I know well pity's cruel, when it was pity for my own self destroyed Naisi."(257) Deirdre, too, is consumed with self-pity, intensified by her remorse at betraying Naisi:

> It was my words without pity gave Naisi a death will have no match until the ends of life and time. /Breaking out into a keen./ But who'll pity Deirdre has lost the lips of Naisi from her neck, and from her cheek, forever: who'll pity Deirdre has lost the twilight in the woods with Naisi, when beech-trees were silver and copper, and ash-trees were fine gold?(257-59)

Conchubor and Naisi, its stringent poignancy has been prepared for by a breath of sweetness and hope. No tenderness of lyrical farewelling could so move us to pity: we feel the intensity of their union in the violence of its snapping."

[70]Ellis-Fermor, p. 181.

[71]Ann Saddlemyer ("Deirdre of the Sorrows," in Harmon, p. 98) comments: "The story told for ever threatens to be one of pain, not comfort; not only have they lost their love - their own choice - but they have lost their triumph as well, and Deirdre is left truly desolate." But their choice was to lose life in order to preserve love.

[72]Cf. his speech when he first courts her: "I'm a ripe man and I've great love and yet, Deirdre, I'm the King of Ulster" (195); supra, p. 239.

In saying that he would possibly rather be dead and have Deirdre's love than be alive but old and without her favour, the "bewildered" king echoes her own aversion to age:

> It's I'll know the way to pity and care you, and I with a share of troubles has me thinking this night, it would be a good bargain if it was I was in the grave, and Deirdre crying over me, and it was Naisi who was old and desolate.(259)

Deirdre, described as "wild with sorrow"(259) is grief-stricken because of Naisi's death, her cruelty and her condition: "It is I who am desolate, I, Deirdre, that will not live till I am old."(259) She and the king are two lonely people, both without the love they want, both immersed in their own misery. Conchubor mentions the impermanence of joy and sorrow, but admits: "There's one sorrow has no end surely, that's being old and lonesome."(259) This is what Deirdre dreads.[73] He offers her the grandeur of Emain, but it is in flames.

Deirdre laments the deaths of the brothers who are young for ever, and in remembering past happiness contrasts it with her present and future wretchedness:

> It's you three will not see age or death coming, you that were my company when the fires on the hill-tops were put out and the stars were our friends only. I'll turn my thoughts back from this night - that's pitiful for want of pity - to the time it was your rods and cloaks made a little tent for me where there'd be a birch tree making shelter, and a dry stone: though from this day my own fingers will be making a tent for me, spreading out my hairs and they knotted with the rain.(261)

She cannot forgive herself for the harsh parting:

> It is I Deirdre will be crouching in a dark place, I Deirdre that was young with Naisi, and brought sorrow to his grave in Emain.(261)

Old Woman remarks on the change in Deirdre: "Is that

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[73] Skelton (p. 146) observes that Conchubor "is suffering that very condition which Deirdre herself has feared."

Deirdre broken down that was so light and airy?"(261) It is she: death has proved a harder blow than she imagined. Contrary to all her avowals, it appears that Deirdre expects to live for some time still, although Naisi is dead:

> It will be my share from this out to be making lamentation on his stone always, and I crying for a love will be the like of a star shining on a little harbour by the sea.(261)

Figgis's comment on Deirdre's behaviour is largely valid:

> That Deirdre should beg Conchubor for life for Naisi and herself, despite the fact that she urged their return from Alban fearful lest Naisi's love for her should fail, and desirous of a death together to frustrate this, might have been covered by a hint of frailty in her, however little likely it might seem. But that, after Naisi has been done to death, she should wail over his body, speaking in prospect of a long life of miserable retrospect, is unforgivable.[74]

But this does not quite allow for Deirdre's distracted state. It is understandable that, realizing her actions have borne bitter fruit and knowing she has been torn away from happiness for ever, she contradicts herself and appears confused.

By playing on her vanity, her desire to be a marvel, Lavarcham tries to coax Deirdre away:

> If it's keening you'd be come till I find you a sunny place where you'll be a great wonder they'll call the queen of sorrows, and you'll begin taking a pride to be sitting up pausing and dreaming when the summer comes.(261)

She tries to stir Deirdre to action by mentioning her choice:

> There's a score of woman's years in store for you, and you'd best choose will you start living them beside the man you hate, or being your own mistress in the west or south.(263)

But Deirdre has another course which will make her even more of

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[74] Darrell Figgis, "The Art of J. M. Synge," FR, n.s., XC (November 1, 1911), 1067.

a wonder. She refers to her own death: "It is not I will go on living after Ainnle and after Ardan. After Naisi I will not have a lifetime in the world."(263) In her distress she tries to give Naisi a decent burial by throwing clay over him, but is gratified that at least he has met the "sharp end" contemplated in Alban, a death befitting a noble warrior. Once more she remembers their days of ecstasy and freedom:

> It was a clean death was your share Naisi, and it is not I will quit your head when it's many a dark night among the snipe and plover that you and I were whispering together. It is not I will quit your head Naisi, when it's many a night we saw the stars among the clear trees of Glen da Ruadh, or the moon pausing on the edges of the hills.(263)

When Lavarcham persists in her pleas, the queen responds "imperiously":

> I will not leave Naisi who has left the whole world scorched and desolate, I will not go away when there is no light in the heavens, and no flower in the earth under them, but is saying to me, that it is Naisi who is gone forever.(263)

Because Deirdre will never be able to look about her without remembering Naisi, she will find no pleasure in nature for he will not be with her to share in its delight.[75]

Conchubor tries to compel Deirdre to leave by showing that their conditions are similar. But he has lost material goods only - Deirdre puts more value on Naisi and on life. In forbidding the king to approach, she points out that her beloved has escaped old age:

> Draw a little back from Naisi who is young forever. Draw a little back from the white bodies I am putting under a mound of clay and grasses that are withered - a mound will have a nook for my own self when the end is come.(265)

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[75] Farris (op. cit., p. 250) notes: "The nature imagery, with which Deirdre and Naisi have been identified from the beginning, turns desolate in the last scene - dark skies, naked trees, withered grasses. The word 'desolate' is repeated several times; the mood of the scene is indeed desolation." /Farris's italics./

Conchubor is the "old man and a fool,only"(265) that Deirdre finds him, his foolishness being his desire for the young queen, his attempts to capture her and his hope that she will go to him.

In her firm resolve to die now, Deirdre is determined that nobody will stop her and she asks the High King "almost mockingly": "Who'll fight the grave, Conchubor, and it opened on a dark night?"(265) She cannot fight the grave in which Naisi lies; Conchubor will be equally powerless when she dies.[76]

Conchubor's treachery and Deirdre's fateful decision in Alban have led to the present impasse,[77] but, as Deirdre predicted, Fergus blames himself:

> I have destroyed Emain, and now I'll guard you all times, Deirdre, though it was I, without knowledge, brought Naisi to his grave.(267)

When he and Conchubor squabble, Deirdre scorns them: they are disturbing her greater wretchedness.

In drawing on images of nature to express her grief, she echoes Lavarcham's vision of Emain. The quarrel and the bitterness are forgotten in the lamentation for herself and the passing of joy with Naisi:[78]

> Draw a little back with the squabbling of fools when I am broken up with misery. . . . I see the flames of Emain starting upward in the dark night, and because of me there will be weasels and wild cats crying on a lonely wall where there were queens and armies, and red gold, the way there will be a story told of a ruined city and a raving king and a woman will be young forever. . . .[79] I see the trees naked

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[76]Cf. Empson, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

[77]Cf. Styan, op. cit., p. 259.

[78]Cf. Henn, pp. 77-78.

[79]In regarding this as the answer to Maurya's cry, "No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied,"(27) Skelton (p. 145) says: "It is the answer to time, to have created a story that will never be forgotten." Styan (op. cit., p. 258) says that in this prophecy, Deirdre "links Conchubor with the

> and bare, and the moon shining. . Little moon, little moon of Alban, it's lonesome you'll be this night, and tomorrow night, and long nights after, and you pacing the woods beyond Glen Laid, looking every place for Deirdre and Naisi, the two lovers who slept so sweetly with each other.(267)

Deirdre forgoes her mourning now; proud to have been fought over by the mighty, she finds comfort in being young for ever. She experiences "a kind of joy / In casting hope away,"[80] as well as in dispensing with sorrow. She builds herself up in her own estimation as she stresses her high status:[81]

> I have put away sorrow like a shoe that is worn out and muddy, for it is I have had a life that will be envied by great companies. It was not by a low birth I made kings uneasy, and they sitting in the halls of Emain. It was not a low thing to be chosen by Conchubor, who was wise, and Naisi had no match for bravery. . . . It is not a small thing to be rid of grey hairs and the loosening of the teeth. [With a sort of triumph.] . . . It was the choice of lives we had in the clear woods, and in the grave we're safe surely. . . .(267-69)

In saving her from the horrors of old age, the grave also tears her from youth, but it is a youth in which she finds no joy any more. Rajan regards Deirdre as clear-sighted:

> Deirdre sees with a clarity that is passionate but which is beyond victimization by any particular passion. She seems withdrawn behind frustration and bitterness and even from the winning of dignity from defeat, withdrawn into the hard, sweet understanding of the desolation and consolation in the nature of things.[82]

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meanest of animal life, thus in a vivid picture raising herself far above him, while in turn the spirit of the comparison suggests that she is herself a creature of nature, elemental, artless as the play's verbal imagery has reiterated."

[80]W. B. Yeats, The Countess Cathleen, in Collected Plays, p. 31.

[81]Cf. Henn, p. 76.

[82]Balachandra Rajan, "Yeats, Synge and the Tragic Understanding," YS, No. 2 (1972), p. 77.

She mocks Conchubor: death - the "High King" of everybody - helps her thwart him conclusively:[83]

> I have a little key to unlock the prison of Naisi, you'd shut upon his youth forever. Keep back Conchubor, for the High King who is your master has put his hands between us. /She half turns to the grave./ . . . It was sorrows were foretold, but great joys were my share always, yet it is a cold place I must go to be with you, Naisi, and it's cold your arms will be this night that were warm about my neck so often. . . . It's a pitiful thing to be talking out when your ears are shut to me. It's a pitiful thing, Conchubor, you have done this night in Emain, yet a thing will be a joy and triumph to /the/ ends of life and time.(269)[84]

Unlike Maurya, Deirdre has no compensating religion, no hope, but in committing suicide, she exults over Conchubor for she will be remembered as young, beautiful and a great wonder always.[85]

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[83]Styan (op. cit., p. 259), who says that Deirdre's "wish to recognize God's intervention in her story raises her still higher," is mistaken in regarding God and not death as the "High King." Cf. also Corkery, p. 106. That "High King" implies death is underlined in considering other speeches, such as Conchubor's, "I was near won this night, but death's between us now,"(255) and Deirdre's, "For seven years you have been kindly, but the hardness of death has come between us."(255) Cf. Ellis-Fermor, p. 185: "Except for the insuperable and undying power of love in Deirdre, whose immortality even there is rather implied by its own strength than defined by comment or suggestion, there is no relating of the world of men with any wider, less tangible metaphysical universe"; supra, pp. 22-23.

[84]Williams (p. 168) remarks: "This speech is genuine drama; it is that rarest of situations, a character conscious of her own dramatic importance, in the same way as in the earlier magnificence of her entrance dressed as a queen . . . ."

[85]Skelton (pp. 139-40) says: Deirdre, unlike her sisters in /Synge's/ drama, is not possessed by rage against mortality; she accepts that the price to be paid for youth's splendour is its passing, and she triumphs in evading the miseries of age, as the lovers in Axel triumphed by choosing to die at the height of the intensity of their dream. In this act of assertion, Deirdre, destroying herself, conquers the fates . . . ." Later, he remarks (p. 146) that Deirdre shows only pity for herself: "She may be a heroic and magnificent creature, but she is finally a

Deirdre is no puppet and her death is no indication of a passive outlook. Although she triumphs in her deed which is both willed and carried out by her,[86] she dies not at the peak of happiness as desired, but after sorrow, bitterness and disillusionment.

Deirdre, Naisi and his brothers, the young, are dead; Conchubor, Fergus and Lavarcham, the old, are helpless. The wise woman, who believes that a long, even if miserable, life is preferable to a "clean death" while young and joyful, turns to assist the living in the form of a frustrated and broken old man: "I have a little hut where you can rest Conchubor, there is a great dew falling."(269) She must have somebody to care for; life must be preserved in some way.[87]

The broken king, with no hope of a young queen to comfort him in his decline, is dependent on the old women and incapable of acting: "Take me with you, I'm hard set to see the way before me,"(269) he admits "with the voice of an old man." It is implied that he does not know what to do or what will happen. More than ever, at the end Conchubor is a piteous and miserable figure. He has lost all.[88] Sorrows were foretold and

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predator, a monster." Skelton admits that this comment does "put the case too strongly" but holds that "the overstatement points to an inadequacy at the heart of the play, in that we are at no point permitted to see Deirdre in terms other than her own, for all are captivated and blinded by her vision of herself."

[86]Cf. Fackler, op. cit., p. 407.

[87]Cf. Price, p. 214.

[88]Price (p. 211) remarks on the tragic status of Conchubor: "In a way he is a tragic figure; or rather, it is his tragedy that with all his suffering and scheming he never attains the tragic plane and never experiences exaltation, however brief; wretchedness, desolation and drouth alone are his. In contrast with Deirdre and Naisi and all they represent - the power of love - he is a destructive force - not least to himself." [Price's italics] Cf. also Corkery, pp. 223-24; Skelton, p. 146.

sorrows have resulted; the characters have fulfilled the prophecy.

In delivering the epilogue, Lavarcham draws on the pathetic fallacy once more:

> Deirdre is dead, and Naisi is dead, and if the oaks and stars could die for sorrow it's a dark sky and a hard and naked earth we'd have this night in Emain.(269)[89]

Lavarcham, counterpoised to Deirdre throughout, is old, practical and doleful, whereas the queen is young, impulsive and gay at first. Whereas Deirdre dies young in order to preserve youth, Lavarcham endures, submitting to the ravages of time. Whereas Deirdre succeeds in acting as she deems fit, Lavarcham is always frustrated in her endeavours to prevent others from certain behaviour. She presents the choric voice of convention and sense, but is a frustrated figure, distressed both by the desire of Conchubor for Deirdre, and by the desire of Deirdre for freedom and eternal youth.[90]

Ann Saddlemyer maintains that

> Deirdre's dream is the realization of her own nature. Though she speaks with the dignity and command of a queen, she reveals the same longings and despair, the same sincerity that we find in all Synge's women characters from old Maurya to Mary Byrne. It is Deirdre who reaches

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[89] In commenting on this speech, Donna Gerstenberger (p. 107) points out that "nature does not mourn for man; it only covers over the spot where man has tried to make his will, to insist on the possibility of his significant being."

[90] Fackler (op. cit., p. 405) says that Lavarcham "functions as a one-voice chorus, comparable to the choruses of Greek drama"; Ann Saddlemyer ("Deirdre of the Sorrows,"in Harmon, p. 101), on the other hand, regards her as combining "the function of the chorus (in the Elizabethan sense) and the tolerance of age." Skelton (p. 146) sees her as becoming "little more than a stock figure required to introduce moments of false hope and inadequate criticism"; Price (p. 213) contends that she never has any real hope, and that she is the most unhappy person in the play.

> out and grasps what all her peasant sisters have dimly felt. But whereas the tramp remained a poetic symbol only of the richer, freer life Nora Burke was seeking, Deirdre's fulfilment depends upon Naisi's willingness to share the same dream.[91]

It can hardly be denied that Deirdre of the Sorrows is a tragedy, but there are diverse reasons for regarding it as such. Price says:

> The tragedy is not so much that people like Deirdre and Naisi are crushed by powerful men like Conchubor, but that all earthly beauty, youth and love decay and die.[92]

But Price's final estimation of the play is not based on the tragic:

> Lavarcham and Conchubor are the best proof of the wisdom and rightness of the life and death of Deirdre and Naisi. Life for the old has been a long nightmare; for the young a brief, exquisite dream. They have tried to bind to themselves a joy, and have destroyed it: the young kissed it as it flew, and they live in eternity's sunrise.[93]

Lucas finds the play a tragedy of *hubris*, Deirdre's *hubris* being "against the most powerful of all gods, whose name is Time."[94] Deirdre, who fears time which inevitably must lead to death, elects to take her own life rather than waiting to have it taken from her after years of misery. She can only vanquish time by attaining this stage of timelessness, but in fighting against it she merely hastens the conclusion.

Fackler says that the tragedy in Deirdre of the Sorrows is that of a common flaw in the characters - surrender to the will.[95] Both Conchubor and Deirdre's wills lead to unhappiness.

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[91] Saddlemyer, pp. 19-20. Cf. also Skelton, p. 139.

[92] Price, p. 207.

[93] ibid., p. 215. Farris (op. cit., pp. 243-44) comments on Price's "eminently untragic" view of the play.

[94] Lucas, op. cit., p. 234.

[95] Fackler, op. cit., p. 409.

Although he is thwarted in the end, Conchubor succeeds in bringing Deirdre to Emain, something he has both willed and desired for seven years; although she does seek safety at first when confronted with the immediacy of danger in Emain, Deirdre meets the fate she wills in Alban.

Part of the tragic view of Deirdre must centre on the fact that she desires joy and, in the beginning, her instinct is only for life; but this becomes an instinct for death and she is destroyed after having insisted on life.[96] The chain which ends in her death is initiated by her refusal to sacrifice joy and freedom for a smothered existence as Conchubor's consort. Another tragic feature is that although she wishes to die in order to preserve a perfect love, by putting this impulse into action she estranges her lover.[97] Death is an accomplishment which comes only after bitter words that destroy the faultless, and her victory is a hollow one because it comes too late to save her from anguish and the knowledge that no reconciliation awaits her. The lovers' end is not the happy one they have sought. Nevertheless, Deirdre glories in her triumph over Conchubor and over old age - it is a joy for her to die.[98]

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[96]Cf. Farris, op. cit., pp. 244-45.

[97]Cf. Henn, p. 77; Barnett, op. cit., p. 124.

[98]Cf. W. B. Yeats, The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. xxxiv: "In all the great tragedies, tragedy is a joy to the man who dies." In 1914, Yeats wrote to his father: "I shall not be able to use the word joy in any lecture for it would confuse things, I shall have to use the word 'ecstasy.' Ecstasy includes emotions like those of Synge's Deirdre after her lover's death which are the worst of sorrows to the ego." The Letters of W. B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade (London: Ruper Hart-Davis, 1954) p. 587. On the other hand, Richard B. Sewall - "The Tragic Form," Essays in Criticism, IV (October 1954), 354 - argues: "The martyr seeks suffering, accepts it gladly, 'glories in tribulation.' Tragic man knows nothing of grace and never glories in his suffering."

Because she precipitates events and fulfils the prophecy by voluntary actions, it is ironic that Deirdre tells Lavarcham in Alban:

> There's little power in oaths to stop what's coming, and little power in what I'd do Lavarcham, to change the story of Conchubor and Naisi and the things old men foretold.(217)

Without her death-wish, without her willing the end, the prophecy would be rendered ineffectual. Boyd sees Deirdre as "a wild, passionate woman, who struggles helplessly against the fate which is to deprive her of life and love";[99] but in returning to Emain, she encourages it, and, by realizing her own death-instinct, causes the deaths of those whom she loves most. Deirdre is a destructive force:

> The strong sons of Uisneac,
> Who never submitted,
> They fell by Deirdre![100]

Styan says that Deirdre's feelings for herself "mature to impersonality,"[101] but they do not. Her last speeches are all predominantly about herself, her grief, and her effect on others, both now and in time to come. She is conscious of both her rank and her destiny:

> This knowledge, however, destroys her spiritually. It makes her prisoner of her own ego. It leads her to be both ruthless and self-centred. It turns her into a heroine who sees her life's only justification to be its tragic pattern, and the poetry of lamentation that can be made from it. Her values are the pure values of romance. She is possessed only by the impulse towards love and that towards death.[102]

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[99] Boyd, Contemporary, p. 107. Skelton (p. 139), however, finds that Deirdre lacks the emotional complexity of other Synge heroines in that she neither opposes nor disagrees with her fate.

[100] James Stephens, "The Red Man's Wife, Collected Poems (London: Macmillan, 1965), p. 53.

[101] Styan, op. cit., p. 259.

[102] Skelton, p. 150. Corkery (p. 219), who says that Deirdre

Synge's heroine is domineering and grows increasingly imperious, selfish, self-willed, self-pitying and egoistic; yet she is always "a queen of women,"(247) the queen of the Sons of Usna, of the King of Ulster, and of all his subjects.

In the beginning, Deirdre lives for the joy of life, but in the end she dies because she is afraid of losing it. Her desire for death overcomes all else. Like Antigone, her intention, her obligation almost, is to die, is to obtain relief from life:

> She insisted. No man on earth was strong enough to dissuade her. Death was her purpose, whether she knew it or not. . . . She was bent upon only one thing; to reject life and die.[103]

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is not like "marmorean" [sic] queens of tragedy "that moved about as if burdened with their own fame," takes an opposing view; cf. also Corkery, p. 223.

[103] Jean Anouilh, Antigone, trans. Lewis Galantière (London: Methuen, 1966), pp. 60-61.

Chapter 10

CONCLUSION

> There are beautiful and interesting plants which are deadly, and others that are kindly. It is absurd to say a flower is not beautiful nor admire its beauty because it is deadly, but it is absurd also to deny its deadliness.[1]
>
> What do we know of women who are fine or foul?[2]

None of Synge's women is wholly fine or foul, kindly or deadly. In considering them, one must remember that even the most sympathetic can be sly or cruel, the meanest, well-disposed at times.

Several features unite these figures, the awareness of transiency being one of the most striking. Although so many are haunted by the briefness of their world,[3] they dread the decline of vigour and comeliness even more than death and realize that there is no escape from mutability and gnawing time.[4] Etain's keen in the fragment _A Vernal Play_ exemplifies this consciousness:

> All young girls must yield to rage,
> All firm youth must end in age. (III, 192)

Maurya, whose main grievance is that her sons have preceded her in death, accepts the universal lot of mankind, her final words, "No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied," (III, 27) being taken up in various degrees of protest by other Synge women. Nora Burke tries to provide for her old age by marriage but she knows that she cannot avoid it, constantly reflecting on "the young growing behind . . . and the old passing." (III, 49)

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[1] J. M. Synge, passage in a notebook, quoted by Ann Saddlemyer, "'A Share in the Dignity of the World': J. M. Synge's Aesthetic Theory," _The World of W. B. Yeats_, p. 217.

[2] _CW_ III, 88. (This is part of a speech by the saint in an early draft of _The Well of the Saints_.)

[3] Cf. "Vita Vecchia," _CW_ II, 20-21.

[4] Cf. Roberts, op. cit., p. 60; Bourgeois, pp. 222-23; Cunliffe, _Modern English Playwrights_, p. 137; Corkery, pp. 76, 233; Price, p. 216 and passim; Saddlemyer, pp. 13, 17; Skelton, p. 62. Cf. also "An Old Woman's Lamentations," _CW_ I, 80.

Unlike her, Mary Doul, who is already old, finds compensation in age. She is aware that good looks disappear when youth goes but concludes that she will find a new kind of magnificence; only those like Molly Byrne will grow old and ugly. Mary Byrne, who admires beauty in the young, is similar to Mary Doul in that both intend enjoying life as long as they can - the blind woman by dreaming of her future appearance, the tinker woman by drinking and living for the moment. She acknowledges that decline comes to all, as evident in her rhetorical question to Sarah Casey: "Is it putting that ring on your finger will keep you from getting an aged woman and losing the fine face you have . . . ?(IV, 37) The most compelling study in the fear of decay is Deirdre of the Sorrows, the woman who does not wait for old age to overtake her. The others all drift towards death, disliking the condition but powerless to act against it. In contrast to Lavarcham who views old age with resignation and not resentment, Deirdre takes her fate in her own hands and remains young for ever. She does not storm against mortality but against change - the change in love as well as in beauty.[5] Like the others she knows that "there's no safe place . . . on the ridge of the world."(IV, 231)

Deirdre, who makes several momentous decisions, rules her destiny, unlike the fisherwife of Aran, a victim of fate who is at the mercy of the sea. Whereas Deirdre succeeds in getting her own way, Maurya is frustrated in her attempt to dissuade Bartley from leaving. Deirdre, driven by emotion as much as by reason, rationalizes constantly like Mary Doul. Both convince themselves that they are right - Deirdre in action, Mary in fantasy. The blind woman, who is swayed by others and unable to act forcibly under pressure, depends upon her husband to save

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[5]Cf. Skelton, pp. 139-40.

their physical world after she has found the way to preserve their dream-world. They rely on each other for salvation, just as Pegeen and Christy need each other to bring out their poetry, Deirdre puts her trust in Naisi to take her from Conchubor, and Nora requires the tramp and Sister Eileen must have Colm to show them the way to a new understanding of existence.

Mary Costello was driven solely by emotional belief in refusing Colm's uncle. The young man appeals to Sister Eileen through both mind and feelings, leaving it to her to make the "right" decision, which she does after seeing what the "wrong" approach to life can bring about and after his "fine bit of talk." The nun is as affected by his words as Nora is by those of the tramp and the Mayo girls are by the Playboy's.

Pegeen and the Widow Quin are both opportunistic, seeing in Christy a way to a better life, but where the girl regards Christy romantically and falls in love with him, the widow is realistic and artfully tries to win the lad, considering that he would be a comfort, both economically and sexually. This craftiness is echoed in other Synge women who try to get their own way. Nora feigns compassion in order to make Dan relent, Maurya uses cunning to make Bartley stay, Mary Byrne finds an excuse to go off when she realizes that she has sold the marriage can, and Lavarcham lies to both Naisi and Conchubor in order to save Deirdre. In spite of these attempts, all are frustrated. Maurya's daughters are more successful in hiding the clothing and sending her to the well, but in obeying them she discovers the truth before they do. Sarah Casey, too, reveals wiliness when preparing to confront the priest for the first time, making sure that he notices her beauty.

The uproarious doxy is completely irrational in her desire to join the ranks of conventional society. In demanding marriage, she pursues her objective as fervently as Pegeen and the Widow Quin chase Christy, the situation of a woman courting the man she desires being echoed on a loftier plane in Deirdre of the Sorrows. "Young girls are slow always," Conchubor admonishes

Deirdre, "it is their lovers that must say the word."(IV, 195) All these women take the initiative, however.[6] But whereas Deirdre wins Naisi, only to lose him in the face of death, and the Mayo women fail to hold Christy, Sarah, while thwarted, remains with her lover. She taunts Michael that she will go to Jaunting Jim because of his comparative wealth, financial security being the goal of several of Synge's women. Nora married an old man for property, Molly's reason for accepting the "almost elderly"(III, 69) Timmy is much the same, and Pegeen is prepared to accept Shawn at first because he is a good match commercially. Deirdre, on the other hand, cannot betray herself at all and spurns both gold and the disagreeable old man who offers it. Like her, Maurya sees life as more important than financial well-being:

> If it was a hundred horses, or a thousand horses you had itself, what is the price of a thousand horses against a son where there is one son only?(III, 9)

In contrast to the decisive women, Nora Burke is a passive figure, unable to act with determination in any way. She, the opposite of Sarah Casey who enjoys vital intercourse, is starved of companionship.[7] Whereas Sarah is dissatisfied with but a single detail of her state, Nora is unhappy with her whole life, and whereas the doxy, who acts on a caprice, has no quarrel with her surroundings, the glenswoman has been pondering her plight, touching her to the roots of her being, for some time and longs to escape her oppressive environment.

Nora is but one of the women affected by nature.[8] This

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[6]Cf. Bourgeois, p. 223.

[7]Cf. Price, pp. 128-29; Henn, p. 46.

[8]Cf. Ellis-Fermor, pp. 163-86; Price, pp. 216-17; Gerstenberger, pp. 135-36; Saddlemyer, pp. 14-15; Fackler, op.cit., p. 407.

sad woman, living in constant dread of the glen and the mists, is subject to melancholy, depression and possible insanity because of the dismal prospect and weather. Nora has the opportunity to leave her surroundings which threaten her mind and well-being, but Maurya's environment is ineluctable and destructive, taking all from her while remaining the source of subsistence. Synge's other women, however, do not regard nature as such a maleficent factor. Sister Eileen shows some appreciation of it, the rain, moon, sun and flowers in When The Moon Has Set being symbolic of her condition. When Mary Doul begins building her new vision, nature takes on a happy aspect, with twittering birds coming with the warmth of spring and the air being so sweet,

> the way it'll be a grand thing to be sitting here quiet and easy, smelling the things growing up, and budding from the earth.(III, 131)

Sarah Casey, although driven to aberration by a change in the moon, also appreciates her surroundings, as does the ribald Mary Byrne. Nature plays a less important role in The Playboy of the Western World, but in the "flyting match" with Pegeen, the Widow Quin tries to entice Christy with the picture of her contriving in her little gardens; and the barmaid herself is not averse to sheltering in a bush as long as the Playboy is with her. The woman most in harmony with her environment is Deirdre, the mood of nature constantly reflecting hers. It is her love of the freedom it brings, her fear of suffocation if taken from it, that leads to much of her conduct in escaping from Conchubor and the stuffiness associated with him.

Deirdre's revolt against the High King is a form of the rebellious behaviour of many of Synge's women who are antagonistic to the humdrum world of convention.[9] Whereas Deirdre

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[9] Cf. Gerstenberger, pp. 68-69; Skelton, pp. 20, 101, 171.

is true to herself in defying a restrictive existence, Pegeen is not. She rejects her father's authority by choosing the Playboy as her lover, but when he, the embodiment of the free spirit, leaves the confining Mayo society behind, she lacks the boldness to follow, her individuality stifled by an inbred herd attitude. The less interesting Sister Eileen, however, is able to abandon her vows for an ostensibly freer life, and, in so doing, appears to be the only one of Synge's women with a conscience.[10] Conflict with society does not enter Riders to the Sea,[11] but it does The Shadow of the Glen. Dan represents conventional moral laws, the tramp stands for the natural life, and Nora, who wants both, does not know where to turn until she is kicked out of the cottage. Like her, Mary Doul is cast out at the end, but she has no pretensions to the conventional and expresses her individuality throughout.[12] On being compared to Synge's women who turn against society, Sarah Casey seems perverse in wanting to accept the customs of settled people, but her deviation is a crochet which is opposed to the practice of her own kind.

It is the old tinker woman, Mary Byrne, who holds the traditional outlook for those of her class and disparages Sarah's deviation, just as the wise Lavarcham despairs at Deirdre's

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[10]Cf. Corkery, p. 101. [11]Cf. Gerstenberger, p. 44.

[12]In The Irish Comic Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 239, Vivian Mercier points out that, unlike most comic writers, Synge sympathizes with the outcast or underdog, exposing the respectable citizen to ridicule: "At the end of each of Synge's comedies . . . although the solid citizens are left in command of the stage, our hearts go with the outcasts."

Donna Gerstenberger (p. 59) remarks that the ending of The Well of the Saints "is not unlike that of In the Shadow of the Glen, The Playboy of the Western World, The Tinker's Wedding, or even of Deirdre of the Sorrows, in which the characters, with full knowledge of what they leave behind, consciously reject the world of ordinary society and strike out on their own so that they may at least define the world for themselves, even if it is to be the world of the grave, as in Deirdre." Cf. Bourgeois, p. 151, and p. 199, n. 1; Ganz, op. cit., p. 61.

independence of spirit. In the frequent clash between two views of life, Synge's older women tend to be more sensible or practical than the young ones who yearn for a better or different life rather than accept their present existence.[13] Lavarcham, Mary Byrne and the Widow Quin are realistic, Deirdre, Sarah Casey and Pegeen Mike romantic, even though the queen has no illusions about old age. Nora Burke is a mixture of the two groups, in her longing to escape comprehending that there is no real way out. The most striking example of those who live in a world of romance or fantasy and reject reality is an old woman, however – Mary Doul, who turns her mind from the unpleasant in relishing her inner-world of bliss. She is vain about her presumed beauty, betraying an egoism matched only by Deirdre but also revealed in the self-centred Sarah Casey and Molly Byrne. Nevertheless, even this resilient woman is not deceived about the path she must walk in following her dreams.

Although the young Cathleen in Riders to the Sea is practical, she views life with a certain idealism, but her mother, imprisoned by harsh reality for so long, is without illusions, unless one regards her belief in God and a life hereafter as fancy. At the end it is Maurya's religion which saves her from despair after her great bereavement. Granted she and her daughters, like Nora Burke, are superstitious, but Maurya's Catholicism overrides her paganism. The women of When the Moon Has Set are contrasting. Mary, although bound to her religious notions, realizes the harm they have caused her, and advises the nun to "give no heed to the priests or the bishops or the angels of God . . . ."(III, 173) Sister Eileen not only renounces her vows but also accepts a pagan marriage, which makes one wonder how deep her Christian belief really is. The spiritual hardly touches Synge's other women.[14] The heathen tinkers are incompatible

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[13] Cf. Howe, p. 190

[14] Cf. Corkery, p. 105.

with the priest and his beliefs, Mary opposing Sarah's interference in his world just as she resents his meddling in hers. Sarah is convinced only after the brawl. This does not stop them flinging about Christian allusions and using the name of God - usually in vain. Most of the people of The Playboy of the Western World and The Well of the Saints are equally free with His name in their folk-theology, Mary Doul's prayer, "The Lord protect us from the saints of God!"(III, 133) possibly being the most striking example of religious shallowness and confusion. But this also reflects on the saint's failure to understand the blind beggars; the young priest in Riders to the Sea is also inadequate, being unable to console Maurya.

The question of religion does not enter Deirdre of the Sorrows, and when the queen dies she believes that she will live on only in the mind of mankind, which is sufficient as long as she is remembered as young and beautiful, having enjoyed a glorious love. This love, however, is not unspoiled and Deirdre dies alone. "There are lonesome days and bad nights in this place like another,"(IV, 193) she tells Conchubor, a notion echoed throughout Synge's plays. His women are studies in varying degrees of loneliness:[15] Mary Costello, having neither lover nor children, goes mad in her loneliness, imagining the condition of the motherhood that she never allowed; Nora, whose marriage is barren in all ways, is a solitary figure, living in an isolated place where few can or care to understand her sensitivity;[16] Maurya, once surrounded by her menfolk, is left with nobody to look after her except two relatively ineffectual daughters; jolly Mary Byrne soliloquizes on her loneliness, and even complacent Mary Doul betrays a hint of regret at being alone on reverting to blindness; Pegeen and the Widow Quin intersperse their talk with suggestions

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[15] Cf. Howe, pp. 195-97; Ellen Douglass Leyburn, op. cit., passim.

[16] Ellen Douglass Leyburn (op. cit., pp. 84-85) points out that the settings of Synge's plays are desolate, adding to the feeling of loneliness.

of loneliness, both being left lonely at the end, the widow an outsider as always and Pegeen more desolate than ever.

Lady Gregory explains that

> the feeling of "lonesomeness" . . . is looked upon as almost the worst of evils by the Irish countryman, as we see by his proverb: "It is better to be quarrelling than to be lonesome."[17]

Synge's women certainly wrangle, their squabbles leading to violence at times. Mary Doul, who delights in banter with her husband, is not slow to lash either him or Molly verbally. She is as vituperative as Pegeen, "the fright of seven townlands" for her biting tongue,(IV, 151) and both, like the women of The Tinker's Wedding, have vivid imaginations. Although Sarah Casey is the most savage in a clash, only Molly Byrne is gratuitously malicious, attacking without provocation and when her adversaries are in no position to defend themselves. Other women also bicker or act angrily but all with reason; Maurya is petty and irritable at first because of anxiety; Nora takes a final gibe at Dan, but only when she has been turned out; Lavarcham remonstrates with Deirdre, Conchubor and the Sons of Usna when she foresees doom; Deirdre quarrels with Naisi under the pressure of parting for ever. Their turbulent behaviour is frequently the result of threats or provocation or a means of self-defence. They must fight for their rights often out of pride.

Had Synge's plays been seen by John Butler Yeats, who found Shakespeare's tragedies "poetry in deepest earnest," he would have called them "poetry in unlimited sadness," according to Lady Gregory.[18] Pain, suffering and sadness come to the

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[17] Lady Gregory, Poets and Dreamers: Studies and Translations from the Irish (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1903) p. 81

[18] Lady Gregory, Our Irish Theatre, p. 122.

majority of Synge's women at some stage or another: Mary Costello is wretched in her insanity, Maurya a broken old woman until she accepts God and universal fate, and Nora, the most frustrated of all, despairs throughout; Mary Doul is beside herself with rage and grief when her illusions are ripped away and she is made to acknowledge her ugliness, and Mary Byrne, even if tipsy, is unhappy for a while; Pegeen Mike, an afflicted figure at the end, rises with her hero but remains fallen without him; Lavarcham goes from one instance of anxiety and frustration to another, and "the woman will be young forever"(IV, 267) despairs in her joy and scores a hollow victory after the most bitter quarrel of all has withered love in a way unforeseen.

Sister Eileen, Maurya, Mary Doul, Sarah Casey, Pegeen Mike and Deirdre all gain insight into their situation to a greater or lesser extent. This leads the nun to accept Colm, and Maurya God, it makes the blind woman admit that she is fooling herself and the doxy give up her attempt to join an incompatible world, and it causes Pegeen to despair and Deirdre to kill herself.

Rather than a monotonous, unexciting existence, it is vibrant and passionate life which attracts many of Synge's women:[19] Sister Eileen looks forward to it, Mary Costello wishes she could; Mary Doul thrills to a life in the mind, the tinker women to enjoyment of the present; Nora Burke desires such a life but is too faint-hearted to follow it voluntarily and wholly, and the Mayo girls long for it so much that when Christy, who represents it, arrives they idolize him. "I wouldn't give a thraneen for a lad hadn't a mighty spirit in him and a gamey heart,"(IV, 113) Pegeen admits to the Playboy, a sentiment evidently held by other of these women.[20] None pursues the rich, full and free life as

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[19]Cf. Fausset, op. cit., p. 271.

[20]Cf. Corkery, pp. 101-102.

completely as Deirdre, who both finds and abandons it.

Only the women of Riders to the Sea can be regarded as typical in certain aspects, but even the old fisherwoman has an individuality than cannot be overlooked.[21] All the women, including the pasty nun who accepts a pagan marriage, and the madwoman who clings to her faith, reveal diverse qualities, "inconsistencies" and "apparent contradictions";[22] their small-mindedness and magnanimity, their charm and unpleasantness, the features of both goddess and beast all lend depth to their characters and cannot be disregarded.[23] Before she majestically reconciles herself to God and the world, Maurya is seen as a nagging and peevish old woman; Nora Burke, much more complex than the melancholy, sensitive figure regarded by Yeats,[24] is also realistic and cunning; Mary Doul is amazing for her ability to adapt, but her self-centredness and complacency must not be forgotten; her foil, the vain and malicious Molly Byrne, is without ulterior motives in trying to help the woman she dislikes regain sight; vicious Sarah Casey, a virago under provocation, has a delightful imagination, and the jovial and coarse Mary Byrne has moments of loneliness and pathos; Pegeen Mike, that romantic and tender girl, is domineering with a biting tongue, whereas her crafty, sexually motivated and allegedly violent adversary, the Widow Quin, is compassionate and understanding; Lavarcham, who is sensible and candid, has a sharp temper, and the queen of

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[21] Cf. Yeats, "Samhain: 1905," The Irish Dramatic Movement, Explorations, p. 183; Howe, p. 178; Weygandt, op. cit., p. 195; Bourgeois, pp. 62-63; Boyd, Contemporary, p. 106; Fausset, op. cit., p. 269; Corkery, pp. 93, 239; Ellis-Fermor, pp. 184-85; Price, p. 64; Skelton, pp. 124, 173.

[22] Cf. Corkery, p. 100; supra, pp. 18-19.

[23] Cf. Bickley, op. cit., p. 25; Howe, p. 144; Ervine, op. cit., pp. 674-75; Gerstenberger, p. 25.

[24] Yeats, Preface to The Well of the Saints, Essays and Introductions, p. 300; supra, p. 82.

Synge's women, Deirdre of the Sorrows, is self-pitying and egoistic in her tragedy. These women all express an individual approach to life but are universal in their joys and sorrows, reflections and emotions, dreams and disappointments, all having "a share in the pain and passion of the world."(III, 175)

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