CHAPTER III

EVALUATION

i) Themes

Poems

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The non-dramatic works of Synge were a major source for his plays. The Aran Islands and In Wicklow, West Kerry and Connemara, his prose works, contain the sources of themes, language and characters of his plays, explaining and clarifying his dramatic theory and practice. His poetry too functions collaboratively with his drama.

Synge's translations from Villon bring out clearly the obsession from which his women suffer -- the onset of age and the consequent loss of physical beauty. Like Shakespeare in his Sonnets, Synge too is excruciatingly sensitive to Time and Age and Mutability:

Where is the round forehead I had, and the fine hair, and the two eye brows, and the eyes with a big gay look out of them would bring folly from a great scholar? Where is my straight, shapely nose, and two ears, and my chin with a valley in it, my lips were red and open?

Where are the pointed shoulders were on me, and the long arms and nice hands
to them? Where is my bosom was as white as any, or my straight rounded sides? It's the way I am this day — my forehead is gone away into furrows, the hair of my head is grey and whitish, my eyebrows are tumbled from me, and my two eyes have died out within my head — those eyes that would be laughing to the men — my nose has a hook on it, my ears are hanging down, and my lips are sharp and skinny.

That's what's left over from the beauty of a right woman — a bag of bones, legs the like of two shrivelled sausages going beneath it.

It's of the like of that we old hags do be thinking, of the good times are gone from us, and we crouching on our hunkers by a little fire of twigs, soon kindled and soon spent, we that were the pick of many.

That is the prospect that both Nora and Deirdre want to avoid.

Peggy Cavanagh, once a sprightly girl,

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 hill and they after burning the furze from it.

Nora does not want to be reduced to that state. Not only she, but everybody including Michael Dara will become old and haggard. So why should she marry him?

Why would I marry you, Mike Dara? You'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

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2 Ibid., p. 12.
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.  

In *The Tinker's Wedding*, Sarah Casey, by a fine display of her histrionics prevails upon the Priest to marry her to Michael for a nominal fee. But her mother-in-law, Mary warns her that by marriage she cannot avert the disaster of the passing of beauty and the onset of old age:

> Is it putting that ring on your finger will keep you from getting on aged woman and losing the fine face you have, or be easing your pains; when it's the grand ladies be married in silk dresses, with rings of gold, and 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.  

Neither wealth nor luxury can help any woman to overcome the natural factors of change and decay. Mary Doul in *The Well of the Saints* reminds the haughty and vain Molly Byrne that all her flashy beauty which is now so enticing to Martin Doul will be lost and

> 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.

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When Timmy protests that Molly will not be a victim of such ugliness, Mary says:

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.\textsuperscript{6}

One of the main themes of Deirdre of the Sorrows is Deirdre's constant preoccupation with the thought of how to transcend the natural factors. Even Fergus warns Naisi that he cannot but be a victim to old age and loss of youth. Of all the women of Synge, it is Deirdre who is terribly obsessed with this thought, it is like a nightmare disturbing a pleasant dream. Death is better than 'bending the head down, and dragging with the feet,'\textsuperscript{7} in old age. She does not want to be an old woman by Naisi's side who will also grow old. She rejoices over the fact that death has saved Naisi and his brothers from this predicament:

\textit{It's three will not see age or death coming --- \ldots \ldots \textsuperscript{8}}

Naisi having shown the way to get beyond change and decay, she follows him with a sense of joy and triumph:

\textit{It's not a small thing to be rid of grey hairs and the loosening of the teeth.\textsuperscript{9}}

\textsuperscript{6}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{7}Ibid., p. 196.
\textsuperscript{8}Ibid., p. 211.
\textsuperscript{9}Ibid., p. 215.
Synge's poems depict his mental absorption in the idea of his death which he has transferred to his plays. Like Keats, he seems to have been worried about his fame after his death. He imagines how the world would assess his worth as a poet in 'On An Anniversary.'

With Fifteen-ninety or Sixteen-sixteen
We end Cervantes, Marot, Nashe, or Green;
Then Sixteen-thirteen till two score and nine,
Is Crashaw's niche, the honey-tipped divine,
And so when all my little work is done
They'll say I came in Eighteen-seventy-one,
And died in Dublin... What year will they write
For my poor passage to the stall of night.  

His imagination extends to his state after his death with Love and Death neatly juxtaposed in 'To The Oaks of Glencree.'

My arms are round you, and I lean
Against you, while the lark
Sings over us, and the golden lights,
And green shadows are on your back.

There'll come a season when you'll stretch
Black boards to cover me;
Then in Mount Jerome I will lie,
With worms eternally.  

The first stanza is reminiscent of the ecstasy of sexual

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10Ibid., p. 229.
11Ibid.
passion which Deirdre and Naisi enjoy for seven years in Alban woods:

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, listening to the birds in the branches that are the highest. 12

In a jocular exchange with Molly Allgood, whom he had intended to marry, Synge once composed a poem, 'A Question'.

I asked if I got sick and died, would you With my black funeral go walking too, If you'd stand close to hear them talk and pray While I'm let down in that steep bank of clay.

And, No, you said, for if you saw a crew Of living idiots pressing round that new Oak coffin — they alive, I dead beneath That board — you'd rave and rend them with your teeth. 13

He visualises the whole scene of his funeral very graphically and expresses his confidence in his beloved that she will not allow anyone even to see his body. The treatment meted out to his plays was so barbarous that he calls those people 'living idiots' and contemptuously describes them as a predatory Lehean crew. The poem is not free from a satirical tone in that the mourners are described as talking and praying at the same time on the solemn occasion of the lowering of the

12 Ibid., p. 196.
13 Ibid., p. 230.
dead body; how solemn and serious the people are in funerals may be noticed here.

Synge seems to have been very fond of the black humour; he can describe his own death as if he is watching somebody else's. This poem, "I've Thirty Months" expresses a fear that had come true:

I've thirty months, and that's my pride,
Before my age's a double score,
Though many lively men have died,
At twenty-nine and little more. 14

This poem was written on 25 November 1908. He died on 24 March 1909, exactly four months after. He did not live to complete 'a double score' and he joined the immortal band of 'many lively young men' who died young. The poem, 'Epitaph' again with a coruscating premonition, holds a mirror to his own mortality. It presents the troubled inscape of his consciousness, his reserved nature, his love of solitude, and the public opposition that he had to encounter in his artistic career:

A silent sinner, nights and days,
No human heart to him drew nigh,
Alone he wound his wonted ways,
Alone and little loved did die.
And autumn death for him he did choose,
A season dank with mists and rain,
And took him, while the evening dews
Were settling o'er the fields again. 15

14 Ibid., p. 231.
15 Ibid., p. 232 (italics mine).
In the light of the passage, Martin Doul in *The Well of the Saints* stands contextualized as an authorial self-image. He is also warned against a wet death if he goes to the south. Martin represents much that Synge himself possessed — creative imagination, love of wild beauty and energy, walking the roads and a disbelief in Christianity.

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Synge’s love of all that is superb, wild and energetic finds expression in his poems too. 'Danny' also contains the prototype of the tinkers, Michael and Sarah Casey who gag the Priest and manhandle him. Many of the bloody episodes that Pegeen and others mention in *The Playboy of the Western World* may be traced back to this poem. It describes a violence that is pure and simple, throwing a great deal of light on many themes of his plays:

One night a score of Brol men,
A score I'm told and nine,
Said, 'We'll get shut Danny's noise
Of girls and Widows dyin'.

There's not his like from Binghamstown
To Boyle and Ballycroy,
At playing hell on decent girls,
At beating man and boy.

He's left two pairs of female twins
Beyond in Killacraest,
And twice in Crossmolina fair
He's struck the parish priest.

'But we'll come round him in the night
A mile beyond the Mullet;
Ten will quench his bloody eyes,
And ten will choke his gullet.'
It wasn't long till Danny came,
From Bangor making his way,
And he was damning moon and stars
And whistling grand and gay.

Till in a gap of hazel glen —
And not a hare in sight —
Out lepped the nine-and-twenty lads
Along his left and right.

Then Danny smashed the nose on Byrne,
He split the lips on three,
And bit across the right-hand thumb
On one Red Shan Magee.

But seven tripped him up behind,
And seven kicked before,
And seven squeezed around his throat
Till Danny kicked no more.

Then some destroyed him with their heels,
Some tramped him in the mud,
Some stole his purse and timber pipe,
And washed off his blood.

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And when you're going out the way
From Bangor to Belmullet,
You'll see a flat Cross on a stone,
Where men choked Danny's gullet. 16

This ballad of horror and pity underscores the gnawing admixture
of the serious and the comic elements in The Playboy of the
Western World whose very foundation is the worst of the crimes,
parricide, but which is inverted by the eccentric design of
the play. Nothing can be more gruesome and savage than what
is described in the last but one stanza of the poem,
gladiatorial lust. Danny resembles Christy Mahon in many

16Ibid., pp. 224-225 (italics mine).
respects. Christy also plays hell with decent girls, as Shawn Keogh, the conventional moralist thinks. Christy also threatens the people with violence when they are about to trap him at the end. He even bites Shawn's leg. His sexual escapades and 'beating man and boy' make Danny think highly of himself:

damning moon and stars and whistling
grand and gay.

Christy too extensively draws his imagery from celestial bodies after he has been elevated to a hero. He is a grand and gay young man, worshipped by the girls. Synge seems to suggest, at least partly, that the treatment meted out to Danny is the proper or inevitable one for such a fellow. In this light, Christy, the comic scapegoat of the community's vicarious death wish, stands out no less as the victim of his own catastrophic violence and morbidity. His comic crucifixion is a measure of Synge's use of drama as a meaning-making ritual.

The 'Emergency Man' is another poem which glorifies what is energetic and beautiful in life:

He was lodging above in Coom,
And he'd half of the bailiff's room.
Till a black night came in Coomasaharn,
A night of rains you'd swamp a star in.

'To-night,' says he, 'with the devil's weather
The hares itself will quit the heather.

'I'll catch my boys with a latch on the door,
And my process on near a score.'
The night was black at the fording place,
And the flood was up in a whitened race,
But devil a bit he'd turn his face.

Then the peelers said, 'Now mind your lepping,
How can you see the stones for stepping?

'We'll wash our hands of your bloody job.'
Wash and welcome, 'says he, 'begob.'

He made two leps with a run and dash,
Then the peelers heard a yell and splash;

And the 'mergency man in two days and a bit
Was found in the ebb tide struck in a net.17

The night in which the 'mergency man dies is analogous to the
night in The Shadow of the Glen when Nora, greeting the Tramp, says:

it's a wild night, God help you,
to be out in the rain falling.18

It is a dark night when he will not know the path. The
peelers warning the man minding his lepping is similar to the
warning Timmy gives to the Douls when they decide to go to
the south:

There's power of deep rivers with floods
in them where you do have to be lepping
the stones and you going to the south,
so I'm thinking the two of them will be
drowned together in a short while, surely.19

Synge's technique of placing the sublime and the
common place in counterpoint to produce a naturalistic comic

17 Ibid., p. 223.
18 Ibid., p. 3.
19 Ibid., p. 103.
effect is also exemplified by his poems. In the poem, 'Queens', after describing all the great queens he says at the end:

Queens who wasted the East by proxy,
Or drove the ass-cart, a tinker's doxy.20

Mary, in The Tinker's Wedding also refers to the beautiful queens, compares Sarah with them and ends it on a note of bathos:

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.21

The beautiful hands do not embrace one in love but will hit in scorn. Further, by this method Synge juxtaposes the highest and the lowest denominators of humanity -- the queens and tinkers.

Synge's poetic blending of the sublime and the grotesque underlines his own conception of poetry that before verse can be human again it must learn to be brutal.22

Synge's comedy no less than his tragedy is a search for the artistic equivalent of life as a complex mosaic of human contradictions, for only in art they can be pressed into a creative collaboration.

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20 Ibid., p. 221.
21 Ibid., p. 44.
22 Ibid., p. 219.
Flays

Synge has taken his themes and characters from the life and experience of the Aran folk. The Aran folk, peasants and fishermen, are richly endowed with a magnificent imagination, fiery and tender at once. Their joys and sorrows, superstitions and idiosyncrasies, their capacity for fantasy and their proneness towards paganism, all constitute a life rich in drama. In presenting this rich drama, Synge never assumes a didactic interest, nor is he immediately concerned with psychological, sociological or moral problems. For him the artistic value of any work of art is its uniqueness, and its human value largely depends upon its intensity and its richness. Being rich it is many-sided and universal. It should also possess the characteristic of a particular time and locality and the life in it.

All art that is not conceived by a soul in harmony with some mood of the earth is without value, and unless we are able to produce a myth more beautiful than nature — holding in itself a spiritual grace beyond and through the earthly — it is better to be silent.23

It is only the catastrophes of life that give power and substance to the tragedy and the humour which are the true two poles of art. For him religion should be substituted by a 'quite modern feeling for the beauty and mystery of nature, and emotion that has gradually risen up as religion in the

dogmatic sense has gradually died.\(^{24}\)

In his plays Synge conveys this sense of humanity and the mystery of the world that surrounds and permeates it. The 'heightened sense of human drama' which characterizes the lives of the Aran folk has been fully exploited by him. It is his conviction that 'on the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy.'\(^{25}\) His plays articulate 'a rich joy, found only in what is superb and wild in reality.'\(^{26}\) He believes that all art is impetuous, extravagant, vehement and never subservient to any sectarian theology. He holds that 'the dove's foot must have dust on it,'\(^{27}\) and 'it is the timber of poetry that wears most surely, and there is no timber that has not strong roots among the clay and worms.'\(^{28}\) His mind is so much engrossed with life that he does not show any overt interest in the prosaic attitudes to life. He is not committed to any 'isms.'

He was a free intelligence, like Goethe, Ibsen, or Chekov, well aware that 'movements' are best left to mobs; and that majorities, as they grow 'compact,' usually grow, also, dense.\(^{29}\)

\(^{24}\)Ibid., p. 351.

\(^{25}\)J.M. Synge's Plays, Poems and Prose, p. 108.

\(^{26}\)Ibid.


\(^{28}\)J.M. Synge's Plays, Poems and Prose, p. 219.

\(^{29}\)F.L. Lucas, The Drama of Chekov, Synge, Yeats and Pirandello, p. 164.
Synge fulfils his own definition of a great poet:

For a long time I have felt that poetry roughly is of two kinds, the poetry of real life -- the poetry of Burns and Shakespeare and Villon, and the poetry of a land of fancy -- the poetry of Spenser and Keats and Ronsard. That is obvious enough, but what is highest in poetry is always reached where the dreamer is leaning out to reality, or where the man of real life is lifted out of it, and in all the poets the greatest have both these elements, that is why they are supremely engrossed with life, and yet with the wildness of their fancy they are always passing out of what is simple and plain.

Synge treats neither the intellectual niceties of sophisticated people, nor is he concerned with the metaphysical problems of life. The sense of life is all for him. Being a pure artist, he is concerned with the elemental man and he treats him in a language which is at once natural and artistic. In fact, he is accused of having given a super-abundance of life in his plays. Without passing any judgment or expressing his opinion he merely presents the Aran folk's life with the whole of earth and heaven brooding over his work and sheltering it. Though his world is small his characters are completely convincing and enormously alive.

The physical world of Synge is a narrow and circumscribed world, the world of the Aran folk. But with this as his

imaginative base, he deals with the fundamental realities and varied amplitudes of life. He does not paint the surface of life but he reconstructs imaginatively the ordinary events and situations in life and empowers them with a profound wisdom such as fables have in the sense that his plays can be viewed as moral fables. The Greene and Stephens biography tells us that he was searching for a proper medium of expression. He thought of music first, but later he came to realize that it had to be language. He wandered at home and abroad seeking this reality. The peasants in his plays are not just peasants. They represent a primitive community with animistic habits of thought and his language gives expression to these habits of thought. It is artificial in the sense that it has resulted from deliberate invention rather than from accidental observation. His language may not be found spoken in any part of Ireland, although the simple Irish folk also love words, and vivid imagery is a part of the Irish country speech. It is an ideal or universal language, not an actual dialect. It is the language shaped and sensitized by the poet as one whose function is to purify the dialect of the tribe.

A desire to avoid loneliness, a longing for a happy and decent life, the tragedy of losing all of one’s dear and near in one’s conflict with elemental forces and a desire
for spiritual freedom are human universals everywhere, not peculiar exclusively to the Aran people alone. An accurate knowledge of their life has enabled Synge to show on a limited canvas more than what it can contain. His plays depict 'the profound common interests of life.'\(^{31}\) His plays are grounded strongly in reality. He portrays the flesh-and-blood men and women who are very passionate and show the very soul of humanity in their richly poetic speech. His characters wear their hearts, as it were, on their sleeves and speak uninhibitedly without any need for authorial comments; they seem to penetrate their own modes of being. They possess a spirit of self-aggrandizement and a tendency to personalize sensations and to tell all out. His people often allow their tongues to take them to the ridge of the world at critical moments. He shows them as they are, and not as they should be, unless this were an element in their awareness, pushing them towards the frontiers of fantasy and tragedy. 'He does not whitewash the darker shadows,'\(^{32}\) but presents wit and ugliness, laughter and desolation, delight and depression, the complex pattern in the tangled web of life. His plays deal with the passing of a life with unfulfilled desires, the fleeting beauty, the imperfection of happiness and the agony of disillusionment which, being universal human

\(^{31}\) Andrew S. Malone, *The Irish Drama*, p. 156.
conditions, impart to his characters a larger-than-life role.

... while J.M. Synge was indeed passionately concerned with what was essentially Irish and emotionally involved in working for the cultural renaissance of his country, his work, in any serious sense of the word, was international, for he tackled fundamental crises of the human spirit, and in his schamachie plays especially did not limit but extended the territory of the twentieth century drama.^

Synge deals with elemental things, Love, Life and Death which attain a freshness and vastness in his plays. Because of their perennial interest they rise from the particular to the universal. In this he reveals himself as the true disciple of Maeterlinck, for whom love and death are inexplicable forces, exercising a sort of cunning justice. They claim human beings as their victims. Germinating and growing capriciously without any propriety and convenience, love overcomes opposition, exceeding all bounds of prudence, and scorning all worldly wisdom. It may 'bring moments of boundless joy, but no sunny happiness, no peace. It really always involves a final tragedy.'^

Deirdre of the Sorrows is a case in instance.

Synge's is a proper drama of supreme moments: of moments when the quietest of us has wildness in the joy of our illusion.^

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Synge's characters besides being realistic are also symbols of his poetic vision:

Synge's strength, like that of Cervantes, lies in the juxtaposition of the most earthly realism with the highest flights of fancy.  

Fantasy and reality are not juxtaposed but intermingled too. So his people are imbued with the quality of leaning out to reality and also lifting themselves out of it, expressing themselves in dreams and illusions, thereby modifying and reorienting their sense of reality. They are at once dreamers as well as hard headed realists. When the world of reality is found to be bitter they seek refuge in another world. A vein of revolt runs through all his plays, as a result of which the people conflict with their environment. Unable to adapt themselves to the circumstances in which they are placed, they revolt against the society which causes these circumstances and come into violent conflict with it. Within the norms of her particular society, life with her husband is the real world for a married woman. But Nora in The Shadow of the Glen cannot be happy in that world and she realizes her folly in mortgaging her happiness to a farm with cows and sheep on it. So she goes into another world, a world of dream or romantic enchantment. She seeks the company of young men. This world with its hungry seas can only deprive

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Maurya of her male children, in Riders to the Sea. It is one in which no one can live for ever. Therefore she escapes into a world of philosophy where this great wisdom offers her comfort. From out of the chaotic and disorderly world emerges a world of calm and serenity — 'the peace that passeth understanding.' Sarah Casey in The Tinker's Wedding has an irrational desire, of course for her community, but the clerical tyranny does not permit her to realize her desire. Mary and Martin Doul in The Well of the Saints see in the actual world the viciousness of mankind manifesting itself in the villainy of Molly and the bloody strength of Timmy. So they refuse a second cure and get away from the world of the fools who can, but do not see.

In The Playboy of the Western World all the characters, with the exception of Shawn Keogh, create a myth around themselves and live in it in order to escape from the drabness of their existence. Deirdre in Deirdre of the Sorrows is afraid of living in the world where she will be subject to the laws of mutation. Her love, beauty and youth may pass. It is cruelly tragic to be old with grey hair and loosened teeth. So she goes into a world where none of the physical faculties will fade. There is no safe place even on the ridge of the world. She leaves the world joyously and triumphantly. She realizes that her seven-year married life has only been a dream. But that dream has sustained her and
kept her from dreading her fate. Improvising their own reality as a foil to the actual world is the characteristic second nature of Synge's characters.

Synge's people are not able to resist the call of something beyond the present, and they submit themselves to that something, to live in. So they get away from the present and enter into a new world which they create for themselves as an alternative to the world of harsh reality. Fantasy creates a world which is beautiful and which promises happiness, an alternative to or as an escape from the ugly and unhappy world of reality. Fantasy involves 'the invention and arrangement of a world in which we affirm ourselves in our inmost needs.'\(^{37}\) It only presents the vivid experience, not sober reality. This world of illusion or dreams is free from the misery and hard labour of the actual world. Synge sends his men and women who think that the world is too much with them into a 'world elsewhere' which is not subverted by the harsh contingency of facts. There is an antagonism in his characters between 'the ambition for self-realization and the nullity of circumstances.'\(^{38}\) Hence the intensity as well as the brittleness of their surrogate personal and private worlds.


\(^{38}\)P. P. Howe, *op. cit.*, p. 195.
There is thus a dialectic of pairs and doubles and opposites in Synge's plays. He achieves his best dramatic effects by contrast. The dreamers are ranged against the realists. Dan Burke and Michael Dara in The Shadow of the Glen, hard boiled materialists sit down for a drink after the visionaries, Nora and the Tramp, go out into the south in search of spiritual joy. In The Tinker's Wedding, the unconventional and pagan gypsies or tinkers leave the convention-ridden, puritanical Priest behind, a master of the situation with his Latin. The two groups are kept clearly apart in this play. In The Well of the Saints again, the blind couple with their new-found sky in their minds march off to an unknown destination leaving the realists, Timmy, Molly and company behind. In The Playboy of the Western World, the gaffer, Christy, like a gallant captain with his heathen slave, Old Mahon walks off triumphantly from the fools of Mayo. Even in Deirdre of the Sorrows, the young Deirdre and Naisi and his brothers leave the world to the darkness and to the old, Conchubér, Fergus and Lavarcham. In all the plays the fantasy-makers continue the spiritual quest. The 'queer' thinking people cannot live with the harsh realists. Temperamental incompatibility comes in the way of their living together. After the clash of personalities, the only alternative left for them when it becomes impossible for them to live together, is to keep off
from one another. So the materialists are left 'Here' and those who cherish their illusions and who have only them to live on get out of 'Here and Now' to where, they do not know.

They fumble in an environment which they could neither control nor understand. Their hearts are full of dreams and their minds, full of illusions. When they are confronted with fact they find it hard to adapt themselves to it. They run away to an unknown destination, where, maybe, they are secure and happy in a fugitive realm of fantasy. They think that new hope might be born and new happiness achieved. So the quest has to go on to realize their longing. Withdrawal and return, abandonment and retrieval, being left behind and pushed forward are patterns which contrapuntally trace the fluent contour of life for Synge's characters. In Synge's plays, as in Chekov's, the individual does not react against a condition of the society but against the fact of society as such. No action can follow from this but only withdrawal. Again, like Chekov's characters, Synge's people too feel the sense of general failure and for them even aspiration is a form of defeat. Straight and truthful relationships, having become impossible, the only defence against suffering is fantasy. In Freudian terms, Synge's plays present the conflict of the Id with the Super Ego.

Synge's feeling for the future is so keen that he
infuses into his people a thought, feeble though it might be, that they have a future. The feeling for the future becomes keener by their experience of the past -- Nora, the Douls and Christy, all have this feeling. All of them emerge from their past experience bolder and freer to face the future, though the future itself may be uncertain. Synge himself had a feeling for a remote past, a past that was innocent, untouched by civilization. Inspite of their trials and tribulations, the people in the past had a lively imagination that sustained them and enabled them to forget or assuage their sorrows. Synge was far from romanticizing the primitive character or way of life. He was indeed anxiously aware of the vulnerable station these people, endowed with a fiery imagination and intrepid individuality, occupied in time and place. Their strength and grace were constantly threatened by the pressures of change and transformation. They were not exempt from the inexorable laws of nature and history.

The thought, that this island will gradually yield to the ruthlessness of 'progress' is as the certainty that decaying age is moving always nearer to the cheeks it is your ecstasy to kiss. How much of Ireland was formerly like this and how much of Ireland is today Anglicized and civilized and brutalized. 39

As a matter of fact his people combine in themselves the

contradictory pulls of pagan simplicity and charm on one hand and the aggressiveness and pugnacity of the savage on the other.

This feeling for the innocent past may be called a pastoral quality. Like all pastoral poets, Synge looks wistfully back to a community which lived in a wild and superb environment. Here life moved under skies that were none-too-generous. The barren, unpromising landscapes assaulted by terrifying seas and winds and an over-awing solitude, made all living a pattern of perpetual hard labour and physical stress. He has successfully recreated that community in his plays. His people long for a golden age when they can have their spiritual and physical desires fulfilled. They want to live in an age when the social taboos and religious sentiments will not hinder the fulfilment of their desires. In their longing for a permissive society they reveal themselves as pagans. Synge's plays are profoundly pastoral in the sense that the art of pastoral is the art of backward glance and the product of wistful and melancholy longing. His people feel that the world is too much with them and find an escape from the overwhelming present into a sanctified and innocent past or into some indistinct but redeeming future. Having nurtured strong illusions they find them too valuable to give up; since the present can neither sanction nor sustain them they long for a
future which would. The comic as well as the tragic tension in Synge's plays rests on the polarity between an unredeemable present and a redemptive future, both viewed in relation to the theme of reality versus illusion. What appears as illusion may be an ontological refraction of a transcendent order of reality and the characters' confrontation assumes a complex quality. Their pagan intuition guides them in favour of the transcendent rather than the phenomenal reality.

As Robin Skelton says, at the end of every play, the individuals assert their right 'to be 'blind' to the 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.' Synge's people are not so much moved by any practical ambition as driven by an impossible life, impossible in this custom-and-convention-ridden world where expediency and compromise are both the order and rule.

The difference between the two orders of reality is also tested by the freedom of will and choice, each affords to the individual. Nature and nurture, primitivism and civilization, paganism and Christianity are viewed in this light, and Synge's affirmative human types are drawn towards

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whatever choice among these has the promise of possibility rather than limitation, liberating self-expansion rather than a disciplinary finitude, the open rather than the closed forms of being as it were. It is not surprising, therefore, that freedom is a major recurring motif in his plays. Nora, Maurya, Sarah, the Douls, Christy, Pegeen and Deirdre, all attain a self-authenticating kind of freedom. Nora is freed of her claustrophobia and the rigours of domestic tyranny. She escapes from her entrapped existence as a wife into the world of nature where she will not be troubled by the thought of conventions, old age and decay. Maurya is now free to sleep peacefully, without having to worry herself about her sons riding to death:

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.41

She is also now free from having to stack the white boards for her sons, because she has no more sons for the sea to take away; she has now no need to get Holy Water:

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.42

41 J.M. Synge's Plays, Poems and Prose, p. 29.
42 Ibid.
Sarah's mind is disabused of illusions about a decent life. The Douls represent Synge's own intellectual freedom to see the world in their own fashion and they are also free from the destructive illusion of Samsara, of child birth and hard labour. Christy enjoys a freedom from all inhibitions, having been released from the tyranny of paternal control and so he will

    go romancing through a romping life-time from this hour to the dawning of the Judgment Day. 43

Pegeen's mind is now liberated from the illusions of romantic heroism. But the difference between her and the others who get freedom is that freedom gives them satisfaction and happiness whereas in her case it leads only to disappointment and desolation. Hence her final lament. Deirdre releases herself from change and decay.

One may observe that Synge's handling of the theme of fantasy shows both variation and progression. In *The Shadow of the Glen*, fantasy is presented on a strong realistic base: the life of the community of mountain shepherds. In *Riders to the Sea*, the two merge into each other so imperceptibly that it is difficult to know where one ends and the other begins. One is projected into the other so much so that despite the intensely realistic touches, the whole play moves

43 Ibid., p. 167.
as a fantasy, with the sense of action, time and space neatly telescoped. In *The Tinker's Wedding,* fantasy and reality coalesce and clash in the characters of Sarah and Mary, especially in the latter. It is *The Well of the Saints* that portrays the violent clash between the two worlds, sending the dreamers away from the world of villainy and the viciousness of mankind. They would rather get drowned in the rivers in the south than live in this wicked world. *The Playboy of the Western World* shows the antithesis at every stage demanding an alertness on the part of the reader or the audience to know which is truth and which is seeming -- a Pirandelloesque deception. The dreamers are shown as getting away finally from reality on their spiritual odyssey. The unknown destination seems to have been decided in *Deirdre of the Sorrows.* Life is a dream and we wake up only at our death, confirming Prospero's words of wisdom in Shakespeare's *The Tempest:*

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep. 44

Synge himself was a restless soul. His restlessness made him run periodically from civilization to the primitive Aran Islands, finding in their life something that agreed with his own attitudes. He was going from one group to

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44 *Shakespeare, The Tempest, IV, i, pp. 156-158.*
another, unable to find full fellowship in any of them, because

it is only in the intonations of a few sentences or some old fragment of melody that I catch the real spirit of the island, for in general the men sit together and talk with endless iteration of the tides and fish, and the price of kelp in Connemara. 45

But when he came back to the mainland he felt nostalgic:

The sort of yearning I feel towards these lovely rocks is indescribably acute. 46

It gave him a moment of exquisite satisfaction to get away from civilization:

The town, that is usually so full of wild human interest, seems in my present mood a tawdry medley of all that is crudest in modern life. 47

But inspite of a strong kinship that he had with the islanders, so far as their emotions were concerned, he found them strangely far away from him in terms of his artistic needs. He felt unable to communicate with them fully when there was so much to say:

There is hardly an hour I am with them that I do not feel the shock of some inconceivable idea, and then again the shock of some vague emotion that is familiar to them and to me. On some days I feel this island as a perfect house and resting place; on

47 Ibid.
other days I feel that I am a waif among the people. I can feel more with them than they can with me, and while I wander among them they like me sometimes, and laugh at me sometimes, yet never know what I am doing.\textsuperscript{48}

Incomplete membership of any social group results in nostalgia. It is this nostalgic quality that his dreamers display when they come into the world of reality. Like Synge himself trying to run away from sophistication to a primitive state, they also escape from the custom-infested world of harsh reality into their fantasies where they feel at home. This restlessness and utter inability to reconcile himself with the civilization around him are reflected through his characters. They, like, him, have a strong love of life but they are unable to indulge it fully and are therefore denied self-fulfilment. Their dreams are a necessary kind of feedback to sustain their sense of life.

Synge's attitude to art was such that when he tried to project it through his plays he encountered opposition which hastened his death. The full fellowship that he could get neither in civilization nor in primitivity could be found only in art. A Protestant with predominantly pagan tendencies among the Roman Catholics, a person least interested in politics when the struggle for freedom was going on, an

\textsuperscript{48}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 120.
artist first and last among the fanatical nationalists, an utterly objective observer among the highly inflammable people, a man who loved life but was acutely conscious of his proximity to death, Synge was rootless. His life was throughout a struggle against poverty, illness and public opinion. He was an alienated soul, not fitting into the political and religious turmoils of the time. He was carrying on a quest to discover an ultimate law or a way of life which would yield excellence and he succeeded in finding it in art: the antinomies of his life have been transmuted into art:

Synge wanted the best of the two worlds. For he was born between two worlds, of Anglo-Irish stock. He was reared between faith and doubt, torn between truth and fancy. He swayed between Paris and the Irish countryside. Like others of that Anglo-Irish race -- from Sheridan to Shaw -- he sought expression for, and found the resolution of, that conflict in the writing of drama. His unity is in his plays.49

Synge's comedies show everything that is unconventional, robust, healthy and wildly beautiful. Sarah, Molly and Pegeen embody these qualities. The physical cravings of Nora are as real as her spiritual longings. She wears her lust on her sleeves. Physical vitality as symbolized by Patch Darcy and Jaunting Jim is admired and adored. Every

one of these women is conscious of her beauty. Not the fear of death, but the dread of old age haunts them. There is a great deal of violence and harshness in these plays. Flights of fancy soar above the crude and barbarous horse-play of farce. Dreamy imaginativeness lies contiguous with bloody episodes. The fanciful wanderings of the will are blended with the inclinations of the sad poetry of the heart. They together penetrate through clearsightedness and matter-of-fact realism. A melancholy emotion and mysticism result from a partly illusory synthesis of fancifulness and realism. A keen intellectuality gained precedence over the impulses of passion or the senses with the European aesthetes. Pathos became artificial and rhetorical with the qualities of the head dominating over those of the heart. But Synge was one of those who revived the Celtic character of subordinating intelligence to the free play of a poetical dreamy imagination. Also he lay emphasis on the physical and the intuitional in an age of over-intellectualization. He has been able to capture the peculiar essence of the Irish imagination, the poetry of wonder. The Tramp in The Shadow of the Glen rises in sudden flights to heights of poetry and so does Mary in The Tinker’s Wedding.

Synge has brought into his plays the thrills of wonder and the throes of fear that the rough glens of a wild land
have produced in the superstitious minds of those primitive people and the terrible drama, enacted by the sea in their lives. As a realist he had seen both the epic and farcical elements in the life of the people which have been brought into a sharp focus in his plays. He has made both tragedy and comedy very intense capturing the people's moods at supreme moments of tragic uniqueness as well as on the common plateau of comic dailiness and familiarity. His observation of their manners is rather humorous and having lived in Paris he mastered ironic detachment which he calls 'serious' in the French sense of the term. His wide reading in the classics also contributed to this. This enabled him to see and present life from an unusual angle so much so that gaiety and gravity, nobility and vulgarity, comedy and tragedy, all intermingle, interact and intersect in his plays. As a result of this, his work abounds in antinomies, ambivalences and ironies. This attitude removes any trace of sentimentality and squeamishness and enables him to present life in the raw with all its poetry and vulgarity, gentleness and violence:

No other writer has seen Ireland with such intimacy, at the same time with such detachment.50

It helps him to build up drama by contrasts and clash of character.

50 P.P. Howe, op.cit., p. 31.
Violence and harshness give place to an atmosphere of peace and serenity in his tragedies, especially in *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. Even the cynical Owen with his comments on the fading beauty adds to the grim calmness that pervades through the play, making the tragedy intenser. The tone in his tragedies, especially in *Riders to the Sea* is subdued as in Chekov’s plays and the action is almost static. But the audience is all the time made aware of the tragic rhythm underneath the subdued tone and in that way *Riders to the Sea* is a paean of human suffering and *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, a plaintive song. What adds to the rhythm is not only the musical quality of the language but also the use of very simple objects (in *Riders to the Sea*) as symbols. This tone is in contrast to the bumptiousness and boisterousness that characterize his comedies. Thus he has been able to capture the essential moods of both comedy and tragedy. He has captured not only the gaiety that goes to make a good comedy but also the grimness of atmosphere, necessary for tragedy.

Synge’s tragedies have the atmosphere of the Greek and Jacobean tragedies. Not characterization but the creation of the proper atmosphere is his forte. He has successfully brought out the poetic foundation of common place actuality in the events of wonder and mystery. With the aid of symbols and a kind of exotic romanticism he evokes the atmosphere
suitable to a grim tragedy. Whereas Maeterlinck creates an atmosphere of strangeness and mystery, Synge evokes the atmosphere of everyday reality, the strangeness and mystery of reality as well as the reality of the strangeness and mystery. In *Riders to the Sea*, there is, of course, the Maeterlinckian atmosphere of doom although it is not one of disconsolate despair, but rather of sunshine and resigned contentment at the end. There is no sentimentality in the stoic acceptance of the inevitable. Man, in Maeterlinck, is a helpless victim of fate and so the final impression left by his plays is one of interminable pathos: man just whines and gives himself up to fate. But in Synge there is no sentimentalizing. There is no complaint against fate. What cannot be affirmed must nonetheless be accepted. The indestructibility of the human spirit is clearly demonstrated in *Riders to the Sea* so much so that the final impression is more tragic than pathetic. Even in *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, there is no feverishness in Deirdre’s protest against death but only a spirit of serene resignation born out of a full knowledge of life.

Synge’s tragedies are not a denial of life but an affirmation of life in the sense that they show 'the profoundest instinct of life, the instinct for the future of life, for the
eternity of life. They underscore the value of 'the eternal joy of becoming -- that joy which also encompasses joy in destruction,' whether it be Maurya or Deirdre who longs to realize it in herself. Synge does neither sentimentalize nor idealize, he intensifies life.

The Aran folk's tragedy consists in their serious, inevitable battle with the cold, hungry sea. Synge watched it as carefully as he did their dull comedies of narrow, monotonous existence. He observed human nature at first hand, at its best and at its worst, its spiritual serenity and its brutal barbarity. Whereas his comedies demonstrate the joy of life mixed with an irrepressible spirit of mischief and gaiety, a typical Irish quality, his tragedies share with his poems a stoic bitterness and a wounded tenderness. He has been able to transfer the stoical emotion of his own feeling about death to his tragedies. He was so much obsessed with death that there is a suggestion of death or death itself in all his comedies. In The Shadow of the Glen, there is simulation of death and in The Tinker's Wedding the tinkers threaten to kill the Priest by throwing him into a ditch. In The Well of the Saints those who see warn the Douls against going to the south lest they should be drowned.

52 Ibid.
in the rivers there. The Playboy of the Western World is built on a murder glorified into heroism and there are two attempts at murder. So death and its concomitants make his comedies essentially serious in tone inspite of all the external gaiety. Synge's genius lies in his ability to combine a profound observation of the Aran folk's life in its complexity with the power of presenting these people in their amusing aspect, short of the point where they turn to tragedy.

**Nature - Mysticism**

Synge is a regional dramatist who extends the locative impulse towards its higher potential in the larger universals of human experience. One of the major elements in his work which acts as a metamorphic agent in directing the movement from the particular to the general is Nature. Synge's characters, like Hardy's, are all children of the soil -- unsophisticated country folk. The lives of the people in the islands are closely linked with the nature around them -- the sea, the glens, and the mountains of the islands. It is sometimes cruel and savage and sometimes tender and lovely.

It reflects their joys and sorrows, desires and disappointments, the entire web and texture of their simple but intense lives.

Synge has discerned with intimate knowledge and feeling nature's moods and mysterious voices. His insight
into certain aspects of nature and human character as shaped and modified by it is remarkable. As F.L.Lucas observes:

Synge, (like Tennyson and Hardy) scrutinized nature and peasant with a steady, microscopic intentness.53

The barrenness of the rocky and inhospitable islands where nothing grows and which makes their existence hard and precarious predicates stoicism as a necessary way of life, which helps them to overcome their suffering and unhappiness by philosophical immunity. In them the dumb passiveness of the peasantry under affliction rises to the moral grandeur of resignation. The spirit of a strong, patient passivity controls and informs the lives of Synge's characters. The great mystery of death is ever present in the precarious life of the fishers and peasants.

On the other hand, the harshness and the hostility of the land and the climate give a spur to their whimsy and fantasy. In fact their imagination has all the fertility that the land lacks. It is so fertile that it can make a hero of a parricide and a thing of beauty out of the ugly and the grotesque. Their capacity for fantasy mediates between experience and vision, making in the process their existence more lively and meaningful. Suffering and misery sharpen

their intellect and sensibility; and the uses of adversity are for them quite real. Their love of myth-making and their addiction to illusion are concomitant to their situation which invites into play the fugitive virtues of humour and courage in confronting and making sense of their recalcitrant environments.

Synge's sensibility reveals a unification of the two roles of the dramatic poet and the nature-mystic. As Una Ellis-Fermor remarks:

Synge stood alone, then, in this distinctive balance of nature-mystic and dramatic poet, a balance rare before him, though soon after to be found in one or two English Writers. 54

Nature in Synge is a kind of meta-protagonist in the human drama and is recognized by the human actors sometimes as a constant companion whose sights and sounds are familiar to them (as in The Shadow of the Glen, The Tinker's Wedding, and Deirdre of the Sorrows) and sometimes as a presence or an agent which forms and reflects their moods and decides their fates (as in The Shadow of the Glen and Riders to the Sea). Synge often employs the natural environment not simply as a background or a setting but as a sort of circumambient spectator and Chorus. This impersonal interlocutor offers strangely unconcerned comments upon the ludicrous tragedy of

54 Una Ellis-Fermor, The Irish Dramatic Movement, p.165
the human lot from the vantage-ground of a sublime aloofness. The shifting movements of the clouds and the mists in The Shadow of the Glen spell out, accentuate and interpret the sordid story of Nora and her implacable tragedy. Similarly the tide turning, used as a choric refrain in Riders to the Sea emphasizes the feeling that Maurya's tragic predicament springs not so much from within her own personality as within the mind of Nature itself.

Man and nature are conceived as parts of the same creation. Animals, birds, hills, storms, mists, mountains and seas draw man into their spirit by their strange power of attraction and repulsion. He may allow himself to be drawn into it as in The Shadow of The Glen, The Well of the Saints and Deirdre of the Sorrows, or he may resist or oppose it as in The Shadow of the Glen and Riders to the Sea and finally fall a victim to its beauty or savagery. To the Tramp in The Shadow of the Glen and the beggar couple in The Well of the Saints it is friendly. They feel its warmth, smell its scents and hear its sounds. The external world that the Souls sensuously perceive is ugly in comparison with the grand sky, the limpid lakes, big rivers and fine hills that they visualize in their own mind's eye. There they hear 'the swift, flying things racing in the air,' and smell 'the

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sweet beautiful smell does be rising in the warm nights.\textsuperscript{56}

\begin{quote}
\begin{flushright}
It (nature) is the stuff of their everyday life, their continuous possession and they take it for granted with no suggestion, on their part or the poet's, that there is anything unusual in this.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{flushright}
\end{quote}

The Tramp persuades himself that nature is a source of perennial youth and even assures Nora that it will not remind her of old age. Nature is full of awe and dread to the mountain shepherds of Wicklow hills. The mists and bogs are a mysterious phenomenon whose movements tell them the time of the day by their shadows and inspire in them a sad melancholy. Nature is atmosphere and ambience at once, where no one can know on 'what thing your mind would stay.'\textsuperscript{58} Nature has a maddening effect on them, the Tramp not exempted. All are roused to St. Vitus dance of a charmed, liberated, possessive life. As the Tramp feels, Nature 'lifts the mind to a calmer height.' The mists and bogs and clouds in the glen are a witness to and a reflection of their fears and longings, like the Egden Heath in \textit{The Return of the Native}, a comprehensive, radical metaphor of the universe.

Nature generates mixed feelings of joy and melancholy in the Tramp and Nora in \textit{The Shadow of the Glen}. It is

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\textsuperscript{56}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57}Una Ellis-Fermor, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{58}J.M. Synge's \textit{Plays, Poems and Prose}, p. 7.
\end{flushright}
savage and terrible, 'red in tooth and claw,' in *Riders to the Sea.* The pagan attitude of the fishermen, based on the conviction that Nature is Force much more than phenomena, enables them to evoke a moral equivalent to live by their stoic courage. But the Christian priest is ignorant of its primal mythic status and hence removed by many degrees from the realities of life:

It's little the like of him knows of the sea. . . .

In *Riders to the Sea* nature is everything; nature is all. It conditions, controls and resolves the complex fate of man.

In this play nature is the protagonist, the main actor and inevitably victorious. Yet it is not an alien thing responsible only for events, but something to which they have grown so akin that their familiarity with its ways takes all astonishment, all horror from their fate. 60

The responses and reactions of the human characters reveal the varying rhythms and moods of the sea which is 'like a painting in which grass and trees and clouds serve by their colour and line to reveal the movements of the else invisible wind.' 61

The rhythm of the sea is the rhythm of the people living on its shores. It reminds them constantly of their precarious existence; it nourishes them and at the same time destroys them. Synge has concretized 'the crass casualty' of Thomas

59 Ibid., p. 27.
60 Una Ellis-Fermor, op. cit., p. 169.
61 Ibid.
Hardy in his depiction of the sea-motif. So the situations and emotions are elemental in the play. The sea symbolizes the irrational fate that strikes men and at the same time is functional to the natural order and its mysterious ordinations.

In The Tinker's Wedding, nature is a mixed blessing for the people. Like the Tramp and the Douls, Mary responds to its sounds and sights; but she does not allow her sense to be carried away by it. Nevertheless, 'spring time' and 'change of moon' put 'queer' thoughts into Sarah's mind, inspiring in her a desire, which is viewed as unnatural and irrational by her community. She can no longer remain undifferentiated, under the spell of nature.

In The Well of the Saints, the Douls exhibit an extraordinary sensitivity to nature, with a very sharp ear to the sounds which compensates for their deficiency of vision. Martin embodies the pagan response to nature, creating in his mind a grander sky than what the physical eye can see. When, towards the end, he wants to escape from the viciousness of mankind he goes to the south, where,

There's a power of deep rivers with floods in them where you do have to be lepping the stones . . .

Nature stands out as a comforting refuge, a redemptive alternative to human complicity and confusion.

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The one play in which nature is pushed into a rather marginal, subordinate position, making it almost non-existent is *The Playboy of the Western World.* But the characters do show a keen awareness of its moods and movements. As the whole action takes place inside a shabeen, nature is out of place here. But the people are peasants who live amidst cows, goats, fields and rivers and nature dissolves imperceptibly into their vocational experience. Their talk reveals a contour of the district around the shabeen, with the shore and wide shallow sands, the river and the stepping stones and Widow Quin's lonely cottage standing as the outpost on the little hill. Nature, although not an active participant in the myth-making drama in the shabeen is an undertone of a peculiar interest, a submerged presence rather than a centre of self-reference.

In *Deirdre of the Sorrows,* nature is an inseparable part of the lives of the people. *Deirdre* is the child of nature. Her marriage is performed in the presence of the elements. The Alban woods offer her asylum when she runs away from the false pleasures of the palace life. Nature sustains her and makes her happy and when she leaves it for Emain, she is destroyed. Separation from nature implies her isolation and alienation from her authentic self. Her true love is an ingredient of Nature outside which it has neither identity nor meaning. Thus Nature in the play is integral to the action:
It is no ornament. It is woven deep.
And in the moments of intensest passion
it seems more essential than the
passion itself.63

Thus Synge portrays nature in all its profound complexity and manifold variety, without philosophizing on its mystery. He makes us live among the people whose minds are very close to nature. His nature-mysticism, despite its resemblance to Wordsworth's pantheism, is more akin to D.H. Lawrence's insistence on the prime importance of elemental things. Nature does not disturb him 'with the joy of elevated thoughts'; Synge's encounter with nature is perceptual rather than conceptual, experiential rather than cognitive. Nature is mysterious and inscrutable in the world of the senses, 'unbeyonded' by intellectual predispositions. His naturalism is existential rather than transcendental, and as Stopford A. Brooke says,64 this special power of seeing and taking delight in observing her is a characteristic Celtic response, a Druidic posturing of being in the currents of Nature.

Synge also shows an intense feeling of locality. He sees sights and hears sounds in nature keenly. Martin Doul, Mary Doul, the Tramp and the tinker Mary, have all a sharp ear

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63 Una Ellis-Fermor, *op.cit.*, p. 171.
for the song of birds, the sough of the wind and the music of running waters. Attention and awareness, rather than meditation and contemplation, are the key to the instinctive reaction to the natural world which in its turn expresses their moods, their anxieties and their aspirations. The objective nature of Synge's dramatic art does not compel him to draw any philosophical inferences from nature, in spite of the strong feeling of love and reverence towards nature. Synge is interested in Nature as a field of plastic relationships and not as a paradigm of static forces. Nature is shown in terms of man's character, thought and fate and man reveals himself largely in terms of his relation with nature. His sensitivity to sounds, the varying action of light on objects, and the multiplied effect of shifting colours, create a sense of space, a feeling for the reality of the natural world. At the same time this world is related to the manifold of human feeling in all its subtle locutions. Synge is able to achieve such an impression because the very lives of the people whom he has dramatized are so inextricably linked with Nature that no external system of ideas is necessary to interpret the relationships. As he himself observes in his Aran diary:

In Inishman one is forced to believe in a sympathy between man and nature.  

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65 J.M. Synge's Plays, Poems and Prose, p. 266.
Nature is a cosmology in Synge; but unlike other literary cosmologies it does not set itself up as a refracting medium between the felt life and its ordered equivalent in art. In the world of his people and their actions, nature spells out life and life declares nature. Art neither distorts nor falsifies this organic identity.
The comedies of Synge follow a pattern of construction which is quite simple and based upon contrasts and crescendoes. A family or a community is presented first. In _The Shadow of the Glen_, the mountain shepherd Dan Burke's family is presented, with the old man pretending to be dead and his wife, Nora, preparing herself to go out with some money which she puts safely into a stocking. In _The Tinker's Wedding_, the roadside, the temporary home of the tinkers shows Sarah and Michael quarrelling over their marriage. _The Well of the Saints_ opens with the blind beggar couple, Martin and Mary Doul talking about their illusions concerning their beauty. A cross-section of the peasant community of Mayo is sitting in a shabeen when _The Playboy of the Western World_ begins. Every one of these plays evokes a vividly realized picture of the world to which each of these families or communities belongs.

Into this placid, self-complacent and normal, if dull, life of these people comes then a foreign element that disturbs it. The Tramp with his talk of lonely places slightly upsets Nora's plan. The Priest's appearance strengthens Sarah's desire for marriage and she pursues it tenaciously using all her histrionic resources, much to the discomfiture of her husband and her mother-in-law. Timmy Smith's information
about a Saint benevolently dispensing miracle-cure to the blind breaks the self-complacency of the Souls and makes them long for a cure, little knowing that it will do more harm than good to them. Christy's arrival from the western world with his story of parricide causes a sensational stir among the Mayoites.

Then the conflict between the native and the foreign elements results in a period of suspense and uncertainty which sets in motion a chain of events. Will Nora be able to escape from both the Tramp and her 'dead' husband? Will Sarah have her desire fulfilled? Does the gift of sight confer happiness and peace on the Souls? Is Christy's 'heroism' enough food for the Mayoites' imagination and will his story sustain their love of fantasy? Will the story itself endure for long? The appearance of Old Mahon, supposed to have been dead, threatens to subvert and demolish the hero-image of Christy; and Widow Quin tries to keep the old man off the scent all the time. Nora is unable to decide what will give her real happiness. The loss of the tin can is a hindrance to Sarah's marriage. Their sight proves more of a curse than a blessing to the Souls, for they can neither be happy in the new dispensation nor go back to their old state. All the Mayo people build around themselves cocoons of fantasy and shut themselves in, only to find them blown off later.
In this state of doubt and instability, something unexpected or surprising occurs, putting an end to the suspense, anxiety and uncertainty. The 'dead' husband sits up and orders his wife, Nora out; Michael Para failing, the Tramp offers to take her into nature. The obstinacy of the Priest in demanding the tin can causes the tinkers to become riotous and violent; they gag him and run away. The Douls become blind again; they refuse a second cure and choose their own life. Old Mahon, inspite of Widow Quin's efforts to keep him back appears and shatters the image of Christy and in the process breaks the Mayoites' illusions.

After the resolution is brought about, dramatic action is resumed stressing the continuity of normal life. Dan Burke and Michael sit down for a drink, and the Priest is left with his Latin -- malefaction. The marriage of Timmy and Molly will go on, after the Douls have gone to the south on their spiritual odyssey. Michael Flaherty invites all the peasants for a drink when normalcy is restored after the gaffer Christy goes out with his new found romantic image.

Within the plays there are sudden reversals which upset all expectations of the audience. Nora suddenly changes her attitude to Michael and rejects his offer of marriage. When her husband drives her out she pleads with him and then chooses to accept the Tramp's company. Dan, instead of hitting
Michael, invites him cordially to share his drink. This gesture may mean their partnership in their loss of Nora and also in their incapacity to understand a passionate heart. The absence of the tin can in the bundle makes the Friest obstinate which results in the tinkers' riotous behaviour in the church, causing danger to the Friest's life, for they almost smother him to death. Martin, when overwhelmed by the physical force of the people, agrees to be cured a second time; but at the last moment he knocks the can off the Saint's hands, making it impossible for him to administer the cure. A strong irony runs through the play and the supernatural agency of the miracle of water serves only to reveal the Souls' attitude in sharper focus. Through the cure, Synge is able to show the violent conflict between reality and illusion, which is the theme of the play. The Playboy of the Western World is full of reversals, drawing the audience into a sense of participation while responding to the narrative told in the reverse without the aids of clumsy stage-illusionisms.

Synge's comedies show a regular pattern of construction, though interlaced with ironic or incremental variations which arise organically out of the situations and the collision of personality. Being a great lover of music, and himself a good fiddler, Synge shows a fondness for crescendoes not only in the dramatic situations but also in manipulating the counterpointing of disparate elements into a harmonious whole.
He builds up the situations towards a climax gradually, in which process he varies the moods through the devices of inversion and reversal. For instance, Nora is first preparing herself to go out, but with the coming of the Tramp she changes her mind. Then she leaves him on a lonely vigil beside her husband and shows an eagerness to see her lover. Later, all her eagerness cools off and she rejects Michael's offer of marriage. It looks as though she was going to reconcile herself to her domestic drudgery; but suddenly her husband is resurrected and he orders her out. Though at first angry with his unsympathetic attitude she is hesitant and talks to him in a rather conciliatory tone. Michael fails her miserably; the Tramp proffers his hand. Not the kind of life he offers but his fine talk attracts her to go with him. The uneven progression of the dramatic action enacts the fitful, whimsical nature of the character.

In The Tinker's Wedding, the fluctuating of chances of Sarah's marital aspirations is so well manipulated that every time Sarah feels that she has overcome one obstacle, another crops up. First, after convincing a reluctant Michael, she has to persuade, cajole, entreat and beg by turns the unwilling and greedy Priest into agreeing to bless their union. On the point of the Priest agreeing to do so, Mary's drunken prattle and heathenish talk almost provoke the Priest into dishonouring his word. The Priest's refusal to bless the union for Mary's
failure to deliver the stolen can back, compels Sarah to resort to violence in which Michael and Mary also join. This foiled, circuitous and jazzy movement of action renders the ending of the play hilarious. The gagged Priest, at the mercy of the heathenish crew, promising not to let the police know of their behaviour, himself expecting the fastidious Bishop, and the tinkers making good their escape leaving the helpless Priest the master of the situation with a Latin malefaction in his mouth, all lead to a climax of comic mirth. Also, the preemptive tactics and strategies of Sarah, the threat held out to Michael of running away with Jaunting Jim, the motivated exhibition of her histrionics to the Priest, her ruse of cleverly dispatching Mary on the day of marriage etc., lend the play a suspense and tempo holding the final outcome and issue a matter of lively conjecture and intense speculation. The climax is reached when the intrepid patience of an otherwise impatient and rude Sarah is wilted down under comic pressure and she bursts out into verbal blasphemy and physical violence against the avaricious Priest. Comic inflation and comic deflation proceed apace scattering the shrapnels of laughter in all directions.

In The Well of the Saints, the expectations and eagerness of the complacent and the inward-looking blind couple, the Douls, is built up gradually by Timmy. From then on it is all a ding-dong between their aspirations and
disappointments, especially during their period of vision
when nothing but misery stares them full in their faces, while
they expected to find instant joy in sight. This
disappointment is accentuated by Martin's abortive romantic
overtures to Molly. The villainy of man and the treacherous
beauty of the woman are impressed upon him when she betrays
him to Timmy and the latter drives him out of the smithy.
When Martin feels that he has lost everything, blindness sets
in again to set off all the despair and misery hitherto heaped
upon him. His adjustment to this dispensation is not so
traumatic as the one to the earlier -- from blindness to
sight. The period of sight becomes a terrible nightmare
which is better forgotten altogether than assuaged. The
Soule have been brought back to their original state of
complacency and introspective joy; the return implies an
accession of sensibility folding back upon a pragmatic
awareness of human limits. The action has now come full
circle, but rests on a higher axis of reality. The events
leading up to this consummation devoutly wished for by the
blind couple during their wretched period of sight are
carefully piled up one over the other -- from their extreme
joy at the getting of sight to such an extreme misery during
vision as to make them aspire for the recovery of blindness,
and their supreme satisfaction on their being able to find
their imaginative vision restored on their being reverted to blindness. The climax is reached when Michael by a clever ruse knocks off the water can from the hands of the Saint, thus rendering the second cure impossible and ensuring their release from the cruel world of those that see. The patterning of the dramatic action here again is achieved by a cunningly improvised system of delayed responses, delusions and discoveries. It is as though the comic experience moves through actions and events controlled by a carefully designed structure of parentheses.

The Playboy of the Western World also exemplifies the principle of fluctuation at work. Expecting to rouse in the Mayoites' a sense of righteous indignation and nauseating revulsion by the story of his parricide, Christy is pleasantly surprised not only at their glorification of his act but also at his own success in winning the admiration and love of both Pegeen and Widow Quin. He prefers the former, and when he is progressing upward in her estimate, Old Mahon arrives to spoil the game, foil his chances and thwart his attempts to sustain his easily won adulation. Christy strikes a bargain with Widow Quin who cleverly whisks the old man away. Again Christy is confident, and his confidence grows so strong that the love scene between him and Pegeen shows him at his best as a romantic hero who does not look back and whose celestial
love-talk has all the qualities of the hyperbolic conceit of Renaissance love poetry. Just when his love is sanctioned by Michael Flaherty, his old father appears again to pull him down from his high pedestal and show his feet of clay. But the hero recovers after an initial timidity and strikes back at his father with a renewed confidence and courage and also at the Mayo people, which drives them to enraged self-defence. Though he has lost in love, he has gained in confidence. He finds these people too simple to realize his value, especially now with his new courage.

Thus in his comedies, Synge, by the principle of variation and fluctuation, creates situations which play up the qualities of gusto, animal spirits and a kind of rapid movement characterized by pressure and force rather than speed and velocity. The resilience displayed by his characters helps him to manipulate the incidents to suit the fluidity and plasticity of his dramatic form. We are egged on from one situation to the next before the first situation has had time to pall on us. Synge avoids monotony by constantly giving a new twist to the situation, thus maintaining the curiosity and expectation of the audience. His method is to develop the situations, not by concentration but by pursuing as many fluctuations as possible, by the spacing of the internal climaxes in such a way as to trace a complex rhythm of action leading to the final climax. The
rapid shift of situations added to the intensification of the feelings of the characters and their consequent tendency to express themselves sharply and forcefully gives an impression of very quick movement and intense energy. Tempo is heightened by sudden decisions — impulsive leaps into action which cause startling reversals. This tempo contributes to the effect of the play as it reaches its crescendo.

Synge's comedies are structurally comic but dramatically tragic as a result of the use of irony. The chief characters attain a painful but redemptive self-knowledge, while the audience achieve an existential awareness through laughter. It is this double focus which makes his plays tragi-comic.

Nora thinks that by escaping from the tyranny of domestic life she can be happy but she finds at the end that there is no security anywhere and is also agonizingly conscious of her own limitations and the limits of this world. The desire for marriage has only yielded Sarah a knowledge that a decent life is incompatible with the customs and conventions of religion and society and not easy to get in a world that attaches importance to them. The Douls' ambition to see their beauty at least for one hour has only made them more miserable in finding this world unacceptable to their temperament.

Pegeen realizes that

... a strange man is a marvel, with his mighty talk; but what's a squabble in your back yard, and the blow of loy, have
taught me that there's a great gap
between a gallous story and a dirty
deed.¹

This realization only brings her a knowledge that a romantic
vision is incongruous with the actuality of the world. She
can do nothing but sigh over the loss of such a vision, which
leaves her in a position worse than death.

*Riders to the Sea* is severely Greek in form. A
concentrated tragedy is achieved by the one-act structure
which admits of no diffusion of sensibility or dilution of
intensity. The projection of the past into the present, the
interpretation and understanding of the present in terms of
the past, and the blending of realism and fantasy give the
dramatic action a shuttle-like movement, as the structure of
the work is a symbolic loom on which the web of life is being
spun. By integrating the techniques of mime, flashback,
still-life presentation of objects and artefacts, and the
expressionistic manipulation of theatrical and psychological
space, Synge achieves a dramatic compactness. Everything
moves by an internal velocity until the inevitable end is
reached.

The play has all atmosphere and no plot, which

¹J.M. Synge's Plays, Poems and Prose, p. 165.
according to John van Druten,\textsuperscript{2} is the mark of a good play. The simple, domestic, quotidian objects are used as symbols, and the language assumes an incantatory tone. Symbolism, both verbal and visual, gives the play a parabolic structure, accentuating its theme as a rite dedicated to the dark, unknown forces, and yet maintaining with merciless clarity, the harsh outlines of naturalistic presentation.

Synge meticulously observes the dramatic unities and adopts realism and fantasy to the demands of organic form. The whole action takes place, as it were, in Maurya's soul for its interest lies in her feelings. The thematic postulates of man's struggle against the external forces and woman's suffering as a result of it, are introduced through a Prologue, supplied by the stage-setting. The exposition is provided by the opening conversation between Nora and Cathleen, who act as Chorus, when they discuss the cloth bundle which is the central object of dramatic action. The epitasis is denoted by the Maurya-Bartley dialogue, followed by Bartley leaving unblest by his mother. The vision at the Spring Well is the scene of recognition or anagnorisis and the climax is reached when Maurya returns from the Spring Well and starts observing mourning. The long elegiac narrative in retrospect

constitutes the scene of suffering in the sense that the agon has the human soul for its locus. The resolution is brought about in Maurya's final statement and her reconciliation with the eternal truth.

The play projects on the stage a slice of life, with the action working at two levels. The interaction in the fisher folk's family, caught in a series of losses, not directly presented but only suggested, constitutes the external drama. The inner drama is projected through Maurya's narration of the past deaths in detail, followed by a visual representation of yet another death whose consequences are revealed in all their terrifying immediacy in her consciousness. The tension between the world of action which is the external world and the world of one's own consciousness makes for a powerful drama. Its perfectly controlled structure makes Riders to the Sea what it is, a pitiless tale of Pity.

In Deirdre of the Sorrows, the story is mainly unfolded through conversations. The play opens with a conflict between Deirdre and Conchubor, a clash of fiercely antithetical temperaments and sensibilities, followed by Conchubor's ultimatum which goads Deirdre into quick decisions, almost impulsive, such as marrying Naisi and running away with him to Alban woods. This action of Deirdre, coming as it does immediately after Conchubor's ultimatum has a touch of
melodramatic farce in that the old man wishing to marry her is outwitted by a young woman by running away with a young man who is his rival. An incestuous calamity is almost laughed out of court by a vaudeville trick.

In the second Act, Synge does not show the conjugal life of Deirdre and Naisi directly, but in a kind of lyrical-pastoral flash-back which gives tempo to the action. Synge avoids the sentimental falsity of a scene of conjugal bliss and opts for the more convincing dramatic depiction through the reverie of remembered joy. Again it is a good theatrical device in letting Deirdre know by accidental eavesdropping the possibility of the lovers getting wearied of each other, when Naisi mentions it to Fergus; it would have lost its edge had it been shown as being discussed in detail by the lovers themselves. The maternal concern and caution of Lavarcham, the cynical warning of Owen, and finally, the excited threat by Ainnel and Ardan to burn the boats to prevent Deirdre from going to Emain, only emphasize her assertiveness in her decision to have her own way. Only when she is confronted with a warning or an ultimatum she becomes adventurous and aggressive. As though to bring out this phase of her character, Synge makes a structural provision by letting the other characters issue the warning or ultimatum. It is this aggressiveness of Deirdre that sustains the interest of the play to some extent, for as the play progresses the dramatic
action gets weaker and the work is more statement than action. There is no variation of mood, but a single mood of melancholy prevails throughout.

In the third Act, the play becomes virtually an extended monologue punctuated by spasmodic reactions rather than responses. The lyrical impulse gains precedence over the dramatic and the dramatic action is almost attenuated. A semblance of tension is kept up somewhat through the lovers' quarrel first and then Conchubar's attempt to take Deirdre by force after Naisi's death. Both these quarrels externalize a kind of internal conflict in Deirdre. Her quarrel with Naisi confirms her conviction that a prolonged life would only become passionless which is aggravated by the Manichean anxieties over mortality and afterlife. Naisi's decision convinces her of the transcendent power of death. The row with Conchubar indicates a clash between spirit and matter, with the spirit breaking away from its material shackles, attaining freedom and leaving behind only decay and desolation, symbolized by the survival of the unfittest — the old and the ageing.

In Deirdre of the Sorrows too, Synge follows the principle of clash and contrast, but only to emphasize the importance of Deirdre. The contrast between Conchubar and Deirdre at the beginning of the play is one of attitudes,
while the final contrast is that of character. Deirdre's dignified demeanour and her noble acceptance of her fate is contrasted with the mean tactics and ignoble failure of Conchubor to achieve his objective. The exchange between Deirdre and Naisi in the second Act underscores the difference in the understanding of life between Naisi who believes that passion can transcend change and decay and Deirdre who sees clearly the transcendence of death. This again is in sharp contrast to their exchange in the third Act when Naisi's heroic bearing and intrepid acceptance of his role stand out clearly against the essentially feminine weakness and trepidation of Deirdre to fulfil her role as the fated woman. It is only Naisi's heroism that spurs her to face her fate.

The three acts are well balanced, with the coming events casting their shadows before, even at the end of every act. The lovers' conjugal life and its subsequent subversion are the theme of the second Act which is indicated towards the end of the first Act. When Naisi ecstatically exclaims,

> There has never been the like of joy we'll have, Deirdre, you and I, having our fill of love at the evening and the morning till the sun is high.

Deirdre points out the inevitability of its subversion:

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3J.M.Synge's Plays, Poems and Prose, p. 185.
I am going with Naisi to Alban and
the north to face the troubles are
foretold.4

The fated and fatal choice leading to the final catastrophe
is made more than clear in Deirdre's lyrical farewell to the
Alban woods at the end of the second Act:

Woods of Cuan, woods of Cuan, dear
country of the east! 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
death should be a poor, untidy thing,
though it's a queen that dies.5

In both the tragedies, Riders to the Sea and Deirdre
of the Sorrows, the protagonists so dominate the action of
the plays that everything contributes to their tragedies.
The unity of action is maintained without any sub-plot or
parallel action. The other characters exist only in relation
to the protagonists. The tragic feeling proceeds from and
culminates in a strong central consciousness around whom other
intelligences are held like mirrors at various angles for
multiple contrast, but in single effect.

Characterization

There is a dialectic of pairs, doubles and opposites
underlying Synge's presentation of his men. Each play offers

4Ibid., p. 186.
5Ibid., p. 200.
romantics or poets, or protagonists in search who are pitted against the philistines or realists. The Tramp and non-existent Patch Darcy, representing the beauty and energy of nature are set against the materialists, Dan Burke and Michael Dara in *The Shadow of the Glen*. The Tramp symbolizes the quest of romantic vision which eschews the vulgar values of a closed social system that frustrates self-knowledge and self-realization. He seeks meaning and purpose not in the way of the world but in the pursuit of beauty in Nature. He assures Nora that she will find Nature alone not reminding her of getting old. The real beauty of one's self is in the inner peace that Nature gives and not in the economic security and social protection that marriage offers. With Nora being converted to his way of thinking, the Tramp leaves the philistines, Dan and Michael to their meretricious world.

Jaunting Jim, another bright absentee, in *The Tinker's Wedding*, inspires Sarah Casey because he has a fine eye for a beautiful woman and a liberal hand. On the other hand, Michael can keep Sarah with him only by violence and grudges the money that marriage involves. Timmy, in *The Well of the Saints*, cannot understand the poetic sensibility of Martin Doul. Martin is the seeker after beauty and when he finds it he is not satisfied because it cannot be enjoyed by him. He is only disappointed and disillusioned, but that does not deter him from the pursuit of his ideal which he hopes to find in the south.
In *The Playboy of the Western World*, Christy's romantic pose stands out against the dull caution of Shawn Keogh, who, alone of all the characters in the play, does not feel attracted by Christy's mythical heroism, while all the others are influenced by it in one way or the other. Christy is in quest of his identity which, he thinks, he has found at the end. But the irony that it may again be another illusion is suggested by his naive desire to go romancing through the world which has already rejected his apocryphal championhood. Christy's character has a quick-silver-quality, constantly changing before his admirers' eyes and before his own. As the Mayo people see him as a hero in general, Old Mahon calls him a frightened rabbit and a 'looney!' Again as he moves upward in the estimate of the audience at the end, the Mayo people view him with disgust. The truth lies in neither of the opposed points of view, but at the still neutral centre which subsumes the contradictions that result from the shifting perspectives. This antithesis enables the audience to perceive the absurdity of Christy's self-aggrandizement as well as Pegeen's disillusionment and disappointment. The mock-Christ figure of Christy, offering salvation to his votaries as a scape-goat, defines an extreme human situation which is controlled by the ironic comedy. Christy as a phoney or anti-hero is inevitable; for the apotheosis of an apparent murderer strikes at the root of all values that
the world cherishes. The apotheosis of the murderer subverts
the heroic ideal through inversion, parody and ridicule.
Christy is an innocent romancer, transformed by the fantasy-
loving world into a self-confident egotist whose vain-glorious
bragging in the Falstaffian vein renders him a mimic man
reduced to a grotesque. Nevertheless, he shows a simplicity,
quite unsuspecting of the motives of the Maycites, which
makes him credulous and innocent like the Tramp in The Shadow
of the Glen. Both Christy and the Tramp have a predisposition
for romantic vision and wanderlust, which makes them gullible
and susceptible to the shocks they receive from those around
them. The Tramp cannot believe that Dan is serious in
dismissing Nora and he leads himself to believe that Michael
Dara would offer her protection. Christy finds it hard to
accept the wickedness of the world and its complicated
indirections. His credulousness in believing quickly what
others say and falling too easily into deception, his
innocence of females, his pathetic appeal to Pegeen to be
considerate towards him even when his lie is exposed
completely and his realization of the truth only when his leg
is burnt, are all the marks of a heroic ideal improvised and
subverted by a community motivated by its own dark necessity.
When the mock-hero turned scapegoat learns nothing and forgets
nothing and goes romping again in this silly world, the play
achieves a comic ending that reverts everything to the beginning.
In *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, Conchubar represents tiresome recalcitrance of age contrasting with the fluent youth of Naisi. He displays an animal-like tenacity in pursuing Deirdre only to lose her for ever. His offer of palace luxuries cannot be a compensation for the handsomeness and vitality of Naisi to attract Deirdre.

The romantics are seekers or finders whose quest is disturbed or thwarted by the realists. The philistines are completely out of harmony with the inner vibrations of the romantics and cannot discern the movements of the heart which inspire the poets to pursue an ideal about which they themselves have only a vague idea. These seekers are all endowed with wanderlust and a restlessness which causes them to move from place to place. This restlessness or nomadic temperament is symbolic of their spiritual quest. The Tramp, Martin Doul, Christy and Naisi are all wanderers, free men but rootless, fugitive and nomadic. All these have a fine eye for everything that is beautiful, energetic and wild, which is articulated by them in eloquent poetry. These poets are pursued by women for this trait in their character, and in the case of Martin Doul, his ideal is strengthened by a woman, Molly Byrne. In contrast to these, the materialists are impounded by social and religious constraints, and they are content to conform to them.
The Christian priests are invariably unromantic and philistine. The Priest in *Riders to the Sea* is ignorant of the significance of the tide turning and so cannot understand Maurya's fear and anxiety. In *The Tinker's Wedding*, the Priest is too avaricious and simplistic without much moral stature to sympathize with the desire of Sarah Casey. The Saint in *The Well of the Saints* cannot offer spiritual cure to the blind couple. Father Reilly who is not directly shown but invoked very often by Shawn in *The Playboy of the Western World* is that force which is shunned by Pegeen. This Christian element symbolizes the destructiveness of the social or religious force which demolishes the inner vision. The conflict between pagan vitality and Christian sterility is underscored. The rebels are excommunicated, as for instance, when the Tramp is ordered out of his house by Dan Burke. Michael, the tinker is made to run away from the police. Martin Doul is pelted with stones; Christy is driven out of the shabeen. The non-conformists are treated as derelicts and are repudiated and rejected by their uncreative and unwholesome society. Thus Synge's protagonists are essentially victims.

The old among the men characters are presented as extremely possessive, wanting to have exclusively for themselves what they desire. They are possessors, self-dispossessed. Dan Burke would not like Nora to be wooed
by young lads. Martin wants Molly to run away with him and reject Timmy. Conchubor pursues Deirdre to death. The younger men set against them are passive. Michael Dara is too timid to offer Nora protection against Dan Burke. Timmy can only dismiss Martin from work, for he cannot match Martin in poetic talk. Naisi is content to be led by Deirdre; but there is an explosion of personality when he proposes to Deirdre not to go to Emain. But he is easily overwhelmed by the seductive intransigence of Deirdre. Again he asserts his independence and individuality when he decides to go to fight with Conchubor at the end and this time he is overpowered by death. In either case, the explosion is muffled and silenced by destruction, Deirdre being a symbol of destruction.

So Synge has created in his plays well defined types, but instead of letting them remain as mere types which would make them 'flat', dull and lifeless, he imbues them, the realist that he is, with a 'roundness' by constantly shifting perspectives and giving them antithetical, whimsical behaviour as they respond to the crisis of change. So the abstractions are made alive by ambivalences and antinomies which characterize human conduct and character. But what renders them 'round' is the influence of women on them. Synge's plays deal largely with the fate of the women. Men would not be what they are without their women. There is an emphasis on the women characters in the plays and the men characters
assume significance primarily in their relationship with the women. Nora, Sarah, Molly Byrne, Mary Doul, Pegeen and Deirdre contribute to the growth of the men by their attitudes and behaviour towards the males and provide the thematic centres.

Clifford Leech makes an assertion that, 'The women in Synge's plays have generally less dominance than Ibsen's women have.' But the impression one gets from his plays is somewhat different; his women characters are not only sharply individualized but are given a vital role in relation to his themes and his attitudes. Nora, Maurya, Sarah, Mary, Pegeen Widow Quin and Deirdre stand out more vividly realized than the men in the plays in which they figure. It is their longings, sorrows and disappointments that form the thematic centres. Even in The Well of the Saints though it is Martin Doul who plays a dominant role, Mary with her silent pathos is more appealing; his relations with Molly Byrne and Mary decide the course of the play. When, after acquiring the faculty of sight, Martin behaves oddly, Mary's only consolation is to look into the pools and derive pleasure from the reflection of the white hair flowing around her face. Of course, Synge is not championing the cause of women in the

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6 Clifford Leech, 'Synge and the Drama of His Time,' Modern Drama, xvi (December, 1973), p. 228.
sense in which Ibsen has done in his plays, because for one, Synge is not interested in the sociological implications of the feminist movement with which Ibsen is preoccupied. This concept of drama militates against Synge's own conception of the purpose of drama; for another, Synge's predilection is more for the elemental in women.

We almost 'hear' Nora's sighing for freedom in The Shadow of the Glen. The pathos and the tragedy with which Maurya in Riders to the Sea is invested are existential rather than merely sociological. Sarah's desire in The Tinker's Wedding for a decent life, inspite of Michael's and his mother Mary's dissuasion, seems so genuine that the Priest appears heartless and unreasonable when he insists upon his gold and tin can. In The Playboy of the Western World, Christy may be the hero but he is raised to that position by the women in general and by Pegeen and Widow Quin in particular. The audience is made to recognize his sham heroism only through these women. The disappointment of Pegeen when she finds 'a gap between a gallous story and a dirty dead' is so great that the next moment she becomes harsh in words and deed. Her last words that she has lost her only Playboy of the Western World sound 'Didoesque.' Even though she has nothing to gain, it is Widow Quin, who tries to save Christy from the

7J.M.Synge's Plays, Poems and Prose, p. 165.
wrath of the people because he is a symbol of lusty youth who must be preserved and not destroyed. She alone is able to see through his bluff very early in the play, but she keeps the drama of his heroism going very cleverly by managing to hide the secret and throwing Old Mahon off the scent. She loves Christy but when it is unrequited she has no regrets. She tries to pull him away through the backyard before the people attack him.

Synge's women are agonizingly lonely and are aware of their loneliness. Nora complains to Michael Dara:

It's a lonesome place you do have to be talking with some one, and looking for some one. 

When she is dismissed by her husband, she says:

What way would a woman in a lonesome place the like of this place, and, she not making a talk with the men passing.

Maurya is lonely and broken by a series of deaths in her family. She is left with no bread-winner for the family in her old age:

What way will I live and the girls with me, and I an old woman looking for the grave.

8 Ibid., p. 11.  
9 Ibid., p. 16.  
10 Ibid., p. 22.
Mary, the tinker, is terribly afraid of loneliness, and she must either be talking or singing or drinking to ward it off. She appeals to Sarah:

Let you walk back here, and not be leaving me lonesome when the night is fine.*

When Sarah leaves her alone, she grows philosophical over the lonesomeness of the old as something inevitable:

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 this time her hour was come or a little child wouldn't be sleeping with the hunger on a cold night.*

Next moment, she decides to drown her loneliness in drink, though it may invite Sarah's anger and even physical violence.

... 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 short while only till you die?*

When she wins back her sight, Mary in The Well of the Saints feels lonely for Martin is running after Molly Byrne. During this period her only companion is her own reflection in the pools. With the restoration of her blindness she is lonely again:

Ah, God help me ... God help me;
the blackness wasn't so black at

*Ibid., p. 45.
*1Ibid
*2Ibid.
*3Ibid., p. 46.
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 winds are cold. . . . I’m thinking short days will be long days to me from this time, and I sitting here, not seeing a blink, or hearing a word, . . . 14

In The Playboy of the Western World Pegeen does not want to be left alone:

Isn’t it long the nights are now, Shawn Keogh, to be leaving a poor girl with her own self counting the hours to the dawn of day? 15

Her father is a ‘queer’ fellow to leave her alone in the shop:

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. 16

Widow Quin is a lonesome woman, having lost her husband and children. She seeks the companionship of Christy and invites him to be with her in her lonely cottage on the hill:

When you see me contriving in my little gardens, Christy Mahon, you’ll swear the Lord God formed me to be living alone, . . . 17

14 Ibid., p. 90.
15 Ibid., p. 110.
16 Ibid., p. 112.
17 Ibid., p. 126.
Belonging as they do to a gregarious community, for the Aran folk who form the basis of Synge's *dramatis personae*, loneliness is an anathema.

T.R.Henn says 18 rightly that Synge's world is concerned with the tragedy of the common people and particularly of women. All his plays underline the unfulfilled aspirations of the women and their essential loneliness in this world where they meet only with disappointment, depression and desolation. It is their tragedy to be left aside and alone in life, with their husbands, lovers, children and friends dropping out of their lives, leaving them exposed, vulnerable and helpless. In this world of tragic outcomes and reversals men are the instruments of their joys and sorrows both of which rest on the precarious hinges of loss and liability. Dan Burke and Michael disappoint Nora because neither can satisfy her longings. On the other hand, the Tramp and Patch Darcy make her happy to some extent. Bartley, by going to the galway horse fair against his mother, Maurya's wish, causes her misery and deprives her of her only son. The Priest cannot stop him from going to the fair. Michael is rather unwilling to marry Sarah when she desires marriage so keenly. With great difficulty she persuades him to agree to it, but when her wish is about to be consummated, the Priest refuses to bless their union. The pathos of Mary is caused

as much by the odd behaviour of Martin Doul as by the shock of recognition of their ugliness, which is caused by the sight that is given to her by the Saint at the suggestion of Timmy.

In *The Playboy of the Western World*, Christy charms all the girls with his story; especially Pegeen, who is the most susceptible to his narrative seduction, makes him over into a romantic, almost mythic hero. Evidently such a figure fills her own psychological need to overcome her loneliness and sense of being forlorn in the shabeen, with no promise of adventure or excitement. She rejects the claim of Shawn to whom she has been engaged before the arrival of Christy and tells her father that she will marry only Christy. Christy proves a disappointment too when his putative heroism is deflated with the unexpected return of Old Mahon. Her romantic joy turns into romantic misery; and this romantic agony finds expression in her final lament.

In *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, Naisi and Conchubhar give Deirdre life and death respectively. In choosing either she has to oppose the other and thus court destruction. Naisi's love has the promise of life in it, but also the seeds of doom. He cannot save her from the consequences of her tragic choice. Conchubhar can give her only material pleasures to which she is averse temperamentally. So that is a kind of death -- death of her love of life. Neither Naisi nor
Conchubor can change her destiny. She loses one and leaves the other. Deirdre and Maurya are not weak, but fated; theirs is a loneliness and isolation predicted by their very situation. But whereas Maurya's acceptance of her fate has the heroic submissiveness, Deirdre's response to hers is more complex and borders on the tragic. Maurya's suffering evokes pity. Deirdre's agony has the implications of terror. The ambivalence that is at the root of her personality, combining with her romantic passion on one hand and her intransigent will on the other, confers on her the status of a mythic archetype.
As a dramatist Synge displays a remarkable ability to let a varied range of verbal consciousness dramatize the texture of experience and the tone of meaning. Synge, having chosen to write in the naturalistic vein, was trying to overcome the limitations of the naturalistic language. A mere photo-phonographic reproduction of the facts and words of real life would tend to be prosaic and monotonous, for they would be 'joyless and pallid words!' On the one hand, he wanted to avoid the language of the international intelligentsia, of the Ibsens and the Shaws, which, though witty and incisive, lacked, according to him, the flavour of poetry. For him, 'every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple;' every dramatic event fresh with the quick pulp of life. However he rejected the language of the aesthetes, which, though beautiful, lacked truth, being far from real speech. Both types of language were dry and dead. In choosing the richly flavoured speech of the Aran Islanders, he found a medium at once rich and intense, natural and spontaneous. He loved all that in speech of character was 'earthy, salty and pricking to the springs of the mouth or mind.'

20 Ibid.
For him, 'before verse can be human again it must learn to be brutal.' Syngle's adoption of the language of the tribe is not merely a descent into the primitive, but an artistic attempt to tap the racial unconscious and to approximate dramatic action to ritual enactment through the vocabulary and idiom of the folk culture.

The twofold object of the Irish Dramatic Movement, was to represent the true and the beautiful in the Irish culture and it has been fulfilled by Synge more than by any other dramatist of Ireland. He collected assiduously the imaginative speech of the Irish countrymen, their 'living phrase.' He loved to talk to tinker and tramp, tailor and publican, peasant and fisherfolk, beggar and boatman because their speech contained all that was salty and earthy. Out of the words thus collected, he made a careful collection and shaped them to suit his dramatic necessity. As in the treatment of nature, in the use of the peasant dialect also, Synge seems to resemble Thomas Hardy who exercised 'selection and cunning manipulation,' in employing 'the idiom, compass, and characteristic expressions' of intelligent peasant talk. Whereas Hardy thereby achieves a high degree of local colour and authentic mythic atmosphere, Synge strains every grain

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of speech into the very essence and texture of realism. Synge was a meticulous collector of the living phrase; in fact, like the character in Shaw's *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, he went about compiling, note book in hand, words and snatches of speech as they emerged fresh from the tongues of men and women as they talked to him in the Aran Islands or Ireland.

By establishing the sovereignty of words, Synge has fulfilled what Yeats wished when the Abbey Theatre was contemplated. Poetry for Synge was not merely a matter of extracting or utilizing the natural poetry of life. It was one of exploiting creatively the poetic content of human discourse capturing the texture and resonance of the Aran speech, which is in its own turn, a lively blending of English and Gaelic.

Different views have been expressed about Synge's language. St. John Ervine calls him a 'faker of peasant speech.', Clifford Leech says that Synge loved language, like Oscar Wilde. The latter profited from his reading of the Restoration dramatic speech as the former did from the talk of the servant girls in country Wicklow. T.R. Henn thinks that the peculiarity of Synge's language is that it

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admits of both parody and imitation at the hands of inferior dramatists. It is a selection, refraction, compression of the peasant speech. T.S. Eliot gives a reasonable view of Synge's language. He says:

The plays of John Millington Synge form rather a special case, because they are based upon the idiom of a rural people whose speech is naturally poetic, both in imagery and rhythm. I believe that he even incorporated phrases which he had heard from these country people of Ireland. The language of Synge is not available except for the plays set among that same people... But in order to be poetic in prose, a dramatist has to be so consistently poetic that his scope is very limited. Synge wrote plays about characters whose originals in life talked poetically, so he could make them talk poetry and remain real people. 28

The great problem of the twentieth century theatre has been to strike the right relationship between the surface-portraiture of naturalistic verisimilitude on the one hand and the inner sense of life on the other. Synge has successfully solved the problem by formulating a kind of language which seeks clarity of expression through the use of images and which is also ritualistic in tone and content. An action suited to this linguistic situation secures and keeps fast this relationship between the illusion of reality and the inner sense of being. He has also succeeded in claiming the imaginative attention of the audience, while at the same time

28 T.S. Eliot, Selected Prose, 'Poetry and Drama,' p.74.
 retaining the fictive nature of his characters. The realistic dialogue in Synge becomes a mannerism, a linguistic stylization which accepts the surface connections as a matter of course, but which at the same time echoes the hidden interior voices. He has solved the theatrical-aesthetic problem by transforming a spontaneous, lively and free-flowing folk speech into a finely fashioned, highly artificial, splendidly sharpened theatrical language. As Northrop Frye says, Synge's prose is a literary mannerism even though it reproduces the speech rhythms of the Irish peasantry. He has drawn artistic vitality from a language belonging to a subculture but which has elements of literariness, by virtue of its hybridism so much so that it can be used as a vehicle of drama. He has achieved in a different century what Wordsworth advocated as a fit language of poetry. This has resulted in a hybrid language; a hybrid has a greater vigour and vitality than a thoroughbred. In transcending the limitations of the naturalistic convention, Synge has created an artificially natural language.

In his Preface to The Playboy of the Western World, Synge points out the need for a kind of triple alliance. He feels that a sort of relationship should inhere between the simple, perceptible, apparent, everyday surface of life, the

29Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 269.
language of the dramatic dialogue and the inner reality of
the play, its complete, comprehensive, whole being. As
though in answer to the criticism that his language is false
and not heard among the peasantry of the Irish country side,
he points out that he has used just one or two words alone
that he has not heard among the folk. He seems to be
claiming realistic verisimilitude as his justification and
defence. But a little later in the same preface he says:

In a good play every speech should be
fully flavoured as a nut or apple.\footnote{loc.cit.}

To make every speech fully flavoured needs a careful selection
and rigorous shaping. Though the words in his plays are from
common speech their final effect, because of their having been
carefully chosen, beautifully embellished and dramatically
used, is something much more resonant and vital than that of
merely giving an exact phonographic reproduction of common
speech and ordinary thought-patterns. Such an effective
language could only have evolved out of an original language
which would be the accidental, careless and unordered language
of vulgar conversation. In other words, what is superb and
wild in language in the ordinary speech, and what is salty in
the mouth, is needed.

So Synge uses the language that has been shaped out of
ordinary, everyday conversation to reveal not just the
trivialities of the surface detail but something of the force
that is below the surface of all human experience. He has
been able to articulate successfully what will be normally
inarticulate in the naturalistic convention. His verbal
structures resolve into single speeches of extra-ordinary
quality, combining rhythm, verbal image and iconic action:

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. 31

But Ronald Peacock says 32 that Synge's language, though
richly poetic, suffers from a serious handicap in that it is
enough only to express a rather narrow range of peasant
character and simple feeling.

Its style is all on the surface.
It has not that expressiveness of
great dramatic poetry that lies in
its profound relevance to the underlying
pattern of our lives. 33

Such a language may be gorgeously metaphorical, or eloquent,
precise and intense, but it is still familiar. Judged by
this standard, Peacock says that Synge's style fails and this
failure is conspicuous in Deirdre of the Sorrows whose subject
lies outside the range of the peasantry. But in Riders to

32 Ronald Peacock, 'Synge's Idiom,' Twentieth Century
Int. of the Playboy, p. 103.
33 Ibid.
the Sea, his language possesses the very qualities that Peacock finds it wanting. The language in the play functions at three levels at the same time, literal, symbolic and metaphorical. Everything is woven into the emotional framework of poetry in the play so that words are construed intellectually but responded to emotionally with the result that truth and poetry are integrated into the experience dramatically created. For all its figurativeness, it is a familiar language.

Synge is able to circumvent the dull literalism of the naturalistic convention by his essentially poetic vision which overcomes the strictly tape-recorded, phonographic representation of the local dialect of the common people to pass into a profound and highly imaginative, poetic use of language. His plays abound in local and documentary details, but his poetic vision transcends these limitations and raises the language to a great height. Inspite of the language being poetic, the credibility of the characters is not damaged, nor are the theatrical interest and tension relaxed.

Synge derived great delight in the manipulation of language and the patterns of language. He is reported to have been spending an inordinate time working out the rhythm and cadence of a single sentence. He has a deep misapprehension about the communicability or otherwise of
language. He seems to suspect the power of language in that it can not only enlighten and clarify but also conceal and mislead. He seems to believe that words 'half reveal and half conceal the soul within.' This breaking down of the linguistic barrier is very conspicuous in *The Playboy of the Western World.* In that play the characters speak of the glories and also the deceits of a poetic tongue. Language deals with the surface trivialities of life and helps us to ask questions on insignificant and unimportant matters. It should not merely stop with that; it should also provide us with means to respond to larger and deeper questioning. A poet must show his language to be capable of both:

> Let you wait to hear me talking
> till we're astray in Erin, when Good Friday's by, ...  

says Christy. It means that his talk now is nothing compared with what his language will be in its fullness, at its greatest height, when Lent is over. He seems to attribute his refraining from the use of 'poetry talk' to his fasting during the period of Lent. Synge seems to express an apprehension that when the artist tries to press the language for deeper revelations, both the artist and the language fail, under the strain of overreaching limits of communication. Beneath all intellectual show the artist is essentially

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*Tennyson, 'In Memoriam.*

inarticulate. In this Synge looks forward to Pirandello in whose *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Father says:

> But don't you see that the whole trouble lies here. In words, words. Each one of us has within him a whole world of things, each man of us his own special world. And how can we ever come to an understanding if we put in the words I utter the sense and value of things as I see them; while you who listen to me must inevitably translate them according to the conception of things each one of you has within himself? We think we understand each other, but we never really do.  

*The Playboy of the Western World* is, in fact, built on this failure of communication, in a way. When Christy narrates the circumstances of the murder of his father, he does it, thinking that it will produce a violent and repulsive reaction in the Mayo people. But they have different value and sense to it, because of the peculiar world they have within them — a world of myth and fantasy:

Christy: (with a cry of horror) I killed my poor father, Tuesday was a week, for doing the like of that.

Philly: There's a daring fellow.

Jimmy: Oh, glory be to God!

Michael: (with great respect.) That was a hanging crime.

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37 J.M. Synge's *Plays, Poems and Prose*, p. 117.
Later, Jimmy says:

Bravery's a treasure in a lonesome place, and a lad kills his father, I'm thinking would face a foxy devil with a pitchpike on the flags on hell.\textsuperscript{38}

Christy is only overcome with wonder when he is assured of protection from the police there and also provided with a job. When they make him a hero, they have actually mistaken a murderer for a hero. This particular vision of the world only shows the incapacity of the human language to describe, define and specify human meanings. It also shows that these meanings themselves are unreal, deceptive and factitious, though they are so much desired by us. Synge's play admits of both these explanations, underlining the fact that our being is essentially ambiguous and uncertain.

\textsuperscript{38}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 119.
iii) Synge and Others:

Synge belongs to the great trinity of the Abbey Theatre along with Yeats and O'Casey. Although they were all engaged in the common pursuit of an Irish Renaissance, and tried their hand at tragedy and attempted to employ Irish themes and characters as well as the common speech of the Irish folk, they eventually developed as artists in diverse directions. While Yeats became increasingly occupied with Symbolism, mythologies and metaphysics, O'Casey was fast becoming concerned with a socio-moral analysis of human values. Synge chose to be an uncommitted, pure artist engaged in his portrayal of the human condition in terms of a simple naturalism which permitted as much reality as poetry. In a sense, both in pure tragedy and in language experiment he excelled Yeats and O'Casey.

Both Yeats and Synge belonged to the Anglo-Irish Protestant stock. They had both developed a highly ambivalent attitude towards Ireland and its people. They had also cultivated a kind of agnosticism which sometimes revealed them to be anti-clerical and irreligious. Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* had been as much a target of vicious attack as Synge's plays in Ireland because of its theme, a Christian woman selling her soul to the devil. Both the poets saw violent and picturesque contrasts and juxtapositions in life.
Synge made his own idiom in prose, Yeats in poetry; but in prose Yeats never got wholly clear of the 'high style' he had learned from Pater, while Synge achieved, in The Aran Islands and In Wicklow and West Kerry, a vigorous and simple prose, with a keen sense of the accent and intonations of reported speech.\[^1\]

As F.L. Lucas says,\[^2\] Synge learned the secret of the lilting melody, and the uninhibited, unstable, child-like imagination which characterized the peasant speech, Yeats could never really master it.

In drama, Yeats's style is rather lyrical than dramatic and he diminishes the importance of characterization, always tending to stylize his human figures. Synge observed keenly the nature around him and this observation helped him to understand the ecology of the natural life. He possessed a rare insight into the moods and movements of the flora and fauna in the intricate web of time and space. Yeats uses the natural objects and creatures as dramatic metaphors constituting an almost iconic, heraldic setting: in the process of poetic illumination they lose their animation. Synge does not attempt, as Yeats does, to give special meanings to his symbols. The peasant life invests them with local specificity as well as universal resonance. In


presenting the peasant folk Synge invites attention to their positive and negative attributes by distributing the components of their psychological space evenhandedly. He brings to view their want of sophistication, their stoicism and their heroic passivity in the face of suffering, and their brutality in sex, drink and blasphemy. There is no attempt on his part to hide or mitigate the darker side of their life and character. Yeats's attention is continually drawn to the legendary and mythical potential of the Irish character and seeks to charge every theme with a personal significance.

Synge, a hard realist, concentrates on the ironies of life around him, keeping close to naturalism. Yeats on the other hand seeks to replace the naturalistic by aesthetic distance, in his pursuit of 'the deeps of the mind.'

Synge is a pioneer in using the lowest denominators of humanity, like the tramps and tinkers, as the only characters who represent the 'wildness' of the free and autonomous individual, whose energy is uninhibited and unhampered by social customs and religious conventions. In both Synge and Yeats, this wildness is smothered by the pressure of conventions. Hence a conflict between paganism and Christianity becomes a basic polarity in their plays. Yeats's beggars are drawn from these tramps. They are very sensitive to the poetry of the country side but at the same time, they fully understand its squalor and flux. Yeats learnt from Synge to draw foils
to his romantic figures, the Blind Man and the Fool, for instance in On Baile's Strand:

The peasant speech of these characters intensifies the depth of Cuchulain's passionate nature, and their presence on the stage reflects Yeats's interest in extremes, and in oppositions, the wise Man and the Fool; never the balanced man.

The nobility of Cuchulain is brought into sharp relief by the meanness of the Blind Beggar in The Death of Cuchulain, when the latter takes Cuchulain's head to Aoife for money. This juxtaposition of nobility and meanness is a Syngean technique. According to Norman Jeffares, Yeats's skill in drama increased on account of Synge's influence on him. He also traces the echoes of Synge in some of Yeats's poems, such as 'The Hour Before Dawn' and 'The Dolls.' Yeats has himself acknowledged his debt to Synge and Lady Gregory who had helped him shape his aesthetic and guided his work. He developed the conviction that great art must be aristocratic in spirit while at the same time rooted in the life of the people. It 'must come from contact with the soil,' but must be metamorphosed by a higher sensibility. This 'dream' of 'the noble and the beggarman' is the Irish dream on which the efforts of the writers have been based:

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4Ibid.
5Ibid., p. 177.
We three alone in modern times had brought
Every thing down to that sole test again,
Dream of the noble and the beggarman.6

In its language of the compressed or miniature tragedy
and in its use of images for dramatic meaning, Yeats's
Purgatory resembles Riders to the Sea. Synge shows the
importance of flesh whose indulgence is no sin but rather
quite natural and human. Yeats was fascinated by magic,
theosophy and the supernatural, but Synge preferred naturalistic
irony. Yeats fled into the land of heart's desire, the lakes
of Innisfree, dived into shadowy waters and mixed with the
fairies and mystic figures from the legendary past. But
Synge would have even myths and legends first resolved into
their natural human archetypes before they could be artistically
repossessed. Even fantasy emerges as a natural human tendency
and Synge treats it as such. Whereas Synge saw life that he
was to portray, steadily and saw it whole, Yeats saw it
through an iridescent mist. Although both wrote about the
roads and tried to master what Yeats called 'the book of the
people,' Synge could succeed better, as he could see them as
figures in a landscape and not as transcendentally misplaced
deities and occult figures. As Clifford Leech observes:

Synge is supremely the Irish classic
dramatist, a more deliberate and austere
writer than O'Casey, a more 'rooted'

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6The Collected Poems of W.B.Yeats, 'The Municipal
one than Yeats, though Yeats wanted to be rooted indeed.  

O'Casey denies that he is an imitator of Synge:

I am sorry, but I'm not Synge; and not even, I'm afraid, a reincarnation.

Still, Synge's influence on him may be noticed. Without any formal schooling, O'Casey was brought up in an environment which shaped his career as a dramatist. It was the environment in the Abbey Theatre, where peasant farces of Lady Gregory and Synge's plays, 'breathed an ample spirit and played a wide gambit of lyricism, humour, and emotionalism.' The most important factor of influence was the synthetic language which the younger Irishman evolved and used in his plays, a mixture of dialect, spoke in the Dublin slums, and English. This is similar to the Gaelicised English of Synge's people. The exploitation of a colourful dramatic language may be taken as the legacy of Synge. Whereas Synge's language admits of several dimensions of meaning, O'Casey's is firmly tied down to a single semantic contour. There is an element of overdoing

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7 Clifford Leech, 'Synge and the Drama of his Time,' Modern Drama, xvi (December, 1973), p. 256.
9 John Gassner, 'The Prodigality of Sean O'Casey,' Ibid., p. 115.
on the part of O'Casey, while Synge has that moderation which makes his style more open and resilient. Further, Synge has the balance, measure and patience, and an eclectic detachment that controls everything. Synge blends the rhetoric of the peasants with the deep structure of their speech, thereby using language as a generative mechanism. In O'Casey's drama the emphasis is mimetic and representational, and sometimes his plebian speech gives the impression of being grotesque. However, both Synge and O'Casey draw upon a tradition of eloquence in everyday speech,' so much so that the audience will not know where the dramatists cross 'the border between the true and the false, natural and synthetic speech.'

Like Synge, O'Casey adapts the living, suffering, hoping, brutal, gross material of his day to weld it into art. Again in portraying men and women as illustrations of the life that he has known and the forces that have environed that life, he seems to follow Synge. His technique of mixing the grotesque and the tragic in comedy to bring out the effect of the tragi-comic also points to the similarity with Synge. Notwithstanding the gravity and the sombre mood in the scenes where Mrs. Boyle appears, Juno and the Paycock leads up to a sense of the grotesque dramatized in the drinking and

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apparently meaningless talk of Captain Boyle and Jaxter. 11

Though this play is sometimes compared with Riders to the Sea, it does not have that compressed and consistently sustained poignancy of Synge's play. When O'Casey wrote his play Synge's portrayal of the matriarchal nature of the Irish society was already there. The 'mater dolorosa' image of Maurya might have been the prototype of Mrs. Boyle.

In *Cook-A-Doodle-Dandy*, Julia goes to Lourdes for a cure, returns unhealed and renounces her faith in miracle cure. She finds the pagan vitality more wholesome than the miracle cure, an attitude not different from Martin's in Synge's *The Well of the Saints*. The sickness of the girl is the painful part of O'Casey's play which is thrown into the background by the bouts of horseplay in the appearance of the Cook. Again, Father Domineer smites dead a man 'living in sin.' This is the tragic counterpoint of the horseplay, and resembles Old Mahon's death looming large behind Christy's playacting the role of the Champion Playboy of the Western World. *Cock-A-Doodle-Dandy* combines beautiful poetry with elements of farce, like Synge's *The Tinker's Wedding*. It

11 Synge wanted to weave a grotesque element through the entire play, *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. In one of his revisions of the play, he put a grotesque character into the second act and thought of weaving him into the first act. He was to accompany Conchubor, carrying some of his belongings and then at the end of the act to return for a forgotten knife, so that he might be used in the second act (W.B.Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 44).
also presents the conflict between pagan vitality as symbolized by the younger generation and the rigid puritanism of the clerical establishment. O'Casey lashes out at the clergy and ridicules the Catholic faith in Saints and miracles. This ecclesiastical satire is too overt and blatant, compared with the subtle and concealed barks of Synge in The Tinker's Wedding and in The Well of the Saints. The deliberate and overt glorification of the pagan vitality by O'Casey is in sharp contrast to the strategy of suggestive enactment followed by Synge. The woes and responsibilities of the Priest are also presented rather sympathetically in The Tinker's Wedding; and the Saint in The Well of the Saints, despite all the sarcasm, suggests an affectionate effigy rather than a blatant caricature;

He's straying around saying prayers at the churches and high crosses, between this place and the hills, and he with a great crowd, behind — for it's fine prayers he does be saying, and fasting with it, till he's as thin as one of the empty rushes you have there on your knee;

O'Casey is not capable of Synge's gentle touches. His ideological commitment pre-empts sympathy. He projects one of the sides in such a grotesque and ridiculous light that the characters on that side look like caricatures. His truth is so much on the side of the right that it misses the

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perception of wrong in the living context. At times O'Casey's radicalist righteousness gives the impression of being the exact obverse of the obscurantist prejudice he is attacking. Synge has the negative capability to recognize that no single side has the monopoly over the complex truth of man; he never indulges in malicious caricature. He respects the human personality. The Christian faith, for which he has not much sympathy is never overtly ridiculed. The Priest in The Tinker's Wedding is portrayed with such basic sympathy as to enable the audience to take genuine notice of his worries and anxieties. But beneath all this sympathetic representation is an undercurrent of irony which the audience cannot fail to notice. They can understand the Priest's avarice and his comic personality without having to be commandeered into a position of righteous indignation by the editorial voice of the omniscient narrator.

O'Casey also perceives, like Synge, that human beings can retreat from actuality into fantasy. Captain Boyle's pipe-dreams and fantasies of an adventurous life at sea in the past remove him from the realities of his present situation. Neither the death of his son nor the plight of his daughter touches him. In this respect, he is like Nora in The Shadow of the Glen who without minding her husband's death puts all the money in the stocking and prepares herself to go into the world of her love. Of course, an insensitivity to pain and
suffering is an Irish trait, especially of the Aran folk. In *The Silver Tassie*, the soldiers in the dilapidated church engage themselves in singing and dancing in order to escape from the bitter experiences of war. It is a horridly desolate scene with the rain falling and with a soldier 'crucified.' Harry Heegan, in the same play, after having confronted the actuality of war, sees a world in which civilians build around themselves cocoons of private fancies, locking themselves in. They want to forget the unpleasant memories of war. This is reminiscent of the fantasies that the Mayoites in *The Playboy of the Western World* build for themselves, unable to face the drabness of their existence.

So the artistic exploitation of the gap between illusion and reality in the human consciousness as a means of projecting the perpetual ambivalence of human motive and behaviour may be considered as Synge's legacy to O'Casey.

In writing pastoral tragi-comedy too, O'Casey had before him the model of Synge. A pastoral is always an implicit criticism of the actual. The contrast between the Golden Age and the contemporary world is the basic source of conflict in O'Casey's plays. His Golden Age is a vision of Ireland filled with golden and lusty youth full of vigour, energy, love and life. The Golden Age conflicts with the debased age of the actual world, which is highly commercial-
minded, hypocritical and fanatically religious. In Synge's plays too, the social taboos and religious restraints are depicted as impeding the material and spiritual aspirations of individuals as they strain after a credible, meaningful and worthy sense of personality.

The Syngean technique of counterpointing lyricism and irony, laughter and violence, boastful pronouncements and collapsing action may also be noticed in O'Casey. *The Plough and the Star* presents the heroism of the Irish youth side by side with the meanness of some who resort to plunder while their brethren die fighting for their country. O'Casey who set out, like Synge within the naturalistic tradition later found it inadequate for the expression of his dramatic genius and so he turned to such techniques as Expressionism, Symbolism, and Constructivism. But Synge, without giving up the naturalistic method has used expressionistic and symbolistic modes within naturalistic framework, as can be seen in *Riders to the Sea*.

Inspite of the striking similarities between Synge and O'Casey in theme and technique they are different in temperament and attitude. His wonderful poetry and strict objectivity make Synge more accessible to humane impulse. As Andrew E. Malone points out:

"Synge was a poet, with all the attributes of a poet; O'Casey is a photographic"
artist who touches his films with an acid pencil to produce an effect of grotesque satire.

In Synge, the comedy keeps the satire under check whereas in O'Casey the satire itself is the comedy. There is a Dickensian element of caricaturing in O'Casey. His humanism is Marxian whereas Synge's is pure and simple without any ideological overtones. Synge scrupulously avoids any social, political or religious controversies of his time though references to them are not completely wanting in his plays, that is, loveless marriages, the dowry system, the popular dislike of the English legal system, militia, etc. Topical allusions, here and there, enhance the realism of the plays. He uses them for strengthening the realistic base of his plays rather than for any journalistic sensationalism or ideological propaganda. He eschews all narrow provincialism and fanatical zeal for a political ideology which mar the detachment that a good dramatist should have. Though in a way he is a committed artist -- committed to the inarticulate paganism of the Aran folk -- he is not committed in the sense in which O'Casey is. The latter openly professes his affiliation to Communism. The strict objectivity that Synge displays is in sharp contrast with O'Casey's open involvement in the battle of political and sociological ideologies.

O'Casey has attempted to present tragedy with some success from the Dublin slums, for with him Irish drama has come to town. He has also succeeded in forging a new Anglo-Irish speech suitable for tragedy. But as Henn remarks he has not been able to achieve Synge's ambivalent complexities of mood, the fierce ironic joy in the brutal or the 'glorious phrase,' with the grim detachment of the 'disinterested' artist, manipulating his characters to advance or recede in the total rhythm of each play.14

Both Synge and O'Casey saw life through distorting mirrors and yet both loved Ireland. When they placed their people in awkward situations it was only with the intention of enabling them to see for themselves what they were. Yeats says that like James Joyce, Synge and O'Casey 'can isolate the human mind and its voices as in eternity.'15

Although the direct influence of Synge on Eugene O'Neill has not been established, it is a known fact that as a young man the American playwright saw the Abbey players do Synge's plays in New York in the early 1920s. He was much impressed with Riders to the Sea. In his plays, the sea-motif is used as a preserver and destroyer. The sea has a dual effect in his Bound East for Cardiff, where

15 W. B. Yeats, Explorations, p. 233.
it is the cause of Yank's mutilation, and it is also an agent of his possessiveness.\textsuperscript{16}

There is a deep affinity between man and nature in O'Neill's plays as in Synge's. This 'mythic equation of the sea and human life'\textsuperscript{17} has a Syngean touch, though it would be presumptuous to say that the Black Irishman owed this sea-motif to any one other than himself and his own personal experience of life on the seas. But Synge has so effectively integrated this primal mother of all life into the human drama in \textit{Riders to the Sea} that any similar attempt by subsequent dramatists appears to be related to his method. The lure of the sea is as irresistible to O'Neill's sea-faring men as it is to Synge's fishers. Living in perilous proximity to death and the human struggle for survival against forces as embodied by the sea are common themes in Synge and O'Neill. As in \textit{Riders to the Sea}, there is in O'Neill's \textit{Fog} too the 'paradox in which the moment of ultimate despair and helplessness coincides with that of freedom and deliverance.'\textsuperscript{18} In his \textit{Long Day's Journey into Night}, O'Neill achieved the myth of the sea within the simple, elemental dimensions of domestic tragedy, comparable to Synge's \textit{Riders to the Sea}.

Another aspect that links O'Neill to Synge is the

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{18}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 21.
implacable complicity of illusion and reality in the human condition which often resolves itself in fantasy. At the romantic extreme, O'Neill's *The Fountain* has some resemblance to Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. The Conquistador Leon, however, unlike the abrasive Conchubar, does not let his possessiveness subvert his dream into tyranny.

In his handling of the folk ethos of Puritan New England, as well as in the treatment of Nature, O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* resembles *The Shadow of the Glen*. Thematically the play has a closer resemblance to *Deirdre of the Sorrows* as a romantic tragedy. In *The Iceman Cometh*, the characters go into a dream world of fantasies, finding themselves incapable of facing up to the actual life. Unable to escape from the present, they console themselves with pipe-dreams, with fantasies of happiness and success once possessed. They think that the world is too much with them. Each one suffers from nostalgia and yearning for something in the past. This yearning for the past is the characteristic of Synge's people too. Like the folk of Mayo, the derelicts of Harry Hope's saloon invent strange human relationships and popeyed dreams to preserve their romantic, if inflated, idea of themselves by enlarging it into a system of collective security. But both plays end in the failure of illusion to support the adventitious community of interests.
Like Synge's, O'Neill's genius is almost always concerned with life in the raw. This life has not only authenticity but also a touch of poetry, like Synge's. His people also have their feet in the mire but their eyes on the stars, like Synge's characters.

iii

Synge may be said to have anticipated Samuel Beckett, born in Ireland three years before Synge's death, in that Synge's tramps become the chief characters in Beckett's plays. Like his predecessor Beckett also exploits the poetic content of the language of the tramps, although he pushes it over to the metalinguistic brink. These people suffer little from any inhibitions about the social or religious conventions. The characters of Beckett in Endgame, like Nora in The Shadow of the Glen, suffer from a kind of claustrophobia. His plays are also the drama of the roads. In having the scenes of action wholly on the roads, Waiting for Godot is reminiscent of The Tinker's Wedding which takes place entirely on the road. Synge has demonstrated in his plays that the tramps could be excellent characters, richly poetic and highly romantic because of their wanderlust and lack of inhibitions. He has literally brought the drama down to the streets from its aristocratic heights. Beckett, like Synge, brings the ludicrous and serious elements of life through his tramps into sharp focus.
Synge also anticipates the Existential paradox that man is condemned to be free; and that he can assert his identity as an act of will or choice nowhere more exclusively than in the hour of defeat. Christy, Martin Doul and even Deirdre show this trait. Man alone, of all natural beings, can create his own identity out of 'the body of fate.' The Doul in *The Well of the Saints* build their identity out of the life that is given them. The anguish of the gap between what man can dream of or imagine and what circumstances permit him to be, arises from his own alienated state. He is alienated from Nature, since the crime of being born estranges him from the unconscious state of Nature. The Existentialistic tension between aspiration and fulfilment, the mental anguish, seems to have been anticipated by Synge.

Synge may be said to have looked forward to the Theatre of the Absurd for the latter relies heavily on dreams and fantasy. Further, in the Theatre of the Absurd what is presented is the poet's personal vision of the world which is neither factual nor fictitious but a peculiar blend of both. The dramatic element in the common life is exploited by the Absurd dramatists. Their plays and their characters are charged with a certain symbolism and the surrealist basis of their reality is a Syngean method. Though O'Casey has shown these dramatists how to present things in a grotesque way,
O'Casey himself had before him Synge who has introduced a lot of grotesqueness in his comedies. Farce with an undercurrent of pathos is the forte of Synge which we find in the Absurd Drama. He has also demonstrated how words can fail to communicate and this breaking down of communication is the chief characteristic of the Absurd Drama, especially of Ionesco's. An intense awareness of human solitude, of the mind in its own impenetrable world, so characteristic of modern literature is perhaps what connects Synge and the Absurd dramatists.