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A STUDY OF THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD

TESINA QUE PRESENTA

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TESIS CON FALLA DE ORIGEN

'The Curse'

To a sister of an enemy of the author's
who disapproved of The Playboy

Lord, confound this surly sister
Blight her brow with blotch and blister,
Cramp her larynx, lung, and liver,
In her guts a galling give her.

Let her live to earn her dinners
In Mountjoy with seedy sinners:
Lord, this judgment quickly bring,
And I'm Your servant, J.M. Synge.

John Millington Synge.

'On those that hated The Playboy of the Western
World 1907'

Once, when midnight smote the air,
Eunuchs ran through Hell and met
On every crowded street to stare
Upon great Juan riding by:
Even like these to rail and sweat
Staring upon his sinewy thigh.

William Butler Yeats

A feminine mystique permeates John Millington Synge's plays. His female characters seem to convey an almost mysterious ability to experience and tolerate with intense passion not only the heights of ecstasy, but also the depths of despair. This intensity is reflected in their vitality, sensitivity, perseverance and imagination, and Synge's portrayal of women encompasses a broad spectrum of human experience. The elderly Maurya, the protagonist in his first play, Riders to the Sea, tragically resigns herself to the domination of her life-time enemy, the sea, who has claimed all her male relations. The subsequent comedies emphasize both the imposing presence of the environment in which the female protagonist lives and her desire to escape from it. Nora Burke, in The Shadow of the Glen, longs to liberate herself from the imprisonment not only of a loveless marital union, but also from the supernatural oppression of the surrounding Wicklow hills. Sara Casey, in The Tinker's Wedding, imaginatively seeks to raise herself from the humility of her roadside survival to the dizzy heights of respectability by formalizing her union within the bonds of matrimony. Mary Doul, a blind beggar in The Well of the Saints, hopes to release herself from the chains of eternal darkness and suffering through the miracle of sight. A romantic relationship with her notion of the ideal man offers Pegeen Mike, meanwhile, in The Playboy of the Western World, the possibility to transcend the materialistic and restrictive ties of her surroundings. As these four women persevere to achieve their goal, they cry out for the human warmth and affection which is denied them in their harsh environment, and freedom to express their individuality.

Deirdre, in Deirdre of the Sorrows, Synge's last play, embodies not only the need for love, but also a sense of awareness of her destiny only really fully perceived by Synge's first tragic character, Maurya.

Except for Nora Burke, the prominent female protagonist in each case is balanced by a more down-to-earth female portrayal who stresses the stark realism of their mundane existence. However, in The Playboy (this abbreviation will be used throughout this study for the sake of simplicity) the approach subtly changes, since the two female characters work behind the main male protagonist, rather than taking the principal roles themselves. It would naturally be an injustice to Synge to suggest that the male characters in his other plays are of little importance, but it is only in The Playboy that he undertakes to deal so ostensively with the development of a male, rather than a female, character.

This point intrigued me in particular when I discovered that this play was originally drafted without any significant female characters. In the earlier outlines the women merely acted as a 'chorus' of admiring fans, while in the later versions Christy was accepted into this Mayo community and married Pegeen Mike, the innkeeper's daughter, and then became a local councillor before his lie was discovered. However, in 1906, Synge found it necessary to amplify the roles as much of Pegeen Mike as of Widow Quin⁽¹⁾. I therefore decided to explore the role of each woman in the play to attempt to define specifically what they contribute to the

(1) Robin Skelton, The Writings of J.M. Synge, New York, The Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc., 1971, p.114
This is one among many works which indicates the development of the play through its various drafts.

development of Christy Mahon, the hero. I detected an overwhelming influence, and I should like to dedicate this essay to an examination of this effect. I personally feel that Christy is almost entirely a female inspiration and I shall endeavour to indicate how I arrive at this conclusion. We, as readers, realize that obviously Christy could not have reached the height of awareness he achieves at the end of the play without the reappearance of his father. However, this fact was a constant throughout the drafts, whereas the female role changed. It is precisely this variable which I wish to investigate. No longer are the women merely the worshipping chorus nor the means for reaching an important position within the community. Their infiltrating influence is, in my opinion, more profound and their effect further reaching.

However, before entering this study, we should place The Playboy in its context, since it caused such an outcry at the time of its production. Synge was an eminent playwright of the Irish Dramatic Movement which was created at the beginning of the twentieth century. He worked upon this play from 1905 to 1907, and it was entitled The Murderer: A Farce, The Fool of the Family, The Fool of Farnham, Murder Will Out and Christy Mahon before reaching its final form⁽²⁾. It was the last in a series of four comedies which included chronologically The Shadow of the Glen, The Tinker's Wedding (never produced in Dublin) and The Well of the Saints.

His opponents, a middle-class Dublin élite with nationalist tendencies, objected principally to his violent use of language and

⁽²⁾ Nicholas Grene, Synge Manuscripts, Dublin, Dolmen Press, 1971
(no page no.)

his portrayal of their peasantry, especially the Irish maidenhood, who inconceivably hero-worship an apparent father-slayer. W.B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory, the co-directors with Synge of the Abbey Theatre, where the Movement's works were performed, had been apprehensive of The Playboy's potentialities. Lady Gregory feared his language was too strong and the actor, William Fay, who took the title role of Christy Mahon in this work, struggled throughout rehearsal with Synge to modify the violent mode of expression. He recollects: "We might as well have tried to move the Hill of Howth as move Synge. That was his play, he said, and barring one or two jots and titles of 'bad language' that he grudgingly consented to excise, it was the play that with a great screwing of courage we produced"⁽³⁾. The first performance on Saturday, January 26, 1907, caused a riot and initiated the fiercest struggle in the Company's turbulent career. According to observers' accounts, a general disturbance could be felt throughout the first two Acts, but the storm did not break until Christy uttered the now famous line: "What'd I care if you brought me a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself maybe, from this place to the Eastern world"⁽⁴⁾. The audience could no longer withhold its indignation at the "outpouring of a morbid, unhealthy mind, ever seeking on the dunghill of life for the nastiness that lies concealed there"⁽⁵⁾.

⁽³⁾ David H. Greene & Edward M. Stephens, J.M. Synge 1871-1909, New York, Macmillan Co., 1959, p.235

⁽⁴⁾ J.M. Synge, Plays, Ann Saddlemyer (ed), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 160. (The page numbers of all subsequent quotes from these works, principally The Playboy (pp.103-163), will be indicated within parenthesis in the text)

⁽⁵⁾ Richard Fallis, The Irish Renaissance: an Introduction to Anglo-Irish Literature, Dublin, Gill & Macmillan Ltd., 1978, p.106

The Abbey's supporters, who tended to idolize their peasantry, failed to appreciate "what was wild in its people"⁽⁶⁾. Synge, however, had written this play directly "as a piece of life"⁽⁷⁾ and even Fay admitted that Synge "actually knew the people he was writing about whereas [the audience] only thought they did"⁽⁸⁾. Synge underlines the ambivalence between the ideal image and the real image of the Irish in his charming anecdote of the Abbey charwoman. When Lady Gregory asked for her opinion about the word 'shift', the woman declared she would never even mention the garment but, if she were compelled to, she would always call it a chemise, even in private. A few minutes later, she was heard discussing the play with the stage carpenter: "'Isn't Mr. Synge a bloody old snot to write such a play?'"⁽⁹⁾.

However, despite this disastrous first night, Synge and Lady Gregory decided to allow the play to run its course and W.B. Yeats actively joined the fight upon his return from Scotland the following Tuesday. The Company was rewarded for their persistence as Lady Gregory later wrote: "we have been justified, for Synge's name has gone round the world, and we should have been ashamed for ever if we had not insisted on a hearing for his

⁽⁶⁾ W.B. Yeats, "J.M. Synge & the Ireland of his Time" from Interviews & Recollections, E.H. Mikhail (ed), London, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1977, p. 57

⁽⁷⁾ Weldon Thornton, J.M. Synge & the Western Mind, Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, 1979 (In a letter to M.J. Nolan 19/2/1907), p.137.

⁽⁸⁾ William Fay, "The Playboy of the Western World" from Interviews & Recollections, op. cit., p.53

⁽⁹⁾ David H. Greene & Edward M. Stephens., op. cit., p.263-3 (In a letter to Mackenna).

most important work"⁽¹⁰⁾. Synge himself declared in a letter to Molly Allgood, who acted the part of Pegeen Mike, after the first night: "I feel like old Maurya today. 'It's four fine plays I have, though it was a hard birth I had with everyone of them'. It is better any day to have the row we had last night, than to have your play fizzling out in half-hearted applause. Now we'll be talked about. We're an event in the history of the Irish stage ..."⁽¹¹⁾. Their labour had been worthwhile. This valient company, who had been involved in so many struggles to uphold its ideals, had won yet another victory in the successful, if riotous, launching of a work which some drama critics up to the present day consider the finest masterpiece in the history of Irish drama.

The variety of titles The Playboy held in earlier versions is enough to suggest that it may be interpreted at different levels. Whereas the audience was scandalized at the time even a present-day reader may close the book with a bitter-sweet taste in his mouth as Nicholas Grene confirms: "the play is puzzling and a common reaction to seeing or reading it for the first time is complete bewilderment"⁽¹²⁾. We may find our reading a satisfying experience but it is somewhat disturbing to realize that the very characters whom we laugh at are preferable and have perhaps more intrinsic value than those with whom we laugh. This enchanting world of fable is confusingly realistic and even serious at times. Vivian Mercier claims Synge's comedies are partially satires upon rural

⁽¹⁰⁾ Lady Gregory, Selected Plays, Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, 1975, p. 245

⁽¹¹⁾ David H. Greene & Edward M. Stephens, Op. Cit., p. 238

⁽¹²⁾ Nicholas Grene, Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays, London, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1979, p. 145.

Ireland⁽¹³⁾. Widow Quin forms part of this satire, and, although she is a comic figure in one sense, she is uncomfortably realistic. She embodies the disloyalty, amorality, materialism, opportunism and lack of respect for established institutions present, not only in the rural Ireland of her time but also in our society today. Each reader may respond as distinctly to this ambivalence as to other disturbing features in the plays, such as the attitude towards violence, which justifies Grene's statement and makes us aware that The Playboy presents difficulties.

However, the plot itself is fairly straightforward, even though we may question the credibility of the Mayo villagers' reaction to this apparent father-slayer. It concerns the development of the innocent Christy Mahon into an emotionally aware, perceptive and self-confident person. He enters a strange Mayo village, claiming he has killed his father. This act of parricide particularly attracts the attention of the two Connaught women, Pegeen Mike and Widow Quin, who try to win his heart. He becomes emotionally involved with a member of the opposite sex, Pegeen Mike, for the first time in his life as he tries to come to terms with Widow Quin's lively, if harsh, vision of reality. On account of his deed, he is elevated to almost heroic stature which is nearly destroyed by the unexpected appearance of his father. Widow Quin swears secrecy and he is saved momentarily from humiliation. Just as he has managed to gain Michael James Flaherty's (Pegeen's father) approval of their marriage, Old Mahon enters once again. Christy's dilemma deepens as the villagers now turn completely against him.

(13) Vivian Mercier, The Irish Comic Tradition, London, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 239

He has, however, gained sufficient awareness by this time to recognize both the smallmindedness of these Connaught people and his own ability to transcend their mediocrity. At the final climatic moment Christy discovers the irony of the situation: those who worshipped him for his lie cannot face the truth. Triumphantly he takes a step into manhood and establishes his own identity as he abandons his first love and rejects his father's domination. The downtrodden and retiring lad becomes "the master of all fights" (163); his own master.

Christy Mahon may therefore be seen as an outsider who unconsciously depends upon a group of people in order to establish his own identity. The Connaught people offer this lonely outcast security and their estimation, which makes him think this inn would "be a fine place to be my whole life" (126). He cannot forget the freedom of the lonely hills, however, and his love-talk with Pegeen reflects his desire to return to the life of a wanderer: "Let you wait to hear me talking till we're astray in Erris ... drinking a sup from a well ... " (152).. Old Mahon's unfortunate 'resuscitation' forces him to cling on desperately to the new world he has discovered among the villagers. It is only when he is rejected time and again by members of this community that he begins to doubt their authenticity and the true value of their existence. In a moment of utter despair he overcomes his horror of loneliness and confronts the reality that his dependence upon people is hindering rather than helping him form his identity: " you're setting me now to think if it's a poor thing to be lonesome, it's

worse maybe go mixing with the fools of earth" (159). He has caught a glimpse of the truth that his identity should spring from within himself.

Christy could not have reached this perception of his own accord. His search for self-identity is, in fact, imposed upon him through his relationship with the two principal female protagonists who teach him, through their own example, to question the value of his existence. At first he reflects his lack of self-respect and inherent values when, on account of his yearning for acceptance and affection in order to evade his solitude, he admits that he has not only killed his father but also buried him. Some of the male members of this community admire him for his courage, but they respectfully maintain a healthy distance. Pegeen Mike and Widow Quin, however, hold no such reservations as they plot to monopolize this fascinating newcomer. Christy, amazed and overwhelmed by their attitude, submits to their wily charms as each tries to accommodate him to her particular mould. They become the working force behind his transformation, as, taking him out of the 'ditch' and placing him on the road to freedom, they change him from a sorrowful, timid and dominated reject into a happy, confident and dominant wanderer. Thus, it may be argued, that just as Christy Mahon owes his mere existence to a woman, he depends largely upon these two female characters for his emotional growth and eventual self-awareness.

These two domineering female personalities waste no time in starting to put their plan into effect. Pegeen Mike, a vivacious young girl, is eager for an emotional involvement -

rather than the proposed materialistic union with a local farmer, Shawn O'Keogh - which she may use as a vehicle to escape her mundane existence. Meanwhile, Widow Quin, an older, more realistic and experienced woman, exploits her knowledge of life to beguile the gullible lad. In their relationship with Christy, Pegeen underlines much of the seriousness and tragedy of this 'piece of life', and Widow Quin, although she cannot be regarded as a stock comic figure, provides much of the comedy.

An investigation of the different worlds Pegeen Mike and Widow Quin offer in their bid for the newcomer, which reveals their influence upon him, will form the core of this study. Firstly, however, let us place each woman in her context by examining briefly her relationship with the other characters, various opinions expressed, and the rivals' reaction to each other. This survey should enrich our knowledge and understanding of each character and give us a firm basis upon which to undertake our exploration into the structure of their worlds. Subsequently, bearing all this information in mind, we shall be in a position to specify more precisely how each woman contributes to Christy's development. His natural defiance, and yet willingness, to be shaped by these female characters stresses the delicate balance between their two approaches.

Synge describes Pegeen, in the stage directions, as a "wild-looking but fine girl of about twenty" (107). Maybe he had in mind a "wild-looking but beautiful girl" who "was kneeling on the

hearth talking loudly to the men"⁽¹⁴⁾, whom he had met in an inn in Kilronan, when he conceived this portrayal. Certainly, Pegeen has the reputation of being "a fine, hardy girl" who "would knock the head of two men in the place" (110). The young girls regard her with a mixture of fear and spite as Sara points out when Christy is friendless: "Ask Pegeen to aid you. Her like does often change" (158). Pegeen, "the divil's daughter" (148), who treats even her father as an equal, communicates, through her nightmarish delight in violent deeds and her "divil's own temper" (136), both her frustration within this restrictive community and her longing to break forth from it and establish her own individuality. Evidently, her brusque, direct and harsh manner reveals not only a strangely commanding authority, but also a rebellious streak. Although her father positively defines her role as a woman in the midst of her turbulent love-affair, the villagers recognize that such a headstrong girl may try and realize herself through a romantic escapade. For this reason, Michael James is so happy when he has the dispensation for her marriage to Shawn in his hands, as he dreads, like Father Reilly, the "'young gaffer who'd capsize the stars'" (154). Christy, "a dirty tramp from the highways of the world" (155) would, according to Shawn, be "a queer kind to bring into a decent quiet household with the like of Pegeen Mike" (116). Pegeen's implicit 'decency' somehow assures the local inhabitants that, in spite of her wild fancy, she is bound by their values and will not abandon them. The fierce determination with which Pegeen rejects the

(14) J.M. Synge, The Aran Islands, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980, p.124

imposter confirms their belief that she is, in their eyes, a basically 'sensible' person, and they are as prepared to protect their impulsive leader as they are to defend themselves against this fraudulent intruder. When Padriac Colum suggested that Pegeen "would have stood by her man when he was attacked by a crowd", Synge pointed out that Pegeen needed to be acted seventy times before the actress alone could begin to understand the subtleties of her character⁽¹⁵⁾. She is an invaluable member of the community as she embodies its dreams and frustrations as well as its everyday reality. Colum failed to grasp the spirit of the villagers whose only fear had been that she might actually fulfil their dreams by responding rather to the instinctive cry of her heart than to their rationality. Equally, once the "decent quiet household" is restored, they themselves are incapable of perceiving that Pegeen's experience may have changed her outlook. Even though she does not actually leave them, she discloses, in her rejection of her symbol of repression, Shawn O'Keogh, that she has inwardly liberated herself.

Despite Synge's comment, we feel that the characters believe they are able to relate to Pegeen's tangible situation much more easily than they can to the subtleties of Widow Quin's mind. She is first mentioned before her entry by Michael James when he promises Christy "every living Christian is a bona fide saving one widow alone" (112). Christy obviously remembers this remark as he later says apologetically to Pegeen: "Didn't himself say

(15) David H. Greene & Edward M. Stephens, op. cit., p. 248

there were only bona fides living in this place?" (132). On the surface the local people do not appear to approve of Widow Quin since she lives outside their established norms. Susan Brady suggests "all dread her here" (131). Shawn, however, a true representative of the rational moral tone of the community, chooses her not only to act as chaperon to Pegeen, but also to help him dispose of Christy, even though the widow may be considered wicked and amoral. Although she appears to play the role of the typical inquisitive widow of comedy, there is a profundity to her character which is difficult to grasp. For this reason, the opinions concerning her are most definitely ambivalent: while she is apparently untrustworthy, she is the ideal shoulder to cry upon. She is treated with a mixture of admiration and scorn: she committed a "sneaky" murder which won "small glory with the boys itself" (123), but, at the same time, she is raised to heroic stature by the local girls on account of this crime. The older residents gingerly, and, at times, suspiciously, relate to her as an equal, while the young girls rather envy her unique position and experience. Behind her back they all consider Widow Quin rather an evil specimen, but in her presence their attitude changes and the characters seem to be completely controlled by this powerful, and even admirable, woman.

Thus, within the context of the village community, Pegeen, a central figure, may be seen more as the insider and Widow Quin more as the outsider. Despite their difference in age, both are formidable individuals who exert a dominating influence. It is therefore natural that a spirit of competition should exist

between them. Their rivalry reaches a focal point as each attempts to appropriate the apparent father slayer and their criticism of each other not only discloses certain truths about the other woman, but also reflects their own character.

Pegeen demonstratively expresses her attitude towards Widow Quin in their first encounter when Widow Quin declares, "gasping with the rage [she] had racing the hill beyond to look on his face" (123), that she has been sent to take Christy to stay with her. Pegeen never doubts the widow's real motive for a moment and this scene exemplifies beautifully the combination of passionate seriousness and comedy bordering on farce which so enlivens the entire work. Even before Widow Quin enters, Pegeen warns Christy: "let on to be sleepy, for if she found you were such a warrant to talk, she'd be stringing gabble till the dawn of day" (121). We may doubt the authenticity of this trait since Widow Quin's conversations with Christy are almost always brief. It is perhaps more a demonstration of Pegeen's vehement desire to protect her find. Her covetous jealousy is notable throughout the harangue. Her shameless, disrespectful and even, at times, incomprehensible attack upon Widow Quin's personal morals and filth not only illustrates her treacherous and coarse fighting spirit but also mirrors her own restrictive outlook. (It is worth noting that her accusation of Widow Quin having "reared a black ram at [her] own breast" (123) was one of the 'jots and tittles' that Synge agreed to remove during the rehearsals

of The Playboy)⁽¹⁶⁾. Her contemptuous analysis of Widow Quin's murderous act exposes the discrepancy in her mind between "a gallous story and a dirty deed" (161). She reveals clearly how she treats those who attempt to counter her expectations as Christy sadly recalls later: "and now she'll be turning again, and speaking hard words to me, like an old woman with a spavindy ass she'd have, urging on a hill" (142). Her behaviour in this episode inspires a masterful portrayal of her determined, rebellious, yet conflictive, character. She projects her innate principles, her dreams and her limitations, thereby providing a measuring stick by which to judge her conduct throughout the work.

Ironically, Widow Quin seems to play an almost passive role in this telling episode. She does, however, punctuate Pegeen's impetuosity with short and truthful statements, as she confirms, for example, the strength of Pegeen's bitter temper: "Do you hear the way she'll be rating at your own self when a week is by" (124). She warns Christy: "right torment will await you here if you go romancing with her like" (124). Although this appears to go unheard, it offers a possible clue to the development of the plot. This more tolerant woman is amused, rather than offended, by her rival's savage depreciation. Her gentle mockery of Pegeen as a girl "who'd go helter-skeltering after any man would let you wink upon the road" (123) subtly deflects attention from her own fascination. Her experience places her in an advantageous position and she realizes she may gain more by following another line of attack.

⁽¹⁶⁾ David H. Greene & Edward M. Stephens, op. cit., p. 235

Apparently satisfied to be dominated, she, therefore, combats Pegeen's ferocity by presenting a calm front. She does, however, indicate, in her parting remark, when she betrays Pegeen's secret that she is about to be married, that she should not be crossed. Thus, Pegeen spontaneously reveals her own personality through her interaction with Widow Quin, whereas the widow is much more careful. Her meaningful comments suggest that she, unlike Pegeen, is not prepared to place her cards on the table at this stage. It is interesting to note that, apart from this episode, the rivals seldom face each other. The fight comes full-circle in Christy's mind at the end when he turns on Widow Quin stating: "You're jealous, is it, of her wedding me?" (160). Christy can only see the widow's attempt to help him, ironically, as an expression of her defeat.

These opinions provide an exciting background upon which to base this study. Christy is intrigued by the two women. The voice of experience coolly counteracts the violent spontaneity of youth. The world of illusions and adventure is an alluring contrast with the mundane society. Christy is caught between Pegeen's seductive wildness and Widow Quin's frank, if unconventional, stability and these "fine women" offer many possibilities. New and previously unknown doors are opened to him, and, as each woman stimulates his growing vanity, he feels compulsively drawn into their company.

Christy enthusiastically walks through these doors with curiosity. An entirely novel and magical world rises before him

as he becomes involved with these two enchantresses who capture his unbridled imagination. Pegeen, on the one hand, may make the newcomer feel at ease as they have many points in common. We may consider them frustrated adventurers who are inhibited by a repressive upbringing. The reader may therefore perceive a resemblance in their moral outlook. Each wishes to monopolize the other as an uncommitted party, but their interpretation of this precept differs somewhat. Pegeen dishonestly satisfies Christy's uncertainty with a mocking rhetorical question: "What would I want wedding so young?" (119). Christy, meanwhile, has the utmost difficulty convincing Pegeen that she is his only girl. His failure to dispute Pegeen's attack upon Widow Quin implicitly suggests he shares her principles, and we notice that his description of his father partially confirms this idea. He offers no resistance to Pegeen at first as he is overjoyed to find "decent people and a kindly woman" (119) and is amusingly proud of his new position as pot-boy. Later, he forms his own opinion. Old Mahon's later description of Christy's reticence and Christy's own elaboration upon his exploit in Act II emphasize the immeasurable significance of Pegeen's gesture of approval as she offers him "peace in this place it's near time a fine lad the like of you should have your good share of the earth" (121).

Also, although Pegeen disapproves of Christy's negative attitude towards his father, she does, nevertheless, sympathize with his fear. This ambivalence of feeling springs from the fact that they

are both considered "orphans". The lack of maternal love makes them particularly receptive to any hint of endearment. This conflict is stressed in Synge's other comedies as well. In The Tinker's Wedding, a rich tinker, Jaunting Jim, wins Sara Casey's heart with his compliment. Sara, who was kidnapped from her mother's side under false pretences, gullibly believes she really is "the Beauty of Ballinacree" (38) even though her mate claims that is more the kind of "name they do be putting on the horses they have below racing in Arklow" (37). Similarly, Nora Burke, in The Shadow of the Glen, is obsessed by the memory of Patch Darcy, who would "always look in here and he passing up and passing down" until he died (20). This display of personal affection, which contrasts so sharply with their sterile every-day reality, is exaggerated out of all proportion as the characters dream of a world full of warmth and tenderness to which they may escape. The young couple's love-scene in The Playboy, provides an excellent example of this tendency. They do, however, submerge themselves in this romantic illusion of intimacy for different reasons. While Christy envelops himself in a new emotional experience, Pegeen, like Nora Burke and Sara Casey, uses this means to escape her tedious life. She hopes she may discover her true identity within this fantasy. Her reluctance to commit herself to this romance illustrates the depth of her search. She explores this new territory methodically before taking any decision. Even though she has outwardly revealed her fascination for Christy from the beginning, Christy has to use all his persuasive charms

to convince her to join him within the relationship: "If the mitred bishops seen you that time they'd ... be straining the bars of Paradise to lay eyes on the Lady Helen of Troy" (152). This moment of conquest reflects a subtle balance between the expectations of each adventurer as Pegeen finally decides to confine her search for identity to this alien world and Christy wins her heart. The couple stretch out their arms to each other almost in a state of hallucination. The severity with which they attack each threat to their idyllic love emphasizes the importance they attach to this precarious situation. (

This peak of harmony could not have been reached, however, without a considerable amount of groundwork. Pegeen constructs this fantasy world astutely. She implicitly demands that Christy should embody certain characteristics in order to make this dream a conceivable possibility. Firstly, she needs exclusive possession of her accomplice as her moral to her invented murder story indicates: "What's to hinder you staying, except the widow woman or the young girls would inveigle you off?" (135). Secondly, she is intrigued not only by Christy's refreshing new blood, but also by the nature of his apparent crime. She has already disclosed her attraction for shocking criminals in her stories of Daneen Sullivan and Marcus Quin (108). Nora Burke admired men like "Patch Darcy, God spare his soul, who would ... run from this to the city of Dublin, and never catch his breath" (24). The miraculous, and somewhat mysterious, feats of men appeal to the young, entrapped mind. Pegeen is overwhelmed by Christy's

bravery and his success at the sports. Thus, when Widow Quin suggests that she and Christy are similar since they are both murderers, Pegeen is quick to clarify the discrepancy between a mere case of tetanus poisoning and Christy's 'gallous' story: "I just riz the loy and let fall the edge of it on the ridge of his skull and he went down at my feet like an empty sack" (115). Thirdly, this fantastic structure is enhanced by Pegeen's fiery and brooding imagination. In order to comply with her romantic image her ideal companion should possess a strange and mysterious temperament: "the poets are your like, fine fiery fellows with great rages when their temper's roused" (119). She mockingly establishes his nobility by marking the distinction of his "small feet" (119); she inflates his self-image by suggesting he is a descendant of the great Irish Mahons and even raises him, amusingly, to regal stature, positive that he "should have been living the like of a king of Norway or the Eastern world" (120). She convinces Christy at this moment just as audaciously as he persuades her later on when he compares her to the "Lady Helen of Troy" (152). Her fabrication of this fantasy world involves them both in an unrealistic experience as she feverishly imagines herself "a great hand coaxing bailiffs, or coining funny nicknames for the stars of night" (152) and Christy conceives her as "an angel's lamp to me from this out, and I abroad in the darkness spearing salmons in the Owen or the Carrowmore" (152). Her lifetime dream of being "tempted often to go sailing the sea till I'd marry a Jew-man with ten kegs of gold" (153) also discloses her

hankering for adventure in an alien and outlandish context. Both Sara Casey and Nora Burke express similar approaches towards an escape from their world of drudgery as the former imagines her life with a rich tinker, and the latter with a town farmer, Michael Dara. Finally, Christy's conception of loneliness leads Pegeen to make a thorough and curiously thoughtful examination of the topic. She concludes it is quite beyond her comprehension and it, therefore, serves to reaffirm the worthiness of his collocation in a slightly magical and mysterious sphere: "it's a story I'm not understanding at all why you'd be worse than another, Christy Mahon, and you a fine lad with the great savagery to destroy your da" (134).

Pegeen creates this world, knowingly, upon a false assumption since she lies to Christy about her forthcoming marriage. Christy had also quite consciously deceived her when, after reflection, he asserted he had buried his father. Since Christy develops so successfully upon "the power of the lie" (158), it is interesting to observe their distinctive reactions to deception. When Christy realizes that Pegeen is in fact Shawn's fiancée, he turns a blind eye. He is astonished when Pegeen reveals that her murder story is not true, but bears no grudge against her since he is so elated to discover that he does not have to leave. Pegeen, however, cannot understand such a human weakness in another person and retaliates maliciously, as we see, to Christy's treason. Almost at once she feels her integrity and respectability are being threatened: "for I think bad the world should see me raging for a Munster liar and the fool of men" (157). Her dream world comes

crashing down as she realizes her hero is none other than a normal human being: a treacherous liar, a frightened coward, a coaxing imposter and a fool. Similarly, the united reaction to Christy's deceit makes him aware that he is among "the fools of the earth" (159). The lie has given Christy self-confidence and shows how unprepared Pegeen is to step outside her context. Christy somehow accepts the irrelevance of these deceptions, whereas Pegeen's misguided pride leads her to an act of savagery beyond her control. The reader, who has been lulled into a fable world of mock violence, is awakened with a start as Synge forces us to face the violent reality of his people.

In this respect, Pegeen illustrates how she represents the community voice. Synge tells the story in The Aran Islands of a man who, having killed his father, was hidden by the islanders, despite a reward, - we note their opposition to the law throughout the play - until he could be safely shipped to America. "This impulse to protect the criminal is universal in the west", he continues, "if a man has killed his father, and is already sick and broken with remorse there is no reason why he should be dragged away and killed by the law"⁽¹⁷⁾. This partly justifies the villagers' behaviour towards Christy when they discover the truth. Although this savage breed respects courage, there is an aura of mystery surrounding Christy's presence which makes him an object of suspicion and they cannot fully accept him, as Michael James points out: "You'd be making him a son to me and he wet and

⁽¹⁷⁾ J.M. Synge, *The Aran Islands*, pp. 62-63

crusted with his father's blood?" (154). His father's appearance corroborates this reticence. Their welcoming hospitality is thrown back at them and Pegeen shows her true colours as she attempts to defend not only herself but also the community from losing face. She seems to have succeeded but is tragically the victim. The drinkers are happy to regain their 'quietness', but there can be no such consolation for Pegeen.

Pegeen offers Christy an emotional and physical anchor as he struggles to gain his bearings. His position in the inn gives him a feeling of security even though Pegeen dominates him cruelly, always reminding him of his duty: "Lay down that switch and throw some sods on the fire. You're pot-boy in this place, and I'll not have you mitch off from us now" (134). The thought of being alone again still frightens Christy towards the end of the play: "And I must go back into my torment is it, or run off like a vagabond straying through the Unions ..." (158). In the 'shebeen' the exterior darkness to which he was so accustomed slowly converts into a sparkling radiance as he discovers love. Pegeen is forever present in his emotions and therefore influences his every movement, thought or fear. He had dreamed of lifting anchor and sailing away. However, he finally realizes the only way he can leave the port is by abandoning his anchor.

The pull of Pegeen's home port is as strong as her desire to sail away and the endless conflict between her two admirers stresses this point as well as adding another dimension to the structure of her world. She stands between Christy's world of freedom and

adventure and the rational, conventional existence of Shawn O'Keogh. This may be so well observed in Shawn's sorrowful comment that he is "a poor scholar with middling faculties to coin a lie, so I'll tell you the truth" (136). Earlier Christy had confessed to Pegeen: "I'm slow at learning, a middling scholar only" (113). He, nevertheless, tells a lie and wins Pegeen. Pegeen realizes Shawn's materialism offers little chance of romance just as Michael James would prefer "gallant little swearers" to "puny weeds" (156) for grandchildren. Pegeen's continual rejection of Shawn allows Christy to grow self-confident, while Shawn quietly retires into his corner of respectability and cowardice. Although Pegeen cannot handle the conflict these men symbolize, she manipulates their contrast as she emphatically reveals the defects in Shawn's personality and the qualities in Christy's character. It is not, therefore, surprising that Shawn serves as a 'punching bag' at the end when Christy bites him and Pegeen boxes his ears. He is the representative of the world they both aspired to avoid. Christy manages to transcend it, whereas Pegeen cannot quite meet the challenge. However, she does achieve a certain awareness which prevents her from sinking into the depths of a loveless, materialistic union. At the end the reader perceives she has really learnt the difference between "a gallous story and a dirty deed" (161). In contrast to Mary Doul in The Well of the Saints who hides behind her blindness, and both Sara Casey and Nora Burke who are portrayed as triumphant in their abortive escape, Pegeen will consciously face the

consequences of her own shortcomings within her surroundings.

Widow Quin, on the other hand, is an independent individual, whose own values and attitudes form the structure of her world. She is an honest and openminded person who has a keen sense of humour. She is as fascinated by this intriguing newcomer as everyone else and therefore offers him her companionship without reservation from the start. She quite plainly expresses her interest in him: "I'm your like and it's for that I'm taking a fancy to you" (142). This frankness underlines her self-confidence and she is evidently content with her own image.

It would therefore be quite foreign to her nature to entertain any notion of a romantic ideal, especially since there are so many alternatives within a conceivable reality. The widow, so aware of Christy's vulnerability, sets out to conquer him, on her terms, by taking advantage of actual situations which are presented before her. With amusement she pretends to admire his bravery and allows him to believe in his own grandeur without maligning him. Since she seems to doubt the veracity of his tale she gently mocks him, delighting in his innocence, and bursts out laughing, without passing any harsh judgement, when she learns the truth. From her realistic viewpoint Christy was as unprepared to commit such a deed as he is to recognize the sheer audacity of his deception. Widow Quin kindly tries to make him snap out of his romantic illusion which blinds him from the truth: "There's poetry talk for a girl you'd see itching and scratching, and she

with a stale stink of poteen on her from selling in the shop" (121). The implication is clear: she apparently judges by what she sees rather than by what she is told. This outlook may be furthered illustrated as she gives Christy the opportunity to prove himself not only to her but to the whole community as she enters him for the sports. His visible victory provides Widow Quin with a clue to his potential: he may still attain, like herself, immortal status among the "penny poets" (122) as a courageous being. The irony in this remark is unavoidable as she at once appeals to Christy's imaginary dream world, while only presenting a perhaps rather degrading fact.

This subtle balance between the real and ideal could only be suggested by a woman with experience in life. Not only does she know how to handle people, but she is also a capable woman who has succeeded in living alone. Firstly, she does not bear the burden of eternal suffering so common in the portrayal of other experienced female protagonists in Synge's work. Maurya, in Riders to the Sea, was born to suffer as the sea claims her father, her husband and her sons. Lavarcham, in Deirdre of the Sorrows, continually worries about Deirdre, and Mary Byrne in The Tinker's Wedding has taken to the bottle. Maurya's remark sums up the attitude of these women quite succinctly: "They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me ..." (12). While these characters accept their fate with resignation, Widow Quin takes advantage of her situation. Her husband and children may be buried, but she will not die with them. She may play the role of a mother or a mistress,

but never of a victim. The effect of this positive attitude is evident in Christy's final decision. How different she is from Synge's description of a widow in Connemara "who had seven children with hardly a shirt on their skins, and they with nothing to eat but the milk from one cow, and a handful of meal ..."(18).

Secondly, her marital status is important since it permits her the freedom to treat Christy promiscuously without causing offence. Her sexual frankness, indeed, neatly stresses the normality of this instinctive tendency among human beings. Synge noticed that the sexual instincts of the Aran islanders "are not weak..., but they are so subordinated to the instincts of the family that they rarely lead to irregularity ... (19)". Widow Quin not only broadens the scope of a human relationship for Christy by introducing this 'irregularity', but also evokes a natural warmth which Christy had never before encountered. In this sense she is certainly a "wiser comrade" for Christy than a young, flirtatious girl.

Thirdly, wisdom may only be acquired through experience as she emphasizes throughout the play, which provides a valuable contrast with Pegeen's immaturity. Widow Quin's knowledge of life reveals a significant insight as she teaches Christy, by her own example, to appreciate a person for his discernible qualities, rather than to condemn him on account of his defects. A contemptuous attitude is to her mind self-destroying, and both Christy and Pegeen witness the tragic repercussions of Pegeen's self-righteousness and negative

(18) J.M. Synge, In Connemara, Dublin, The Mercier Press, 1979, p.13

(19) J. M. Synge, The Aran Islands, p.123

scorn. Pegeen's disrespectful outrage tints Christy's vision, but, under Widow Quin's wiser tutelage, he discovers the meaningless of moral clothing.

"The women [of Inishmaan]", Synge declares, "are before conventionality, and share some of the liberal features that are thought peculiar to the women of Paris and New York"⁽²⁰⁾. Widow Quin seems to embody these 'liberal features' as she encourages freedom within a relationship and we may observe this openness in her rapport with Christy. Maybe Christy is startled by Widow Quin's frankness, but he thoroughly enjoys having the opportunity to act exactly as he wishes. He impressively tells Pegeen his story, for example, employing, perhaps unwittingly, her implicit values, as his guideline. Old Mahon's loathsome habit of snoring by "the dunghill" (120) is reminiscent of Pegeen's description of Widow Quin's "pigsty" (124). The contraposition of his father's drunkenness and debauchery with his own image as a "quiet, simple poor fellow" (120) should appeal to Pegeen. However, when he lavishly magnifies his deed for Widow Quin's benefit, the widow Casey, rather than his father's misbehaviour, becomes the motive for his apparent crime. Against the grotesque and repulsive physical aspect of the widow Casey he builds up his own image. No longer is he the simpleton; Christy outwits his father, splitting him "to the knob of his gullet" (130). Of course Widow Quin's gentle stimulation makes this development possible: "Don't be letting on to be shy, a fine, gamey,

⁽²⁰⁾ Ibid, p.121

treacherous lad the like of you" (129). The atmosphere in this narration is quite different. Here his weapons are the mere magnificence of his deed and his imaginative interpretation of the battle. Now, apparently, he has liberated himself not only from his father but also from a loveless marriage. Widow Quin is really entertained by all aspects of his tale.

She gains Christy's trust as a free-thinking individual, therefore, rather than as an object of his possible dreams. She subtly breaks down his barriers until he is unconsciously confiding his innermost secrets without any timidity. The fact that he naturally reveals his new sensation of love for Pegeen is a real indication of his confidence in this widow. In their scenes together, Christy always seems to place himself, or be placed by the widow, in an extreme position: he becomes alternatively a pompous fool, the cowering, frightened boy, or the frustrated desperate lover. Somehow the seriousness of his emotions is complemented by Widow Quin's mockery. Her lightheartedness and openmindedness place his feelings into perspective and her unconventionality permits the expression of these extremities. She compensates his fear by proposing a solution, and alleviates his despair by pointing out that there is the match of Pegeen "in every parish public" (159). He, she mockingly stresses, will even have "a double murder this time to be telling to the girls" (159).

Widow Quin hints that their similarities could deepen and enrich their friendship. They both, firstly, acquire a

ridiculous sense of heroism on account of their murderous tendency. This distinction as "heroes" and "outlandish lovers" (131) places them, secondly, outside the established norms of the community. Widow Quin underlines this likeness when she advises Christy: "You'll be doing like myself, I'm thinking, when I did destroy my man, for I'm above many's the day, odd times in great spirits, abroad in the sunshine ... and myself long years living alone" (142). Christy is intrigued as he has eventually found someone who is capable of comprehending the meaning of loneliness. This third resemblance illustrates her unconventionality and her power of comprehension. Christy is overcome by this affiliation and genuinely admires Widow Quin. However, he defies the freedom and understanding of her world, since he is still the slave of his fantasy romance.

The widow, despite her unconventionality, also protects Christy, and her zealous desire to acquire a new mate provokes her to play both a fraternal and a maternal role in this respect. Her heart is "softened" when she first realizes that Pegeen's "curiosity man" is "fitter to be saying your catechism than slaying your da" (122). She can fully sympathize with Old Mahon, his father, who felt Christy needed a "protector from the harshness of the world" (130). Her behaviour can hardly ever be described as altruistic, but she does act as Christy's confidante and even helps to promote his romance by disposing of his father twice. Nevertheless, either for materialistic reasons or out of sheer amusement, she typically turns these situations to her own advantage. Even when Christy rejects her offer of companionship, she promises to shield him if he will

aid her materially "the time you'll be master here" (143). She demonstrates her protective spirit without losing her self-interest.

Her sense of protection alone illustrates how amazingly sensitive she is to Christy's circumstances, even though her blunt presentation of reality lends to the portrayal of a hard woman. Her sensuousness may be clearly noted: "it's there yourself and me will have great times whispering and hugging" (142). As is common among people who live in close contact with their natural surroundings her five senses are fully alert: she relishes a piece of chicken as Christy relates his tale; her description of Pegeen displays her sense of smell; and her sensuous awareness shows the vitality of her other three senses. She will not, however, let herself become carried away openly by such feelings. Her later refusal to honour the agreement she makes with Christy demonstrates her pride as an individual who is not at the disposition of others' whims. Christy's despairing appeal to her for support is flatly brushed aside as she asserts: "I've tried a lot, God help me! And my share is done" (158). In this remark her underlying sensitivity bursts forth as she claims vengeance for Christy's rejection. She regrets her cruelty, however, as she unselfishly tries to help Christy escape. Thus, despite her seemingly hard exterior, this widow is both a goodnatured and sensitive person.

Finally, Widow Quin is incapable of sharing the 'quietness' so treasured by the local people. She offers Christy an active life, full of surprises, which may be so well observed in her manipulation of the characters which invariably clouds the issue at stake. Pegeen

tends to be a more passive, and even fatalistic, ponderer, who is only pushed into action when raised to an extremity of emotion. She is driven more by personal motivation, whereas Widow Quin, although she would never neglect herself, is intensely intrigued and amused by all aspects of the human dilemma. Widow Quin takes such a delight in life that she feels compelled to participate in every situation. Her speech at the end of Act II implies not only her own vital and commanding position, but also the variety of directions the drama may pursue. These alternatives attain greater significance through her wily power of deviation: "Well, if the worst comes in the end of all, it'll be great game to see there's none to pity him but a widow woman, the like of me, has buried her children and destroyed her man" (143). The key word is "game" which embodies Widow Quin's outlook upon life. Her lively commentary on the race holds the characters spellbound and under her control as she seals Old Mahon's destiny by prophesying Christy's eventual victory in every way: "He's fallen! He's mounted again! Faith, he's passing them all!" (148). These words epitomize Widow Quin's positive enjoyment of a moving world, which is so full of fun.

Although she does not actively participate in Christy's ultimate triumph, she had foreseen it at several stages throughout the play. Her revealing statements show her awareness of both the sorrow and the joy to come. Her experience and sensitivity allow her to detach herself from the dramatic 'piece of life' portrayed in The Playboy, whereas the other characters are somewhat blinkered by their

particular role within their limited world. Although she may be disillusioned, her whole world reverberates with a pulsating life-beat. Her past experience has merely taught her to make the most of life while she has the opportunity. Unlike Pegeen, who still dreams of the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, Widow Quin has accepted her lot and finds endless entertainment in her interaction with her fellow man. She realizes, in contrast to Nora Burke, Sara Casey and Pegeen Mike, that a change in material status or geographical location cannot exclude the drudgery of daily living. Pegeen's 'joie de vivre' is somewhat relative as she is as yet incapable of confronting the truth. She, therefore, plunges herself spontaneously into a tunnel of love which, tragically, makes her its victim, while Widow Quin has the commonsense to keep herself above ground and to seek satisfaction in tangible, everyday situations.

Thus, the rivals compose attractive and varied structures within which Christy may evolve. These two acquisitive and curious personalities are quick to spot his weaknesses and establish their advantage. At the beginning, Christy does not seem to evince any real desire to live and is a timorous introvert. However, as the female hold upon him increases, he not only becomes, under their ceaseless inspiration, more extrovert, but also displays a passion to succeed in every sphere of life. His likelihood of success grows as he engrosses himself in the worlds of Pegeen Mike and Widow Quin. An examination of their vitality, individual

ideas and verbal expression will help specify and clarify each woman's contribution to his change in character.

Pegeen's vital spirit is affected by her violently conflictive emotions. On the one hand, she is a rebellious young girl, who gladly exchanged her stability for an extravagant romantic experience with her heroic creation. Her world of romance so affects Christy that he builds up an almost absurd picture of his newfound love: "It's her like is fitting to be handling merchandise in the heavens above ..." (142). Christy assumes the intense and aggressive passion with which she guards her admirer. He not only shares her adventurous illusions, but also senses, through her intensity, a kindred spirit searching for tenderness and affection, which augments his fascination for this wild creature.

On the other hand, Pegeen's authoritative manner demonstrates her independence of thought and spirit. She never loses the initiative and wastes no time, for example, in applying her abrupt 'shock tactics' to extract the truth from Christy. He is as impressed by her fighting spirit as he is by her sense of command among the villagers, and automatically becomes her servant as he places his trust in her. The combination of her apparent self-confidence and her contagious spirit gives Christy the opportunity to express his pent-up feelings which he has seemingly carried within his breast all his life on the lonely hill-side. Pegeen therefore contributes to Christy's emotional growth from her standpoint within her community and through her desire to escape from it.

Pegeen's sentiments are, however, strangely ambivalent and behind this dominating exterior we may sense her uncertainty. While she immerses herself in her caprice, she appears to hesitate, as if aware she cannot realize the perception of greatness she so methodically infuses into her creation. This conflict is manifested in the extreme views she takes regarding Christy. At one moment she eagerly inflates his image of himself and subsequently so effectively deflates it that she appears to have utterly crushed him: "You told me that story six times since the dawn of day" (132). Christy is tremendously influenced and suffers agonizingly on account of her movement between these polarities, but perhaps learns more from this than from any other source. Her hysterical outrage towards the end, for example, when she tries to avenge her own humiliation finally awakens Christy from his nightmare as, turning on his father, he recognizes the power of his situation.

Her violent temper, although excessively harsh and severe at times, discloses both her spontaneity and her authenticity which make her an especially appealing person to Christy. He cannot avoid being influenced by such dynamic vitality, even though a certain fatalism haunts Pegeen's world. It is, surely, partly because Pegeen is so confused by her own complexities that she has to remain unhappily in her local habitat. Christy, fortunately, is unaware of this duality, and, only assuming her vivacious streak, gathers strength from her lively resourcefulness. While the construction takes off on a cloud of romantic oblivion, the uncertain and ambivalent constructor remains to mourn her loss.

Widow Quin is perhaps the only character in the play who lacks this sense of ambiguity. There is no confusion in her honest, openminded spirit of acceptance, which is conducive to freedom of thought and expression. Her tolerance implies, moreover, a spirit of justice and truth. Christy is affected by her straightforwardness, which contrasts so vividly with the world of Pegeen Mike, and he tends to overact. However, he gradually learns to measure and appreciate the widow's more balanced and tranquil spirit.

Widow Quin's knowledge of life allows her to mock the newcomer. The reader may be deceived by her spirit of amusement which makes her appear at times a cunning, rather than an honest, person. Her delight in the mistakes of others is rather a reflection of her joy for life. This stimulating embodiment of life encourages Christy to consider his existence in a positive manner. His exposure to Widow Quin's zestful and lively spirit underlines the ambivalence of Christy's position. He revels in the moment of outrageous glory as they wildly toast their farcical heroism, but he willingly submits to Pegeen's dry domination instantly. Dressed in Shawn's clothes he discloses a pompous delight and free abandon totally absent in his scenes with Pegeen. Yet, he still rejects his gleeful companion for his emotional ideal. Christy is, however, affected by Widow Quin's relish for life as we may note when he eventually learns, by her example, to face himself and enjoy his reflection. His glances at that distant light of truth reveal the influence not only of Widow Quin's forthrightness, openness

and honesty, but also her infinitesimal gusto for life.

Widow Quin's animation reaffirms for Christy the captivating spirit of Pegeen's inspiration. The widow's approach is more objective which helps Christy clarify his emotional bewilderment. Widow Quin mocks him hinting at a deeper and more realistic interpretation of life, while Pegeen bullies him impetuously into a false, yet enchanting, dream world. Just as Christy loves the freedom of the former's world, he abhors the latter's domesticating domination. However, he paradoxically rejects Widow Quin, whom he uses to promote his own image, while he continues to lust after Pegeen to satisfy this image. The widow's calm tolerance and experience beautifully balance the violent and spontaneous immaturity of her rival. Christy reaches a point of self-realization as a splendid combination of these two stimulating women's vital and enthusiastic spirits.

It was pointed out above that both Pegeen's authoritative manner and Widow Quin's calm acceptance of her fellowman reflect an independence as much of spirit as of thought. Both women not only revitalize Christy but also introduce several modes of thought which are essential to his growth.

Pegeen outlines her idea of the perfect man and Christy gains self-confidence as she convincingly places him within her definition. Also her charming amiability towards him not only helps him lose his fear of the female sex, but also arouses his interest to experience an intimate relationship. In this fashion she succeeds in accommodating Christy to meet her demands within her fantasy world.

Furthermore, Pegeen indicates that there is no need to suffer on account of having grown up within a one-parent family. When Christy bitterly asks her, "What would any be but odd men and they living lonesome in the world?" (134), she quietly retorts, "I'm not odd, and I'm my whole life with my father only" (134). These two comments reflect their distinctive approaches. Only at the end does Christy begin to realize the truth in Pegeen's outlook. Her influence upon his change in attitude is evident as he begins to recognize that he may live, without suffering, as an independent individual. He emerges out of his pool of wretched repression, manifesting the same rebellious spirit toward his parent that Pegeen had shown from the beginning, and really liberates himself.

Pegeen projects a set of values within which she wishes her hero to develop. Christy responds to these principles firstly because they seem basically to confirm his own unspoken beliefs, and, secondly, because their very definition creates a feeling of security. This precision contributes to Christy's eventual self-possession and she provides the essential foundation for the formation of his own authentic individuality. In fact, her determination and apparent decisiveness in all respects provide a continual support for Christy.

Pegeen has a profound effect upon Christy as an equally young, wild and impulsive adventurer, whereas Widow Quin's experience greatly deepens Christy's vision of life. Widow Quin is realistic and represents a voice of truth. When Christy

outgrows Pegeen's romantic dream world, he reflects the widow's influence as he begins to understand the foolishness of his love for Pegeen, and the narrowmindedness of the local people.

One of Christy's greatest achievements is precisely his final perception of this shallowness and therefore his incapability to remain among the villagers. At first he felt a sense of belonging he had never before experienced. However, Widow Quin's revelation that she herself is a partial outcast from this rural group, on account of her unconventionality, indicates to Christy the irrelevance of this membership. He is essentially an outsider and he partly assumes the widow's attitude in his final statement as he thanks the crowd for liberating him. He may now transcend their restrictive world and establish his own identity.

Widow Quin broadens her protégé's knowledge of life by introducing, for example, the fundamental idea of the beauty, normality and feasibility of a sexual relationship which was noticeably lacking in his first scene with Pegeen. He eagerly inherits her sensual warmth which adds depth and intimacy to his relationship with Pegeen.

Throughout the drama Widow Quin emphasizes the comical side of life. Although she is amused by her fellow man, she does paint a true picture of life, as she attempts to cultivate Christy's common-sense, delicately outlining the absurdity of his elevated position so as not to undermine his self-confidence. Christy is infected by her joy for life as the laughable aspect of the rules of the games of existence are displayed before him. He derisively

discloses this influence when he tells Shawn that he "can shake out hell's flags of welcome for my coming in two weeks or three, for I'm thinking Satan hasn't many have killed their da in Kerry and in Mayo too" (162).

Hence we may observe that Christy undergoes a startling metamorphosis as he is converted into a dominating, courageous, fiery and independent individual who is full of self-confidence and 'joie de vivre'. The women's vitality and ideas play an operative part in this process. However, it is doubtful whether he could have altered so much if he had not established a comprehensive verbal communication with them. They both admire his 'fine' words and he does perhaps contribute most to his own image through his eloquence. As Pegeen notices, he certainly possesses an innate lyricism, but it is so hidden that an outside force is required both to free it and give it form. The female protagonists' competence not only to invade this terrain but also to inspire and even change his expression to some extent should prove conclusively their effect upon him. Even without taking the uniqueness of Synge's theatrical language into account, this could become the topic of an interesting study in itself. At this stage it is only possible, unfortunately, to touch upon the principal ways in which the female influence upon Christy's speech may be detected.

When Christy arrives, his shyness and lack of self-esteem may be sensed partly through his short, precise sentences. He manages, however, to convey quite a lot in a brief remark, as, for example, when he says of the nature of his crime: "I had it in my

mind it was a different word and bigger" (113). The tigress, Pegeen, immediately pounces upon this comment and from this moment on her influence may be noted in Christy's speech. Her crafty manoeuvring, as she shrewdly hurts his pride, extracts the longest and most eloquent rendering from him since his entrance. She confirms that he has "as much talk and streelen, ... as Owen Roe O'Sullivan or the poets of Dingle Bay" (119). His subsequent comical, and yet poetical, exaggeration of his tale which becomes vitally alive before our eyes, reflects Pegeen's encouragement. He does, however, reveal a more convincing vein of eloquence when he woos Pegeen. At this point it is worth noting how Synge's stage directions, which may be lost on an audience, enrich our reading of the play, and further reveal Pegeen's influence upon Christy. In Act I Pegeen mockingly compliments Christy's good looks to which he responds: "(With a flash of delighted surprise) Is it me?" (118). In the love-scene Pegeen cannot resist mocking his fine language which "encourages" Christy. In turn Pegeen is "moved by his tone", and, as Christy speaks "with rapture", she eventually becomes overwhelmed by his lyricism as she replies "with real tenderness" (152). The actual tone of her speech, which the reader immediately understands, is fundamental in her portrayal. Perhaps for this reason an actress could have difficulties, as Synge mentioned, in presenting the subtleties of her character. Similarly, pauses and punctuation are essential, but we cannot afford to dedicate our time to this at the moment.

Just as Pegeen esteems "fine words", Christy Mahon fears her bitter tongue and he is influenced by her hostile and aggressive form of expression. By the time he confronts Shawn, he has captured Pegeen's fighting streak and terrifies his rival humourously. This "new arrogance" and "pugnacious" tone contrasts comically with Shawn's "imploring voice" (136). Christy confides to Widow Quin that Pegeen will be "speaking hard words to me" when she discovers his deception and therefore learns to appreciate such a rarity as a 'sweet voice' in Pegeen's expression. It is interesting to note that, just as Christy preserves his eloquence for Pegeen, she preserves her "sweetness" for him.

Christy appears to have inherited Pegeen's word choice and wild comparison which he incorporates so effectively into his own language. Pegeen introduces the verb 'torment' which Christy repeats in his moment of despair when he has been betrayed by his father: "What is it drives you to torment me here" (157). Christy plays with the adjective 'decent' which Shawn relates with Pegeen. At first he uses the term conventionally, but when he has to account for his riotous behaviour in Act II he seems purposefully to utilize it as a demonstration of his defiance: "I was making myself decent ... Wouldn't any wish to be decent in a place ..." (132). The final pause provides the clue to this interpretation. Pegeen, in an attack against Widow Quin's cleanliness, enunciates the word 'shift' which, combined with Shawn's appeal to Pegeen to remember his "drift of heifers" and her own early reference to the Eastern world,

lead up to Christy's famous line: "what'd I care if you brought me a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself maybe, from this place to the Eastern world" (160). This composition surely demonstrates Pegeen's penetrating influence upon Christy's utterance.

Secondly, she likens him, for example, to an Eastern king, and he later compares her to the "Lady Helen of Troy" (152) which displays both their creativity and a tint of a flight into the absurd. She also suggests that "a soft lad the like of you wouldn't slit the windpipe of a screeching sow" (114) and Christy reiterates this very image when depicting his father who would "put the fear of death into the banbhs and the screeching sows" (121).

However, Pegeen's vivid imagination inspires Christy as much as her vocabulary. Her passion for detailed, ugly and grotesque description, which frequently carries moral undertones, greatly stimulates Christy. His portrayal of the widow Casey must surely have been influenced by Pegeen's outburst against Widow Quin. Pegeen's fascination with violence permeates Christy's speech. His beautifully alliterative cry of horror embodies the effect of Pegeen's imagination: "And it's yourself will send me off to have a horny-fingered hangman hitching his bloody slip-knots at the butt of my ear?" (161).

Pegeen's speech is rhythmical and well-balanced. Her ability to convey outrageous extremes in a neat grammatical form shows her command of the language. Christy's language is generally more impulsive and disordered, but at the height of the love-scene

he demonstrates a remarkable organization and lyricism on a somewhat higher plane. Just as this discloses Christy's romantic abandon, Pegeen's more methodical personality may be observed in the way in which she weaves her ideas and images throughout the play. Her condemnation of Christy provides an excellent example of this tendency: "And to think of the coaxing glory we had given him, and he after doing nothing but hitting a soft blow and chasing northward in a sweat of fear" (157). The one constant in Christy's speech is the unforgettable 'loy'. Pegeen's creative language and her youthful imagination, therefore, is a continual source of inspiration for Christy's own decorative and attractive expression.

Widow Quin's utterance provides quite a contrast with the lyricism of the young dreamers. Since she expresses herself directly her vocabulary is more restricted. She insinuates more by exaggerating the reality she perceives, as, for example, in her description of Pegeen, than by using colourful images. However she avoids sounding malicious and perhaps partly her secret lies in her choice of adjectives and rich association of ideas, which not only reveal her depth of vision, but also brighten her realistic view with a humorous tinge. Just the image of the "itching" and "scratching" Pegeen is enough to exemplify this. At the end of the play Christy expresses himself without fear or hesitation, rather as Widow Quin would, but his statement lacks the subtle shades of her direct manner of speech: "... you're setting me now to think if it's a poor thing to be lonesome,

it's worse maybe go mixing with the fools of the earth" (159).

Although Widow Quin tends to listen more than to speak, her comments are invariably appropriate and flavoured with an amused and mocking tone. The reader can appreciate this much more than an audience since the shades of amusement noted in the stage directions must be especially difficult for an actress to portray. Perhaps this tone is another part of the secret to her goodnatured personality. The description of the widow Casey causes her to reflect: "There's maybe worse than a dry hearth and a widow woman and your glass at night. So you hit him then?" (130). Christy, as we have mentioned, assumes this tone by the end of the work. She relishes in her knowledge of Christy's deception and can hardly suppress her glee when Old Mahon describes his son, as, "clasping her hands", she prompts him: "Well, I never till this day heard tell of a man the like of that" (140). These gestures are as important to her portrayal as the tone. In Act I she "peers" at Christy and then looks at him "with half-amused curiosity" (122). The reader is at once aware of her intention. Her delightful examination of Old Mahon's head and the later wiping of her hands on her apron stress her remark: "You'd best be wary of mortified scalp" (139). Christy is influenced by these gestures as we may observe, for example, in the recounting of his deed in Act II.

Widow Quin's mocking tone may be more specifically noted in her use of diminutives. She disdains Shawn, for example, when she announces to Christy that "Shaneen has long speeches for to

tell you now" (135) - a beautifully rhythmical sentence incidentally. Her open amusement of the whole situation is disclosed from the beginning when she imitates Father Reilly: "'It isn't fitting', says the priesteen, 'to have his likeness lodging with an orphaned girl'. God save you, mister!" (122).

Widow Quin's choice of words, or lack of them, as the case may be, seems strangely to generate, at times, an undercurrent of possible inferences. She reflects a tremendous self-assurance as she disregards Pegeen's insults, for example. She shrewdly ignores her rival, thereby magnifying Pegeen's ridiculous stance. Verbally Pegeen dominates Christy harshly, whereas Widow Quin gains his respect more by implication, which underlines her self-confidence. Christy reveals this influence when he finally overcomes the idea of loneliness and in his love-scene with Pegeen when he sensitively imagines nights of physical and emotional tenderness. Christy possibly has in mind Widow Quin's earlier, and only, dream about "the gallant hairy fellows [who] are drifting beyond" (142). This is the only point at which the dramatist permits Widow Quin a moment of serious reflection. Her thoughts momentarily stray, as she envisages a possible life with the newcomer, which illustrates both a contemplative and creative mind.

However, she is too detached to tolerate such a world of make-believe, and for this reason, it appears that she takes the role of a stage manager. She points out, especially for an audience, the characteristics of the other personalities as they fall prey to her appetizing bait. With her carefully chosen

phrases she manipulates the characters and instills her joyful and lively outlook into the play. For this reason partly, she refuses to commit herself since she acts as a balance and as a constant source of optimism and fun and becomes the pivot of the comical side of the drama. Christy, perhaps unwittingly, assumes her frivolity at the end of the play when he asks his father: "Are you coming to be killed a third time or what ails you now?" (162). This remark underlines a fundamental lesson Christy has learnt from the widow, which forms part of his personality as he leaves this Mayo village: he now has the ability to laugh both at others and at himself. It seems almost impossible that such a change should have taken place. Now he is conscious of the real significance of his apparent crime and involvement with the local people. He may feel truly emancipated from this moment onwards.

Thus, Pegeen Mike and Widow Quin contribute greatly to both the enhancement and the creation of the final image of Christy Mahon. They base their construction on their own enticing foundations and revitalize the skeleton with their vivacious and full-bodied spirits. In general, Christy complies with their efforts to alter and form him and willingly absorbs their influence as he really knows little better. Each woman treats him rather like a puppet. At Pegeen's instigation he becomes aware of his own appearance, as his transformation begins: "I'll be growing fine from this day, the way I'll have a soft lovely skin on me and won't be the like of the clumsy young

fellows ..." (127). The young girls' presents are curiously piled upon this symbol (the looking-glass) of his growing vanity. As Widow Quin places a hat upon his head he reaches an extreme of pomposity, which is promptly deflated by his father's appearance. However, as his father removes his own hat, Christy is reminded of his daring deed. He wins the sports comically dressed as a jockey, but uses this pretext to propose to Pegeen. Widow Quin's attempt to disguise him helps him assert his individuality and confirm his status as a complete human being rather than a malleable puppet. He has responded as a puppet in some ways, but he has also defied certain influences such as Pegeen's attempt to domesticate him and Widow Quin's offer of an exciting life on the hill-side. Exclusive ownership is therefore denied, and the final structure is an outstanding balance of each woman's influence. Christy's most impressive manifestation of self-confidence and self-realization is disclosed through the growth and blossoming of his verbal expression. He does not simply reflect the distinctive flavourings of his creators' speech, but cleverly integrates their inspiration into his language until he expresses an individuality unconceivable at the beginning of the play. He had never had the opportunity before to communicate with his fellow man on such a trusting, intimate and open basis. When this barrier is broken down by his female protectors he may begin to evaluate the meaning of his own existence in a positive way. On account of these two dynamic sources of inspiration

he may now "go romancing through a romping lifetime" (163) instead of hiding behind "the little twigs and leaves" whenever he sees a red petticoat (140).

Needless to say, other factors do contribute to the development of our hero. Nevertheless, the skirted permeation is both fundamental and pre-eminent in this process, and, for this reason, indisputable. Although neither woman believes that Christy has the character to commit parricide, his overwhelming susceptibility and sense of isolation present an engrossing challenge. Pegeen, on the one hand, romantically begins to visualize a means to escape her stagnant everyday life as she nurtures and stimulates the mysterious young man. However, Christy, the image, gradually transplants Christy, the human being, in her mind, and she grows increasingly blind to his earthly qualities and independent shoots. On the other hand, Widow Quin bases her pursuit firmly within her daily existence and follows a more practical course. Her down-to-earth attitude and realistic outlook both emphasize the irrationality of Pegeen's dream world and make it more intriguing. While Pegeen passionately submerges herself in her creative fantasy, Widow Quin looks in upon the situation with an amused, and somewhat cynical, detachment.

Christy responds to their warmth and admiration - so opposed to the cold negation he had been accustomed to - by giving them his trust, and begins to demonstrate signs of their effect upon him as

the spontaneity and immaturity of Pegeen's wild illusion and the more experienced, humourous vision of Widow Quin awaken him from his sheltered and inhibited existence. No longer does he have to fear the scorning tongues. Now he may wallow in each new experience with an unabashed and natural exuberance he has hidden all his life. As he gains self-confidence, he openly expresses his compelling love for Pegeen, but he still retains a certain fascination for the vitally human and tolerant widow, who seems to understand him on both a social and an instinctive level. His assimilation of the outstanding attributes of each woman is astonishingly astute and rapid. In his moment of self-realization, his very reaction to the female protagonists, as well as his attitude and language, disclose their predominant role in his creation. This freshly animated, authoritative and self-possessed individual may cheerfully dispose of his influential advisers, but he cannot deny the debt he owes them. His triumphant departure poignantly counters Pegeen's tragic incapability to meet her perception of greatness and reveals the influence of the widow's insight into the meaning of life. Thus, while Pegeen's impulsiveness actually sets the match to this unquenchable and victorious flame, Widow Quin's plain commonsense adds the more durable and longer-burning logs to the fire.

It is difficult to imagine how such a metamorphosis could have taken place without the persistence and influence of these two dominating female personalities. In earlier versions of

the play, once Christy's deception had been discovered, he was banished from the community as a drivelling coward⁽²¹⁾. However, curiously, in the final draft, Christy is victorious. As we have realized through our study, Christy gains strength from the two women to overcome the indignation of the villagers and does not dissolve into a cowardly fool. This surely emphasizes the female infiltration. He may still be considered ambiguous and controversial in many ways, but he is, nevertheless, an intense and perceptive mixture of strangely opposing, and yet complementary, forces. By placing this absorbing female magnetism behind the male protagonist, Synge succeeds in creating the natural poise in this hero that his earlier heroines lacked. Their fate may almost be prophesied from the start on account of their portrayal and circumstances. However, Christy undergoes a total transformation as he incorporates his female supporters' personalities and encouraging influence into his being. It is lamentable, surely, that neither of these vivacious ladies could share his ultimate victory.

Synge was part of a definite theatrical movement which proposed to reawaken the national consciousness to its rich and glorious heritage, but he was more interested in portraying his countrymen as human beings. He buried himself among the Aran islanders, the people of Kerry and Connemara in order to capture the atmosphere of their world. Furthermore, as he states in the preface to The Playboy, he even listened through the floor-

⁽²¹⁾ David H. Greene & Edward M. Stephens, op.cit., p.253

boards of his Wicklow home to grasp the patterns of their speech and their imaginative spirit so that he could be as "rich and copious in his words and at the same time ... give the reality which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form" (103). His setting was therefore local, but his intention was truly universal. We may surely find the tragedy and fiery spirit of Pegeen Mike, the comedy and tremendous joy for living expressed by Widow Quin, and the romantic desire to escape from a dull routine, which pervades this work, as well as human weaknesses and ambivalences, reflected within our very selves. Synge masterfully and meticulously blends these elements into his male protagonist. The women's individual themes and motifs are woven into the very texture of the drama creating resounding climaxes throughout the work which profoundly affect the hero. The memorable tune of feminine inspiration recurs continually throughout this composition, and is largely responsible for the melodious unison present in the final magnificent and commanding crescendo. The harmony and significance of this powerful symphonic-like structure exist, therefore, for the moment and for all time. The profound female infiltration converts as much the work as its hero into an expression of universality.

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