

U.C.T.

THE WORKS

OF

J. M. SYNGE.

University of Cape Town

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THE S I S

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Sister Malachy McLaughlin

1970

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: C O N T E N T S :

Biographical Sketch	I.
Synge and the Irish Literary Renaissance	9
Prose	19
When the Moon Has set	48
Verse Plays	55
The Shadow of the Glen	96
Riders to the Sea	III
The Tinkers' Wedding:	139
The Well of the Saints:	157
The Playboy of the Western World	174
Deirdre of the Sorrows:	204
The Poems	230
C O N C L U S I O N	264

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF JOHN MILLINGTON SYNGE

Edmund John Millington Synge, born on 16th April, 1871 at Rathfarnham near Dublin, was the son of an Anglo-Irish Protestant barrister who died the following year leaving his widow to educate their four sons and one daughter, Annie. John was the youngest of the family, and so delicate that he had to abandon normal school for tuition at home. Much of his boyhood was spent out of doors, giving rise to an almost Wordsworthian passion for the countryside and a keen awareness of the diverse forms of life found there - birds, insects, fish, and the small, shy creatures of the woods. He managed a fair menagerie of pets at his home, and found his deepest joy in wandering "at the dawn of night with every nerve stiff and strained with expectation (that) gives me a singular acquaintance with the essences of the world." (1)

From 1888 to 1892 Synge attended Trinity College, Dublin. Not a very assiduous student, he discovered in himself a preference for music, particularly the violin, and seriously entertained the idea of becoming a professional musician. At the same time he was steeping himself in Irish history to an extent that quite overshadowed any other academic interest. It is no slight tribute to his intellect that he attained a degree in spite of these tempting distractions.

In 1893 he left Ireland for Germany to explore his musical ability, lodging with a family of musicians who promised him every encouragement and assistance. In the intervals between practising and performances, he filled several notebooks with poems and snatches of poems; outlined a play which has not survived in its entirety but which

contained indications of future lines of thought; discovered that his University accomplishments were inferior to those of his German fellow-students, and also that his musical talent was insufficient for a career. He was too shy for solo performances, and inadequate as a composer. He turned from Germany and music to Paris and literature.

In Paris he lodged with simple working people, whom he helped, when possible, with great simplicity and pleasure. He quickly acquired a knowledge of French, attended lectures at the Sorbonne, including a course on Ancient Irish Civilisation, taught English, and wrote optimistically to his mother and a companion of his youth, Cherry Matheson, whom he hoped to marry. A short visit to Ireland relieved this crowded schedule, but to his proposal of marriage, Cherry's answer was a resolute "No." Disconsolate, Synge returned to the Continent for a brief tour of Italy, during which he studied Italian and began reading Petrarch of whose writings he would later make a completely original translation.

It was now October, 1896. A copy of THE IMITATION OF CHRIST by Thomas à Kempis engrossed his attention for four months of daily intensive reading and formed the inspiration of a literary fragment - A RABELAISIAN RHAPSODY - in which à Kempis and Rabelais discuss their prospects in the next world with special concern for the concept of Hell. The piece is humorous with a touch of ribaldry, yet it shows that Synge was not unaffected by the message of THE IMITATION. In ETUDE MORBIDE, the second stage of his autobiographical writings (to be discussed later in this work) reference is again made to this spiritual handbook. Evidently it had made more than a passing impact. The year 1896 had a still richer experience in store. On December 21st, Synge met

W. B. Yeats and his friends, Lady Gregory and George Moore. The party arrived at the Corneille where Synge was staying, and in the ensuing talks, Yeats made his now famous suggestion "Go to the Aran Islands. Live as if you were one of the people. Express a life that has never been expressed." (1)

Accordingly Synge commenced a study of Irish Literature, with Yeats's own works as starting point. About the same time a Breton folklorist and writer, Anatole le Braz, delivered a lecture on Brittany, tracing vestiges of Celtic civilisation in the customs and language of that territory. Fired by his enthusiasm for this cause, Synge conceived a similar dream for the Aran Islands, and deepened his resolution to follow Yeats's counsel as soon as possible. In the autumn of 1897, he paid another visit to Dublin, but finding the city in a political turmoil, stayed only a few weeks preferring to return to France, study and personal peace. Synge had quite constructive opinions concerning politics, but did not choose to be involved in party squabbles. Uneasy at his flitting to and fro, his mother wrote to Robert, her eldest son, "I don't know what he is doing, but I believe he wants to be a reviewer of French literature." (2) She was mistaken, however, for at that time, he was absorbed in Irish and Celtic mythology, interrupted frequently by attacks of illness which were to impede his progress till the end of his days. Drafts of plays verses of poetry, the plan of a novel on the nursing profession, appear in the notebooks of early 1898, till on May 10th of that year, he landed on Innishmor, one of the Aran Islands that lace the entrance to Galway Bay. The people welcomed him, showed him the best house on the island as a lodging, and the six weeks he spent among them were full of

(1) J. M. SYNGE: Greene & Stephens p.61

(2) Ibid: p.72

novelty and linguistic profit. They ended with a significant event - a holiday at Coole Park as Lady Gregory's guest, the beginning of a happy and fruitful co-operation in the field of literature. From Coole Park he moved on to Wicklow, returning to Dublin on August 15th, whence after a chance meeting with Yeats and Maud Gonne he retired to his mother's house for a considerably long period, to her immense satisfaction.

In November he went again to France. He proposed marriage to a Miss Harding, whom he had met in Italy, but she refused. The following September he visited the islands for the second time, was delighted with the warmth of the welcome he received but stayed only a little while as he wanted to be back in France by November. He supported himself there by teaching English and writing articles for American and London periodicals. Reports that he lived in penury are of doubtful authenticity; if he did, it was from choice and not of necessity. A new and interesting occupation now was the editing of his notes on the islands for Yeats and Lady Gregory.

On his third visit to Aran, on September 11th, 1900, he met the "Herodotus" of the islands, Mr. Keating, the hedge schoolmaster with abundant stories and vivid imagination. On this return to Dublin his notebook bulged with folklore. France again, and a new play: WHEN THE MOON HAS SET, which he put by till the opportune time for publication.

The next trip to his mother did not bring her the usual joy owing to the deterioration in his health. He could endure only a week in the city of Dublin, and hastened to Coole Park for the summer of 1901, not only for the freshness

On December 4th of that same year, Synge met the IRISH LITERARY SOCIETY for the first time and the impression was a gloomy one indeed. The Society was in the doldrums and only a new and original dramatist could revive it. He had two completed plays to offer and another in the making. He had poems and prose, all in English. He decided to quit Paris and live in London. Lady Gregory wrote of him at this time "He was anxious to publish his book on Aran and those two plays."(1). He left Dublin for London on January 9th, 1903 and remained there till March 19th. She and Yeats were also in London then and eager to have Synge's talent recognised. Lady Gregory asked him to read his plays to a group which included John Masefield, G.K. Chesterton, Arthur Symons, Maud Gonne and Brinsley Johnson, a publisher. Symons and Johnson promised to read the MSS., and subsequently publish them, but they returned the papers in a few weeks, unpublished. The editor of THE SPEAKER, however, agreed to accept occasional articles from the new writer. Lady Gregory's next step was to invite the members of the Society to her rooms in Dublin, where she read for them Synge's THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN. They were struck by its novelty and at once volunteered to perform it. Fay, the producer, declared they would go into rehearsal immediately, and so indeed they did. He asked Synge too, to alter the ending of THE RIDERS a little so that they could produce it as well. Another play, THE WELL OF THE SAINTS, was commenced in May of this year. It was completed in May, 1904, after which Synge proceeded to Coole Park where Lady Gregory waited for his help with her new play, KINCORA, a folk history produced in 1905. Yeats had decided to publish RIDERS TO THE SEA in SAMHAIN, which he began in 1901 as the

(1) J.M. SYNGE. Greene and Stephens. p.132.

official organ of the Society. The MANCHESTER GUARDIAN likewise reviewed it favourably, thus supplying Synge with the first printed appreciation of any of his works. A surprise invitation from Yeats to join the Directorate of the Theatre gave Synge pause, but he accepted out of gratitude, although his health was giving continued cause for concern. By this acceptance he exposed himself to a realisation of the practical problems of the theatre, and learned that a successful stage play demands more than a catchy plot and brilliant exposition. This knowledge was of invaluable service to him and contributed to the perfection of THE PLAYBOY with which he was then engaged. It was completed by the end of 1906, and performed on 26th January, 1907. DEIRDRE OF THE SORROWS was in progress but suffered continual setbacks owing to his illness. A serious operation on May 4th threatened to be fatal, but by June the crisis was past. He wrote a farewell letter, however, lest death should take him unawares.

On his discharge from hospital he sought to regain strength at Coole Park, and was delighted to discuss DEIRDRE in detail with Yeats. He then astounded the latter by the announcement that he was going to Germany for a few months and, contrary to all advice, he did so. The journey proved pleasant, the welcome sincere, his former music-tutors rejoicing in their renewed acquaintance. But a cable on October 20th brought the news of his mother's unexpected death. His comment in a letter to Molly is enigmatic, but sorrow and a little remorse are there: "I am trying to be cheerful and to think happily of my poor old mother"(1

Returning to Dublin in November, Synge compelled himself to finish DEIRDRE even at the cost of omitting a full act.

(1). J.M. SYNGE: Greene & Stephens. p.295.

The turn of the year brought a fresh onset of his malady and on January 30th, 1909, he was readmitted to hospital. Three weeks later, when death was drawing near, he met it with the laconic reticence typical of his lifetime: "It is no use fighting death any more." Nor was it. It was the 24th February, 1909.

SYNGE AND THE IRISH LITERARY RENAISSANCE.

The Irish Literary Renaissance which occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century, was part of a national movement that affected not only the cultural, but the political and economic interests of the country as well, and indicated that an awakening to the potential importance of the nation was taking place. Geographically isolated and blighted by recurrent famines, internal wranglings and annual emigrations, Ireland had not shared with the Continent and England the happy excitement of the European Renaissance. Consequently, her literature had experienced no development. While drama flourished abroad, for example, she was still listening to her "bard" whose minstrelsy was little more than a vehicle for the communication of his own personality and rhetorical accomplishments; and to the politicians who sedated their hearers with doses of metaphor and flamboyant adjective. Ireland rejected Mystery Play, Morality Play, in fact, any play, for the theatre was the preserve of the aristocracy, took its standards from London, was perforce of purely English texture, and was merely wickèd entertainment. Ireland had no use for it. Fortunately, this attitude did not persist.

In 1883, the SOUTHWARK IRISH LITERARY SOCIETY, a cultural centre for Irish people living in London, invited W.B. Yeats to give an address on Irish literature. He complied, and by way of conclusion, proposed an ORIGINAL NIGHT, to give bashful writers, poets or dramatists an opportunity of revealing their talents and possibly joining the Society. Among those interested were George Moore, Douglas Hyde, John Todhunter, T.W. Rolleston, and of course Yeats himself. The immediate aim of the Society was the reproduction, either in Gaelic or in translation, of material left by Gaelic ancestors. Yeats undertook the founding of a similar group

in Dublin, in 1892, calling it the IRISH LITERARY SOCIETY, and aiming at the eventual establishment of an Irish theatre. He found ready followers for this enterprise in John O'Leary, John P. Taylor, Douglas Hyde again, Dr. Sigerson, Stopford Brooke and Standish O'Grady. Both societies ran smoothly from the outset, and early in 1893 Stopford Brooke delivered a thought-provoking lecture on THE NEED AND USE OF GETTING IRISH LITERATURE INTO THE ENGLISH TONGUE. This speech was virtually a manifesto of the Irish Literary Revival and drew three prominent men to its support. These were Count Plunkett, an ardent Sinn Féiner, Dr. Coffey, Head of the National University, and Ashe King, novelist and correspondent for the periodical TRUTH, whose sympathy would be invaluable when reporting criticisms and reviews.

The question now seemed to be: How to get Irish literature into the English tongue, and Douglas Hyde volunteered to do it. However, he had another dream, of paramount importance to which all else would be secondary. This was the restoration of Gaelic as official language of Ireland, and his first step was the establishment of THE GAELIC LEAGUE in 1893. He explained the methods, purpose and scope of the League in pamphlets, essays, stories, conferences - any media of communication as long as people were prodded into co-operation. But he had overlooked the inborn shrewdness of the Celt. He was urging the complete restoration of the Gaelic language in Ireland to the exclusion of any other tongue. His so attentive audience gazed at him with reverence as his eloquent pleadings poured over their heads and within those heads thoughts were revolving: "He's a fine speaker, this man, and a brilliant

orator, and there's nothing I like more than a bit of good talk And he's very much in earnest, I'm thinking. But now, do you consider this advice of his very wise ? Will this Gaelic - and how I love it, my own country's tongue ! - will it ever be an international language, through which our land can conduct its trade and ensure economic security ?" They sang his LOVE SONGS OF CONNAUGHT which he had collected so diligently at the Céilidhes, but committed themselves no further. Hyde noted their reaction and proceeded to his next step.

Taking the book of songs he translated them into English, giving two versions. For the first translation he used conventional English. This was an easy task, and also rewarding, for the songs lilted along as light as any leprachaun. For the second version he gave the most literal rendering possible, preserving the sentence form and idiom of the Gaelic while presenting the substance of the songs in English. The result was the blending known as Anglo-Irish, already existing as a kind of patois, but never used before as a medium for song or poem. The origin of this form is neatly summed up by the German philologist, A.G. van Hamel, in an article: ON ANGLO-IRISH SYNTAX. He relates back to the seventeenth century when "English was introduced into Ireland by a large number of English settlers, but after that, no immigration of importance took place. English did not spread among the common people of Ireland until recently, and even now it still has to force back the Gaelic, the old Celtic speech. The Irish people did not only experience great difficulties in trying to pronounce sounds very different from their own, but also in adopting

English idioms and constructions. Gaelic is a very idiomatic language, and it is but natural that the Irish should have begun speaking English by translating Gaelic phrases into English words." (1). This was written in 1912, hence one may conclude that Hyde's translations were even more exposed to "great difficulties" than the early twentieth-century speech would be. To Hyde's satisfaction, the Anglo-Irish version which he offered in 1893, was appreciated with unexpected perceptiveness. However, he did not pursue the fascinating experiment, for his first love, the promotion of official Gaelic, maintained her sovereignty. The concern of this work, however, is with the development of Anglo-Irish - the speech of the peasants of the west of Ireland where the Gaelic influence on English has been most retained.

The first writer to explore fully the use of Anglo-Irish in literature was Lady Gregory. The source of her interest was not the example of Douglas Hyde, as might be expected, but her personal experience with the peasants on her estate. In conversation with them she was struck by the natural poetry of their speech, and realised, quite separately from Hyde, that here was a fresh and powerful means of literary expression, as well as material worthy of a noble language.

CUCHULAIN OF NUIRTHEMME and GOES AND FIGHTING MEN were her beginnings. They were translations of heroic legend surrounding Finn and Cuchulain, and earned for her a splendid tribute from Yeats: "I think this is the best book that has ever come out of Ireland, for the stories it tells are a chief part of Ireland's gift to the imagination of the

(1.) Englische Studien: Band 45, p.273.

world - and it tells them perfectly for the first time. Lady Gregory has discovered a speech as beautiful as that of Morris, and a living speech into the bargain".(1) To compare the daily talk of working people with that of Pre-Raphaelite Morris was perhaps a little exuberant. Synge's compliment was sincere and more subdued: "Your Cuchulain", he wrote, "is part of my daily bread." Synge had been searching for the dialogue that would best express his reaction to the life of the countryfolk, and it seemed to him that Lady Gregory had found it. Later, it was from her saga collection that he formed his version of DEIRDRE, his only play to touch on legendary material.

Thus accepted by Yeats, Lady Gregory and Synge, did Anglo-Irish assert itself as an effective means of expression for plays dealing with Ireland and her people. It was the living language, and therefore interpreted the mind of the speakers as no other tongue could. This recognition of the value of Anglo-Irish was also a step towards the fulfillment of Yeats's desire - the establishment of a National Theatre. His collaborators, Lady Gregory, George Moore and Edward Martyn agreed with him that an Irish theatre must perform plays by Irish contributors and treating Irish matters. The four directors likewise believed in simplicity, naturalness, economy in acting and in setting; all of them deplored the "Stage-Irishman", an image which had grown to such uncontrollable proportions in America through the energies of Dion Boucicault. When, by unfortunate request, Boucicault productions were shown in Dublin, Synge's comment was: "It is to be regretted that

(1) Preface to CUCHULAIN OF MUIRTHEMME, by W.B. Yeats.

the absurdity of Boucicault's plots and pathos has gradually driven people of taste away from his plays." (1) Now, however, Yeats made it clear that he expected the Irish audience to be "uncorrupted and imaginative, trained to listen by its passion for oratory. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism." (2)

Yeats, Martyn, Moore and occasionally contributing playwrights such as Alice Milligan, Fr. McGinley, George Russell and James Cousins, produced various small plays in such numbers as to permit of arranged performances in London theatres. They had not ventured in Dublin yet. The success in England, however, suggested that they had nothing to lose, should Dublin not approve of their display, and it was decided to try the temper of an Irish audience as soon as possible. Under the auspices of the Irish Literary Society a series of Anglo-Irish plays was run in 1899, with such grace and assurance that the players felt that the time for the IRISH NATIONAL THEATRE had come. Accordingly the Society was planned, and in 1902, formally established. Two of the most popular early plays were Edward Martyn's HEATHER FIELD and Yeats's COUNTESS CATHLEEN. In October of the year 1902, a special number was added to the series - THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN by J.M. Synge. A new play by a new playwright, attended by old speculations Will it be accepted; will it be understood ?

It was the good fortune of the company to attract the attention of a wealthy Englishwoman, Miss Horniman. Deeply

(1) Letter to THE ACADEMY, giving impression of THE SHAUGHRAUN by D. Boucicault.

(2) From THE PROSPECTUS OF IRISH LIT. THEATRE, quoted by T.H. Henn.

interested in drama, her sympathy was roused by the determined efforts of this small group of writers and actors, and she promised them financial assistance. With Lady Gregory, the widow of a landowner of County Clare and a lady of keen business acumen; as one of their members, and Miss Horniman as benefactress, material problems were quickly removed.

The type of drama approved by this new theatre group was in part a revolt against the Ibsen-type drama, and in part also against the English commercial theatre of the previous two decades. Indeed, it was seen by the founders as a new regenerative force. Yeats declared: "We must make a theatre for ourselves and our friends, and for a few simple people who understand from sheer simplicity what we understand from scholarship and thought." (1). On the same theme Synge's preface to *THE PLAYBOY* says: "On the stage one must have reality, one must have joy; and that is why the modern intellectual drama has failed and people have grown sick of the false joy of the musical comedy, that has been given them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality." (2). Edward Martyn's criticism of the contemporary English theatre: "... the upholstered drawing-room like shapelessness of an English theatre, designed for the addled, over-fed audience, who loathe, above all things, any performance on the stage that would appeal to a lofty and aesthetic sense in humanity," is too

(1). Essay and Introductions by W.B. Yeats. P.166.

(2). J.M. Synge: Preface to *THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD*.

personally acrimonious to be of great critical value; nevertheless it carries the genuinity of his conviction, shared with his fellow workers, that the "first consideration is not materialism, but art." (1).

In March, 1903, Yeats delivered a lecture on THE REFORM OF THE THEATRE, emphasising that theatre was essentially an intellectual institution and deploring that commercialism should intrude on the ideal. His words were well received, and he left the next month for New York to open an Irish Literary Society there.

Miss Horniman was not only as good as her word; she excelled it. Hearing Yeats appeal for financial assistance after a splendid performance of THE KING'S THRESHOLD, she said simply: "I will give you a theatre" (2) And she did. A theatre, the old THEATRE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE in Abbey Street, built in 1820, had been burnt down some years later. The Mechanics' Institute acquired the site and included in their new premises a small concert hall. However, they were badgered by the Corporation Fire Department to execute some elaborate alterations which the Trustees could not afford, and the premises became practically derelict. Miss Horniman succeeded in acquiring part of the property which by additions from adjoining buildings, could be converted into a presentable theatre. That some of the City Morgue rooms were connected in the complex was often the subject of a gibe in years to come, especially after the production of a particularly gloomy play. But that was

(1).

cit. Ellis-Fermor, THE IRISH DRAMATIC MOVEMENT (1939)

P.27.

(2).

Ireland's Abbey Theatre by Lennox Robinson. P.40.

the merest bagatelle. They had a theatre, and of course, the obvious name would be: THE ABBEY THEATRE. In December 1904, the curtain rose for the first time in the new theatre, before a packed auditorium; seating accommodation was 536. On the bill of popular fare was again a new piece, which had seen stormy weather during rehearsals: THE WELL OF THE SAINTS by J.M. Synge. How would it be received?

With the Abbey Theatre in existence, and audience in the homeland secured, one may say that the Irish Literary Renaissance is assured. As Synge is the playwright with whom we are here concerned, I propose to leave the Renaissance theme at this point and devote attention to the specific niche which Synge occupied in its gallery of heroes and heroines.

Synge's genius differed entirely from that of Yeats whom he admired almost to veneration. While Yeats was eager to rouse the nation to an appreciation of Ireland's past glories in history, in myth, in culture of any form, Synge cared little for the legendary greatness and epic grandeur of which few traces remained in the early twentieth century. The "Celtic Twilight" interested him not at all when there were realities such as life in Wicklow, Kerry, Connemara or the Aran Islands to be investigated. The politics in which Yeats and the beautiful Maud Gonne were so immersed seemed less important in his eyes than the unspoiled, unsophisticated, yet immensely wise folk he met on his wandering, searching pilgrimages throughout the length and breadth of Ireland. He sought to catch a

light from the imagination he discovered among them and which he described as "fiery, magnificent and tender". His exposition of the life of the Irish peasant differs from previous efforts made by other writers to describe it; they wrote from observation only, he had lived among the people and as they themselves lived, not as a clinical social worker, but as one human, thinking, affectionate person among peers. Seen against the background of country interests and homes, the words of Anatole le Braz concerning the personality of Synge are highly credible:

"La figure de Synge est typique: une tête longue, un peu carrée, aux traits tourments, et, par moments, quasi douloureux pas belle, mais singulièrement expressive. Il se montre d'une courtoisie charmante, pleine d'aménité, de douceur, légèrement timide. L'intelligence est ouverte, accueillante." (1).

Detailed study of each of his literary productions follows in this work.

(1) Anatole le Braz: cit. Bourgeois.

THE PROSE WORKS OF J.M. SYNGE.

The non-dramatic works of J.M. Synge (1) form an indispensable companion volume to the Plays, Poems and Drama, because they reveal the man behind the artist. From episodes of childhood, boyhood, adolescence and maturity seen against the backdrop of life in general, Synge concludes that "every life is a symphony" from which the artist selects the instruments best suited to him, and using them with skill and reverence, presents to the world the fruit of his peculiar genius. Art, he maintains, testifies to the cosmic in man. It rests on emotions that endure from primitive creation, through present civilizations, on to a future envisaged under many several forms according to the creative artist's vision. Therefore art, based on emotion, has the universality of natural force. A man's life is worthwhile, only when, propelled from within by this force, he fulfils his highest potentialities.

To fulfil his own highest potentialities, Synge felt obliged to cut loose from the conventionalism of his home and seek expansion and maturity on the Continent. Paradoxically, he had to return to Ireland to realise his dream. Continental experience hardened, broadened, educated and "weathered" him, but failed to penetrate the defensive barrier he had unconsciously erected around the core of his personality. It needed the plain, local mood of plain people to do that. Wicklow, West Kerry, Connemara and the Aran Islands contributed to the freeing of his spirit and to the expression of this freedom in the literature of his plays, poems and prose.

(1). Collected Works: Prose. Alan Price.

He tells the history of this process in the AUTOBIOGRAPHY, VITA VECCHIA and ETUDE MORBIDE. (1). These three groupings of what seem to be random notes not intended for publication, form a composite picture of the man as he saw himself. He brooded over his experiences, registered his fears and observations, admitted bewilderment and even terror at his mother's stern religious doctrines, had little pleasure while growing up besides his love of nature and self-devised entertainment. Among the latter was an unusual pursuit that throws light on the imagination that would later distinguish his maturity. He and an elder brother had invented a game called "Squirrelly", in which the hero, Squirrelly, underwent alarming tests of endurance, courage, enterprise, emerging victorious every time. Such vicarious superman-ship counteracted the feeling of impotence engendered by his mother's dominating protectiveness. When this foray into the world of fantasy failed to compensate for the unpleasantness of reality, he found refuge in "living in enchanted premises that had high walls and glass on top", where he "sat and drank ginger-beer in a sort of perpetual summer." (2).

The AUTOBIOGRAPHY describes closely his friendship with Florence Ross and the study of various aspects of nature, in both of which he found the outlet his cramped home atmosphere prohibited. Florence and he owned and conducted a "large establishment of pets: rabbits, pigeons, guinea pigs, canaries and dogs", (3) which occupied much of their

(1). Papers and documents in National University, Dublin.

(2). Autobiography. p.6.

(3). Autobiography. p.6.

time and taught them the realities of sex so that "we both understood all the facts of life and spoke of them without much hesitation but with a certain propriety that was decidedly wholesome." (1). Struggles with "the ideas that beset men at this period" absorbed him from time to time, till foreshadowing Freud, he learned to sublimate the natural tendencies of body and mind and "work myself into an ecstasy with music and the works of Carlyle and Wordsworth" (2). He speaks of being "haunted by dreams of verdant liberty that seemed to reign in pagan forest of the south." (3). Here was his imagination already creating strange lands of greenness and freedoms unheard of in the asceticism of England and his own upbringing. Sexual awakening made of Synge a "pilgrim to the sun", forcing him on excursions to reach the spot "where there was a fine outlook of hill and sky half an hour before twilight." (4). The indeterminate quality of these comments on life are in vivid contrast to the realism that characterizes his mature writings. Readings from Darwin, Leslie Stephens and Matthew Arnold strengthened a revolt against Christianity; works of Christian evidence lost their salt in comparison with the fascination of Darwin theories. Yet the sense of satisfaction which he longed for stayed stubbornly out of reach. He turned to study again, concentrating on English Literature, stumbling on early Irish ballads and finding a fascination in that form of poetry. It gripped and held him. He sought the origins of the old folksongs and glowed with a new patriotism as Irish history unrolled itself before him.

(1). Autobiography. P.7.

(3). Ibid. p.12.

(2). Ibid. p.12.

(4). Ibid. p.14.

He now "relinquished the kingdom of God for the kingdom of Ireland" (1). as he laconically puts it, leaving religious forms and outward manifestations to others, while he devoted his energies to learning Ireland's past glory and present expectations. He said so, but in actual fact, he did nothing of the kind. He was not at all politically minded, while the idea of the Godhead and the all-pervading presence of Divinity in the life of man are frequently attested in his descriptions of nature and the life of his fellowmen. In defence of his change of "kingdom" Synge states: "Patriotism gratifies man's need for adoration." (2).

The AUTOBIOGRAPHY reveals how this religious upheaval was climaxed by an experience while he was playing Mozart's JUPITER SYMPHONY with an orchestra. The entry is simple but profound: "No other emotion have I received that was quite so puissant or complete" (3). He found in this music the mansions he dreamed of, and reflects on them: "The sigh of beautiful relief which comes as an explanation rather than as a mere cessation of an excitement near to pain, is perhaps the greatest utterance of man. A cycle of experience is the only definite unity and when all has been passed through, and every joy and pain has been resolved in one passion of relief, the only rest that can follow is the dissolution of the person." (4). He was twenty-one when he arrived at this conclusion which is the cry of the saints of God as they are tantalized by occasional glimpses of the Being for Whom they long. Hence Synge's abjuration of "the kingdom of God" was not to be taken literally. He now decides on music as

(1). Ibid. p.14.

(2). Ibid. p.14.

(3). Ibid. p.14.

(4). Autobiography. p.14.

his life's career, because he "found in the orchestra the magical beauty I had dreamed of." (1).

At this point the AUTOBIOGRAPHY comes to an abrupt end. The VITA VECCHIA continues from the idea of beauty in orchestral performance, and unfolds his spiritual difficulties during his stay in Germany. He lived with a family called Von Eiken, which consisted of four girls whose father had died leaving them in poverty. They made a living by keeping lodgers and by giving music lessons, all of them being singularly gifted in instrumental music. Valeska, the youngest, was of great assistance to Synge while he was with them and they kept in touch by correspondence for the rest of their lives. Indeed, it was to the Von Eiken family that he returned immediately before his death. In this section of his history, he refers to Valeska as "The Chouska" - an inexplicable name not unreminiscent of "Squirrely"! The fourteen short poems which comprise the VITA VECCHIA are linked by prose narrative and were not intended for publication. However, they are valuable as they reveal Synge's development from this undistinguished verse, even doggerel at times, to the brilliantly sophisticated drama that was to come. Archaisms, hackneyed phrases, heavy-handed inversions, tedious alliterations, jiggling rhythms, mar the expression of emotions that were certainly sincere and interesting. An eloquent exception to this generalisation is the poem he wrote on the occasion of Cherry Matheson's refusal of his offer of marriage:

(1). AUTOBIOGRAPHY. p.14.

"I curse my bearing, childhood, youth,
 I curse the sea, sun mountains, moon,
 I curse my learning, search for truth,
 I curse the dawning, night and noon.

Cold, joyless, will I live, though clean,
 Nor by marriage mould to earth
 Young lives to see what I have seen:
 To curse, as I have cursed, their birth." (1).

Sentimental ramblings of a very young man in love ? Perhaps. But there is a hurt in them which is indicative of Synge's extremely vulnerable sensitivity and suggests how deeply he would suffer over rejected plays which were not only a beloved entity outside himself, but actually a part of himself. Noteworthy too, are the things he chooses for the curse - nature, learning, search for truth. These are just the items he considers excellent and essential in life; hence one may infer that he places Cherry above even them. The sorrow of his disappointment is aggravated by anger at the reason for her refusal. She had been counselled not to marry a man who was not a Christian !

The VITA VECCHIA ended as it began, in music. But it is in a minor key. "The world is an orchestra where every living thing plays one entry and then gives place to another. We must be careful to play all the notes, it is for that we are created. If we play well, we are not too exorbitantly wretched." (2). With this slender consolation

(1). VITA VECCHIA. p.19.

(2). IBID p.21.

Synge passes on to the third section of his life story,
 ETUDE MORBIDE.

This part is described by himself as "a morbid thing about a mad fiddler which I hate." (1). Through the pages of this "study" darts a strange figure, the "Celliniani" - now tearing a Da Vinci from the wall because it is too beautiful and upsets her; now resembling the Mona Lise herself in the exquisiteness of her mystery; now intensifying Synge's nightmares with accounts of her own; again acting "the shadowy Celliniani who sits and listens by the window as I practise." (2). Synge is taking part in a concert. He longs for it, yet dreads it. He must not fail her - "I am her religion," (3) he declares. The performance is a fiasco, and through the daze of his collapse he hears her cry ring out "most terribly"(4) in his ears. He is dimly aware that she is carried out of the hall. Shortly afterwards, the Celliniani dies. Synge dallies with the idea of suicide, and is preserved from this extremity by a chance finding of THE IMITATION OF CHRIST, by Thomas à Kempis. This book absorbs his attention for about four months, but the "Chouska" with whom he has kept up correspondence disapproves of the onrush of piety engendered by THE IMITATION and recommends a daily reading of Spinoza by way of antidote. However, she hastens to visit him, knowing that her presence will enforce her advice. It does and between herself and the philosopher they manage to get the following entry into Synge's diary,

(1) AUTOBIOGRAPHY. p.21.

(2) IBID. p.23

(3) IBID. p.23

(4) IBID. p.24

written by his own hand: "Symbols of things beyond my comprehension cloud the waving of the inward light. Strange stars shine upon me with prophetic rays. Purple feathers float in my hands, and choral symphonies wind themselves about me. Two divine children haunt the twilight of my sleep. Are they souls that would create their lives in my passion for the Chouska?" (1). "Fortunately for the literary genius that really did haunt the twilight of his sleep, the passion was not reciprocated, as Valeska (the Chouska in lovers' nomenclature) decided that their love was of too rare a texture to "descend to common oblivion" (2) and having rescued him from sanctity, she withdrew out of his life. In his farewell letter to her, however is a most eloquent sentence: "I turn daily further from the poetry which is but a shaping of jewels and seek a tone as long and calm as night upon the hills."(3) "Seek a tone"..... still using musical terms, but Synge was on the edge of a tumultuous discovery - that words too have melody, lend themselves to harmony, possess cadences that await a skilled hand to evoke them. Yeats would indicate where such words might be found; Synge would write the verbal music.

ÉTUDE MORBIDE did not end on a morbid note. It closed with the sound of hope which would be justified as the years passed by.

- (1) IBID. p.27
- (2) IBID. p.27
- (3) IBID. p.28

THE ARAN ISLANDS.

After the Autobiographical sections proper, THE ARAN ISLANDS contains the most revealing chapters of Synge's prose. His visits to these islands in compliance with Yeats's suggestion had far-reaching and invaluable results. "Go and live among the people, express a life that has not yet ever been expressed," (1) said the poet, and Synge followed the advice literally, for Yeats had not spoken either impulsively or oracularly. He had just read some of Synge's essays, articles, reviews of French literature particularly that of Racine; had discussed the present situation and future intentions of this new acquaintance; had probably investigated warily the circumstances that had brought Synge to Paris - and had drawn conclusions. Judging from the very radical counsel - to drop all previous interests and strike out on a totally new type of writing - Yeats must have seen that by temperament and personality Synge was capable of intensive, one-man-team enterprise. That he was alone in France, speaking French having already learned to communicate in German, indicated readiness for new territories and a tendency towards solitary, independent work. His deductions were correct and for some weeks of every summer between 1898 and 1902, Synge lived on the islands, among the people, with them, constantly in their company. He learned the Gaelic language from MICHAEL, a lad who loved to teach him, and listened to the tales of memory and imagination that the old men so willingly recounted. With characteristic intensity he absorbed and was absorbed into the life and ways of these people, whose outstanding quality was simplicity, and whose chief virtue was an indomitable courage. Although material conditions must have been irksome to one of such delicate health as

(1). W.B. YEATS: Preface to THE WELL OF THE SAINTS.

Synge, no intimation of this comes through in his writing, only most grateful and understanding courtesy. He approached the islanders and their way of life quietly but eagerly, was accepted, and slipped with a shy graciousness into the niche they prepared for him. He had his place at every hearth and was happy to ensconce himself there when the men returned from their work, join them at their supper and listen to the stories they had recalled or invented for his delectation. He listened, most attentively, not only to the content of the tales, but also to the language, rich in idiom and imagination, which he would mould into the vessel best suited to contain the folklore and history of these primitive and fascinating people. Most of these tales were peculiar to the islands; the myths and legends recorded in books and employed by Hyde and Lady Gregory belonged to another stratum of literature altogether. Here Synge heard traditional yarns of brave forebears, or such renderings of them as had resulted from many retellings. Included too, were many hair-raising accounts of banshees, fairies and messengers for the living from the dead - but the narrators showed no fear. They delivered their stories as casually as: "A rich farmer built it a while since, but after two years he was driven away by the fairy host," (1). and not another word. He was talking of a ruined house as Synge and he passed by. Evidently there was nothing unusual in this activity on the part of the fairies.

But Synge did not receive only, he gave in return. "When the old woman goes for water, I take my turn at rocking the cradle," (2) he writes as if this were quite

(1) J.H. SYNGE: Plays, Poems and Prose. Everyman's Selection. p.252.

(2) IBID.

an accepted occupation for a distinguished visitor. He wanders happily among the stalls at the fairs; attends the sports as onlooker and supporter; varies the programme of evening entertainment by contributions on his violin and skilful sleight-of-hand delusions; sorrows with the mourners when a drowned son of the family is being keened to his grave among the rocks. He admires the beauty and promise of the children with an artist's pleasure: "A ray of sunlight fell on her and a portion of the rye, giving her figure and red dress with the straw under it, a curious relief against the nets and oilskins forming a natural picture of exquisite harmony and colour." (1). He devoted his energy to understanding the spirit of the place as interpreted by people so dependent on elemental agents - wind, tide, ocean, even the habits of fish - people so close to sources that the superficialities of convention were completely foreign to them. When he writes: "It gave me a moment of exquisite satisfaction to find myself moving away from civilisation in this rude, canvas canoe" (2) he reveals the deepening of a nature-mysticism that originated in Wicklow when untrammelled outdoor life was his escape from maternal rigidity at home. The islands acquired an air of sanctuary for Synge so that he could say with pleasure: "As I lie here hour after hour, I seem to enter into the wild pastimes of the cliff and to become a companion of the cormorants and crows. Their language is easier than Gaelic and I seem to understand the greater part of their cries though I am not able to answer." (3).

It is axiomatic that love begets love. When Synge

(1) J.M. Synge: Plays, Poems & Prose. Everyman's selection.
p.283

(2) IBID. p.253.

(3) IBID. p.264

describes the kitchen of the cottage where he lives, there is a strong suggestion of rose-coloured spectacles and consequent transformation of things seen through them. He writes: "The kitchen is full of beauty and distinction. The red dresses of the women who cluster round the fire on their stools give a glow of almost eastern richness, and the walls have been toned by the turf smoke to a soft brown that blends with the grey earth colour of the floor." (1). A less partial observer could be forgiven for finding no oriental elegance in the rather shapeless red flannel skirts which the women favour merely because they are warm and easily dried; nor could he be blamed for a desire to scrub away the "soft brown" in spite of its complementing the grey of the floor. Neither could he find much that is aesthetic in the "whole cow's skin" dangling from the rafters. But to Synge these things are of the essence of life, they are integral to a comprehensive picture of the islands, and he presents them as he sees them, in the fullness of their meaning as well as their mere external appearance. Sensing the genuineness of his regard for them the people drew him ever deeper into the circle of their closed community, enabling him to gauge their relations with one another and with the all-pervading influence on the islands which is - the Atlantic Ocean. Dependent on weather, wave and wind as their non-scientific approach to the work of fishing and kelp collecting compelled them to be, they retained an aloofness and dignity which Synge found irresistible. He touched here the reality that was so important to him; an absence of affectation which matched his own forthrightness

(1) J.M. SYNGE: Plays, Poems & Prose. Everyman's Selection. p. 254.

of speech and behaviour; a strength, as reliable as it was formidable, supported by singular dexterity. "He (a horse breeder) seemed able to hold up a horse by his single weight when it was swinging from the mast-head, and preserved a humorous calm even in moments of the wildest excitement. Sometimes a large mare would come down sideways on the backs of the other horses, and kick there till the hold seemed to be filled with a mass of struggling centaurs, for the men themselves often leap down to try and save the foals from injury." (1) He was conscious of affection for the men whose pride was based on personal integrity and independence. "The men feel in a certain sense the distinction of their island, and show me their work with pride. One of them said to me yesterday: 'I'm thinking you never saw the like of this work before this day?'

'That is true,' I answered, 'I never did.'

'Bedad, then,' he said, 'isn't it a great wonder that you've seen France and Germany and the Holy Father, and never seen a man making kelp till you come to Innishmaan.' " (2).

Not only had the islanders an external struggle against a "universe that wars on them with winds and seas", (3) but they had an unrecognised conflict between inherited paganism and the slow but subtle penetration of the Christianity which missionaries and chaplains brought to them. This spiritual dualism was strikingly evident at burial services, when the shrill grief of the keen yielded for a moment to the murmur of Christian prayer for the soul of the deceased.

(1) J.M. SYNGE. Selections. p.268.

(2) IBID. p.267

(3) IBID. p. 266.

Synge accentuated this difficulty very strongly in the person of MAURYA in RIDERS TO THE SEA as will be seen in the discussion of the play.

In the four sections of THE ARAN ISLANDS, Synge maintains a carefully poised attitude between intimate narration and detached reporting. At no time does he identify with any of the characters, yet he displays an understanding so perceptive as to challenge the reality of his detachment. He noted for example, "a line of old women who had recited in the keen sitting in the shadow of the wall beside the roofless shell of the church. They were still sobbing and shaken with grief, yet they were beginning to talk again of the daily trifles that veil from them the terrors of the world." (1) Unspoken but obvious, is his awareness that these women refuse to parade their sorrow. They have keened as is their duty and privilege; they have anguished as is their lot and that of persons of all times; but now that these things are past, they will return, serene and self-contained, to the demands of every day.

In speaking of the young folk on the islands, however, there is a warmth of tone far removed from any mere retelling of occurrences: "The rain and cold seemed to have no influence on their vitality ('a band of tall girls') and as they hurried past me with eager laughter and great talking in Gaelic, they left the wet masses of rock more desolate than before." (2).

(1). J.M. SYNGE. Selections. P.266.

(2) IBID. P.250.

The emotional balance of THE ARAN ISLANDS is paralleled by the quietness of the style. Though portraying intensity and sincerity, there is no vehemence, no hyperbole, not even heavy emphasis. Synge can make a startling statement and refrain from comment: "When the wind is from the north the old woman manages my meals with fair regularity; but on the other days she often makes my tea at three o'clock instead of six. If I refuse it she puts it down to simmer for three hours in the turf, and then brings it in at six o'clock full of anxiety to know if it is warm enough." (1) He says nothing more. Is he sarcastic about the anxiety, or merely narrating? That he is indifferent is impossible. Again: "They use no animal food except a little bacon and salt fish. The old woman says she would be very ill if she ate fresh meat." (2) Does he believe this or not? When a scene of extraordinary natural magnificence bursts upon him, however, he gives his pen full reign. "About sunset the clouds broke and the storm turned to a hurricane. Bars of purple cloud stretched across the sound, where immense waves were rolling from the west, wreathed with snowy phantasies of spray. Then there was the bay full of green delirium, and the Twelve Pins touched with mauve and scarlet in the east.

"The suggestion from this world of inarticulate power was immense, and now at midnight, when the wind is abating, I am still trembling and flushed with exultation." (3).

The islands, therefore, not only stimulated Synge to writing; they supplied the material as well. It is generally

- (1) J.M. SYNGE. Selections p.257.
 (2) IBID. p.258.
 (3) IBID. p.275.

accepted that, with the exception of DEIRDRE, all of Synge's plays deal with observations made by himself either on the Aran Islands, or in other parts of Ireland during his many excursions into the country. Of his six published plays, THE RIDERS TO THE SEA, is probably the most widely known, and it recounts the burial of a young man which Synge witnessed on the island of Innishmor. After about five weeks on the islands, it was his custom to return to Paris to reflect on incidents still fresh in his memory, and record them for subsequent printing. His life had now found direction. It remained for him to find that "speech fully flavoured as a nut or apple" (1) through which to convey the ideas that were forming to coherence in his mind.

(1) Preface to THE PLAYBOY.

IN WICKLOW, WEST KERRY AND CONNEMARA.

It is impossible to date the writing of the articles headed: **IN WICKLOW, WEST KERRY AND CONNEMARA**, because of Synge's peculiar method of composition. He made jottings of memorable words, scenes and events as they occurred. Sometimes these were abundant; sometimes his attentive waiting and watching were unrewarded. When satisfied with the amount of material on hand, he finely wove selected anecdotes into an artistic whole. A single essay, therefore, may refer to incidents that were separated from one another by many years. This ability to combine sundry recollections into impeccable coherence is an indication of the consistency that informed all his attitudes and decisions, and a proof that he rightly assessed his talents, recognizing their limitations. As with poetry, in which he felt incapable of sustained lyricism or narrative and confined himself to occasional verse, in prose he was an observer, a sensitive and sympathetic reporter, rather than a novelist or philosopher.

Having selected the items, then, he grouped them according to content and decided on appropriate titles. Some titles indicate what is to be expected from the article, such as : **AN AUTUMN NIGHT IN THE HILLS**, or: **AT A WICKLOW FAIR**. There is the more comprehensive name for a long essay: **IN WEST KERRY**, which is a large area compared with the county Wicklow. This is understandable when one recalls that most of Synge's life was spent in Wicklow and practically all his boyhood was passed roaming

among the hills and glens or following roads through miles of silently eloquent countryside. He knew every cranny of the hills of Wicklow and had saluted every tramp who like himself, sought solace in the quietness of lonely places. His acquaintance with Kerry was of a different kind. There he was a deeply interested traveller who had a limited time at his disposal and used it to the full.

Throughout THE ARAN ISLANDS Synge is haunted by the ocean, its pervasiveness, power, ruthlessness; its cruel fascination and unfailing victory. He feels almost sensibly the gnawing of the rocks by the ever encroaching tide. He confesses repeatedly to a sense of desolation, to being "indescribably mournful", to experiencing "utter despondency" even "moments of inconceivable distress" when he found the "lamentations of the sea becoming almost unendurable."

In dealing with Wicklow, however, in spite of his thorough knowledge of the places and inhabitants, there is a marked aloofness, a distance, as if he were not so intimately concerned as with the island fishermen in constant peril or their families in perpetual dread of losing their breadwinner. Whereas in THE ARAN ISLANDS there is never the least indication of distaste or annoyance with the primitiveness and occasional roughness he met, in Wicklow there are distinct traces of disappointment. He recoils from the circus which was garish and coarse: from the four girls who mocked his efforts to eke out his lack of Gaelic by extravagant sign language: from the other insensitive group that "seemed to find romance in the condition" of the young man who had been thrown from a cart and was now "raw and bleeding and horrible to look at."

Yet he admires the peasants who though seeing nothing of the circus owing to the roughness of the "wild hillside people" made no show of impatience, and listens with his customary pleasure and courtesy to the old men who have tales to tell.

In the first Wicklow essay: AN AUTUMN NIGHT IN THE HILLS, the key chords of the Wicklow symphony are struck and reverberate throughout the succeeding articles. In order of resonance they are: Loneliness; nature and its inexorable control of the lives of the people; the past with its superstitions, folk-lore, traditions; death, which is met with unquestioning acceptance and fearless familiarity. Synge rarely comments. He states and passes on. Describing the home-bringing of Mary Kinsella's corpse he writes: "Everything was dark and confused, yet on one car I was able to make out the shadow of a coffin, strapped in the rain, with the body of Mary Kinsella." (1) The phrases, denuded of verbal adornment stand as exposed and naked as the coffin which waited in the steadily falling desolation of evening and rain, while the bearers "filled the bar drinking and making a noise." This economy of personal remark is one of Synge's most successful devices, if indeed it is a conscious device, and not rather the outcome of his natural reticence. He never gushes or sentimentalizes, but frequently when the emotion becomes unendurable he permits himself a cry of poignancy and torment: "as the night comes on the herons cry with a lonely desolate note that is echoed backwards

(1) AN AUTUMN NIGHT IN THE HILLS. p.292.

and forwards among the hills, and stars begin to glitter in the sky and at one's feet in the water. One seems to be set on the side of a solitary cliff between two reaches of stars, yet in one's face the other cliff stands out with a purple density that is much more than darkness." (1) This sentence is awkward and rambling - yet even that is in keeping. It gives the impression that there was so much to endure in the superb beauty and gauntness of the scene that he had to extricate himself bit by bit from the entangling web of mystery. Here the cliff of Wordsworth's PRELUDE finds its counterpart. It is understood that Wordsworth was one of Synge's favourite poets, hence the similarity of reaction to the majesty and fascination of nature. This is one of the rare passages in which Synge describes nature only; usually he introduces a human person into his natural scenes. "..... across the top of the waterfall one can look down on one's left on a little settlement where one can nearly always make out a boy shearing sheep or a tall girl with bare feet and a scarlet hat getting water from the river...." (2) If there is no person available, Synge finds "geese and cattle calling in the mist and in the sky flocks of golden or green plover in an infinity of crying. The sheep one sees against the light are transfigured by a golden halo that makes them appear like symbolical figures on stained glass. The skeletons of burnt furze that stick up here and there have a curious symmetry....." (3) The word "desolate is seldom missing for long in Synge's writing. Nor is colour. Sometimes the sheerness of black and white - "thin sheets

(1) PEOPLE AND PLACES p.195.

(2) IBID p.194.

(3) IBID p. 194 - 5.

of water from a silvery lace-work of undreamable fineness against the black background of rock" (1): rich patterns like "the water taking so much boggy substance with it when it turns to foam that the whiteness has a golden volume in the sunshine that is extraordinarily rich." (2) Or is it the "haycocks that stand in a forlorn ring above their tanned reflection in a passing lake of blue." This seeming plethora of adjectives reflects the varied colours that simultaneously impinge on his sensitive, all appreciative mind.

Synge has a remarkable sympathy with tramps. Normally this section of humanity is as unpopular in Ireland as elsewhere, and tolerated only in the name of Christian charity. But they attracted Synge. With care he questions them, records their answers, gives them alms and not pennies for he fears the blight "even while your silver is warming in his pouch" (3) Perhaps it was this tramp especially that begot Nora's Knight in *THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN* for this one "has the humour of talk and ideas of a certain distinction, and this old marauder has lived twice as long and perhaps ten times more fully than the men around him." (4) Synge identified himself with tramps, even signing himself in a late letter as *YOUR OLD TRAMP*, and quietly justified his choice of a wandering life in: "Man is naturally a nomad and all wanderers have finer intellectual and physical perceptions than men who are condemned to local habitations. The vagrant has preserved the dignity of motion with its whole sensation of strange colours and of strange passages with voices that whisper in the dark and still stranger inns and lodgings, affections and lonely songs that rest for a whole life time with the perfume of spring evenings or the first autumnal smoulder

of the leaves." (1) This singular revelation escaped the ready pruning knife of Synge who was a severe critic of his own work, and laid bare the exquisite martyrdom of loneliness that was his life's condition. More important, it outlines sharply the sweep of his imagination which Shelley considered "the great instrument of moral good." It was the unique quality of his imagination and of the world which he therefore inhabited that caused the want of communication with less spiritualised people. As long as Yeats talked poetry and literature and the lives of unrecognised islanders, Synge was with him; but as soon as political frothings supplanted these, Synge no longer belonged.

GLENCREE, which he honours not only with an essay but a poem subsequently as well, carried one of the most touching tramp-stories in the repertoire. Synge had spent a day in a nook beside the stream from a distant lake, intoxicated by the smells of heather, bracken and rushes, watching the people foing up to Mass and returning in Sunday exultation, while he celebrated his own peculiar religion alone with his thoughts and unspoiled creation. The aimlessness and hopelessness of existence are hinted at in "the sheets of sickly moss and bog-cotton that is unable to thrive" while even "the road breaks like pie-crust under my feet." (2) No sound of anything more progressive than "the slow running of water and the grouse crowing and chuckling underneath the band of cloud." He is mesmerised by the grey fingers of cloud that (3)

(1) PEOPLE & PLACES. p.195.

(2) & (3) GLENCREE p.234.

come up and down again "like a hand that is clasping and opening." (1) After three pages of this discouraging series of observations, "a tramp came wandering round the bottom of the hill." (2) As Synge, hidden by fern, watched, the man stripped off his shirt, washed it thoroughly, wrung it out and drew it on over his head again, buttoned his coat and set off whistling and content. He permits himself a comment on this: "The cottage men with their humour and simplicity have gained in a real sense 'infinite riches in a little room', while the tramp has chosen a life of penury with a world for habitation" (3)

In Kerry he found such the same struggle, though more successfully waged, to combine desire and attainment. Social layers are now discernible, and those who are on an upper level are determined to remain there. He described the implicit contempt of the "woman of the house" who was perfectly aware of the silent beggar that had edged into the kitchen and placed his expectant bag on the floor at his feet, yet continued her work until it was done and she at liberty to attend to him. The dialogue was brief enough to dispatch a less humble suppliant. "Is it meal or flour?" she pelts him with. "Flour," says the man. No want of dignity there either, in the monosyllabic reply. She takes the bag, gives him some flour, returns it to him, wordlessly accepts his "God bless you" and resumes her conversation with her more honourable guest.

(1) GLENOREE. p.234.

(2) & (3) IBID. p.235.

The Kerry people are not so dependent on the elemental forces of sea and storm as are the islanders and even the inhabitants of the lonely Wicklow hills. Synge is content to repeat some of their folktales, without comment, and to note that they enjoyed his violin music. It is factual that the Kerry people are unusually musical and spend practically all their spare time "fiddling" for their own pleasure or for the young folk who still dance on the green patches in the centres of the villages. The section closes on a typical Syngean picture: "Beyond the patch of wet cottages I had another stretch of lonely roadway, and a heron kept flapping in front of me, rising and lighting again with many lonely cries that made me glad to reach the little public house near Smerwick." (1)

CONNEMARA could be nothing but a series of heart-rending scenes of poverty, depression and painful effort to survive. The country has an ethereal beauty in so far as the conventions of civilization have left it largely untouched. Taking Galway city as centre, one sees a distinction between the east and the west, the former facing the settled interior by far the more prosperous. Four types of people inhabit this region. There are the smartly uniformed policemen and coastguards; then the shopkeepers aping the dress of their more affluent counterparts in Dublin; the next group comprises the well-to-do countrymen in their durable homespuns and stout boots; the last section is the destitute, unkempt,

(1) GLENCREE. p.282.

threadbare and shoeless poor. Synge's interest lay with the normal countryman who hoped he would one day reach the status of the shopkeepers, and dreaded ever sliding down to the penury of the unfortunate paupers.

He was profoundly moved by the misery of the Relief workers. When conditions reduced the peasants' already slender budget to practically destitution, the Government invented some work for them, such as road-making, stone-breaking, turf-cutting, and paid them the customary wage of one shilling per day. This work was supervised by a foreman whom they called the "ganger", usually an unsympathetic braggart who infuriated the workers by swaggering up and down among them with insulting comments and pseudo shrewd observations. Here again, Synge identifies himself with the poor and allows himself a disclosure of personal reaction to the sight of their abjection: "The people at work weeding potatoes and cutting turf in the bogs and their draggled, colourless clothes added indescribably to the feeling of wretchedness one gets from the sight of these miserable cottages, many of them with an old hamper stuck through the roof for a chimney and the desolation of the bogs." (1) On reading passages like this one is amazed that the author was so often accused of being antagonistic towards the peasant folk of Ireland - the main criticism of *THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN*, for an example.

The happiest section of his writings of this wild west region dealt with the kelp-makers. These men did a fine and manly job, first in the collecting of the

(1) *THE HOMES OF THE HARVESTMEN*. p.317.

seaweed, and then in the arduous burning of it. Kelp was treated much as the precious flax of more prosperous areas is today and consequently the work had dignity and worth. Unfortunately, the shopkeepers on the mainland were not strictly honest and Syngé's wrath at their false estimation of the value of the loads is quite evident. "I have sometimes seen a party of old men sitting nearly in tears on a ton of rejected kelp that had cost them weeks of hard work, while, for all one knew, it had very possibly been refused on account of some grudge or caprice of the buyer." (1)

To comment on all the essays in this COLLECTED PROSE would take considerable time and space, yet one other essay should be mentioned because of its difference in content. Its historical background distinguishes it from the rest, A LANDLORD'S GARDEN IN COUNTY WICKLOW refers to "the tragedy of the landlord class" and of the old families that are fast disappearing. Irishmen speak of the Land League and its results as "the greatest revolution in the history of modern Ireland" because for the first time the tenant farmers as a class openly resisted the landlords. They demanded the possession of the land, and as the landlords were largely in debt, having tried to live on the grand scale of their landed brethren in England, they gave in gradually to the parcelling of their estates into small holdings, in some cases abandoning them altogether. The new owners could not do more than eke out a living on the land, which

(1) THE KELP MAKERS. p.307.

owing to famine, epidemics, and annual emigrations of earlier years of the century had been constantly neglected, and was now overrun with weeds and rank, coarse, plant-smothering grass. The "castles" which Synge mourns in his essay were merely relics of an interesting and opulent past.

It is illuminating to note that although Synge regrets the passing of the generation of "high-spirited and highly cultivated aristocracy" (1) he singles out only one loss which merited special comment "... where men used to collect fine editions of Don Quixote and Molière in Spanish and in French, and luxuriantly bound copies of Juvenal and Persimms and Cicero, nothing is read now but Longfellow and Hall Caine and Miss Corelli. Bad bookbinding, bad pictures and bad decorations are thought well of, where rich bindings, beautiful miniatures and finely carved chimney-pieces were once prized by the old Irish landlord." (2) Rousing himself as if by force from the reverie which renewed the "desolation of this life" he resumes the story he had briefly introduced - a tale connected with thieves who broke into a seemingly wild and untended garden. Yeats's description of Synge as being folded in his own brooding intellect is apposite here.

In AN EPIC OF ULSTER Synge permits himself a glimpse into the mythology of Ireland and while reviewing Lady Gregory's GUCHULAIN reveals his own comprehensive knowledge

(1) & (2) 2 LANDLORD'S GARDEN. p.231.

of the world of dream and legend in which Yeats and Lady Gregory found pleasure and inspiration. Gentle as his criticism is, Synge's insistence on reality and truth cannot ever be forgotten. His last sentence reads: "Students of mythology will read this book with interest, yet for their severer studies they must still turn to the works of German scholars, and others, who translate without hesitation all that has come down to us through the MSS." (1) This is consistent with his theory that truth is essential, even in poetry; that the poet should not hesitate to be "brutal" in order to attain this standard of perfect reality.

A small section of the published prose tantalizes by its slenderness, for it deals with a subject of which Synge is all too sparing. This part of COLLECTED PROSE is the VARIOUS NOTES in which he allows one a peep, no more, into his tenets and ideals in regard to literature. Unlike Yeats, he has left little on record about his tastes and standards, merely a few pointers. But these he has so steadily illustrated in his writings that his demands are easily recognized. Reality, truth, joy, originality - these are the Big Four of Synge's literary army, and must always be in battle array, always in action. "Three distinctions are to be sought: a work of art must have been possible to only one man at one period and in one place." (2) The stamp of the creator

(1) AN EPIC OF ULSTER. p.370.

(2) VARIOUS NOTES. p.349.

must be indelible, to meet Synge's demand.

Another revealing doctrine is: "Once men sought in art to make natural things beautiful. Now we seek to make beautiful things natural. When the body dies the soul goes to Heaven or Hell. So our modern art is - must be - either divine or satanic." (1) As many of his decrees are borne out in his dramas they will be discussed further there.

Synge's prose is sober, exact, controlled; his choice of diction is careful and unerringly selected. Although there is no proof of the statement, one could surmise that he revised the prose works with the same meticulous scrutiny as that with which he perfected his plays.

WHEN THE MOON HAS SET.

This is John Synge's first completed play. Originally in a two-act version, it was later reduced to one act, and one action, namely the luring of a nun from her profession.

Two themes, basic to the play and illustrative of Synge's convictions recur with clarity and emphasis. First, it is "blasphemy" to follow a way of life that fails to employ all one's potentialities, and a corollary to this, a nun's life is inexcusable because it is just such a blasphemy. Secondly, one is usually thwarted in the realisation of ideals, but each person receives sufficient "power and courage" to overcome obstacles. He must elect whether he will fight or yield.

The background of the story is the death of Colm's uncle, Mr. Sweeny, one of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy for whom Synge had deep regard and whose vanishing from the Irish population he deplored. Death was a lifelong pre-occupation with Synge, and here in his first drama it is a prominent element. Nursing the dying man is Sister Eileen, competent and comforting. Mr. Sweeny the uncle, dies and Eileen is summoned home to her Convent. Colm has other plans for her. When Synge showed this play to Yeats and Lady Gregory they advised him not to publish it. He respected their counsel, yet, winnowing his harvest before his death, he left it intact, evidently for reconsideration.

The plot is slight. Colm, the nephew, heir and only relative of the deceased man, is called to the deathbed and loses his way on the moors. A deranged woman, called Mary, directs him to the house and he learns later from Eileen

new life, completion, perfection. RAIN is essential to this process. Without it there is no chance of fertility whose Great Goddess is, according to ancient symbol, the moon. When, therefore, "moonlight shines on snow" (snow being always the symbol of chastity) it is reasonable to expect change - from chastity to fertility, from the cold snow to the glow of fecundity. Eileen noticed that "flowers were broken with the rain" - this symbol will be concretized in her own virginal life. Now the title is clear. When the moon has set, it will have passed its crescent stage - at which Eileen now stands - and have reached maturity, ready to set, that is to be formally established in the enjoyment of its own perfection - as Eileen will be when married to Colm. She will no longer regret the despoilation of flowers by the rain, realising that this destruction is necessary if the reflowering of exquisite fulfilment is to take place.

Again the moon has been regarded as the boundary between life and death, between the eternal and the mortal. In this sense too, the title is apposite here, for Death not only shares the house with the lovers, but it is the bond that has brought and holds them together. The moon shines impartially on the dead man and on the young pair in the adjoining room; on the one hand life at its close, and on the other, active and pulsating life in their youthful vitality and potential life still remote - as the moon is - but as real and beautiful. In a more figurative sense, the life of Eileen is about to undergo an absolute metamorphosis, from what Colm would call "death" to a new and fruitful life with him.

Mary Costello's terrifying speech suggests the old

belief in moon-madness. She will need the strength of a Crucifix, she maintains, "in the long evenings when the moon is low", for that is the hour in which the children of her hallucinations come out to the woods for their games; that is when they crowd round her, bewildering her clouded brain. But when the "moon is full it's queer things I do be seeing", and the memory of those strange moon-begotten objects causes her to "sob piteously."

It is possible to associate the title with still another acknowledged moon-symbol. She is often likened to Diana the huntress. This play is a series of huntings. Mary Costello is still chasing the impossible of happiness without sacrifice: Eileen pursues the ideal of perfection according to her intuitions: Colm pursues Eileen, convinced that in so doing he will capture the happiness that both of them seek. In the general sense human nature pursues the end for which it is created, the propagation of her image in other persons till the end of time, and ruthlessly recalls Eileen who would impose another goal over that to which human nature has appointed her.

Much of Synge's life and personality is revealed in this short sketch. When he allows Eileen to give her Crucifix to Mary, "because I've a long way to go and this will be keeping me company in the dark lane through the wood" he recalls the comfort he drew from THE IMITATION OF CHRIST, while he plodded the "dark lane" of uncertainty after the music fiasco. Eileen has found "the most divine instant" now, having found her true vocation; consequently she has no further need of comfort and may therefore dispose of the Crucifix. Synge likewise had touched on his, in the satisfaction he had experienced in his two visits to the

islands. More was to come, and he was strong enough to wait. He sensed this in the contact with people, living, loving, struggling, battling; Eileen had found here not "in the mania of the saints" but in the "emancipation more exquisite than any that is possible for man redeemed by logic." Yet even this emancipation is not sufficiently elevated for Synge. He ends the play on a cry of supreme achievement, which is not as foolish as it looks at first glance. Synge has Colm crescendo a long speech with : "We have incarnated God; we have been a part of the world." To have incarnated God..... God, according to St. John is love; Colm and Eileen have found love in each other and in themselves, therefore they have indeed "incarnated God". To have been a part of the world, which in this context has been seen as renewing, reproducing, developing, coming to perfection in fruition - this is not illogical either in the situation. Had it stopped here, it would have been an exciting climax, but at this point, suddenly, and without a merciful warning, Synge laces in a mixture of D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce and blasphemy into: "In the name of the Summer, and the Sun and the Whole World, I wed you as my wife."

Has Yeats said the last word about WHEN THE MOON HAS SET ? He found it "morbid and conventional".

Springtime, flowers in blossom, the matter-of-factness of the three living characters towards the dead body near them, the harmlessness, even kindness of the mad woman, the reassuring solidity of Bride who is exactly as familiar as a trusted servant in an Irish household would be, the satisfaction of the two young people with their marriage -

none of these is morbid in the least, and yet they are key pictures in the play. As for convention, the ineptitude of Colm's comments on a religious vocation is conventional indeed. Shortsightedness is a common malady. But the marriage of a young aristocrat to his uncle's nurse is romantic, and not too usual. Moreover when the nurse is a nun who repudiates her vows after a few sentences of persuasion, convention is no longer in question; the situation has moved into the unique. Again, for a woman, Mary Costello in this case, to become insane because of a decision taken many years previously is not only unusual, it is quite improbable and must therefore have an origin other than convention. It originates from Colm's mind as the basis of his self-defence for luring Eileen from the nobler path she had chosen. It likewise justifies John Synge for rejecting the religion his mother sought so indefatigably to impart to him in their home at Greystones.

The failure of this piece as a play lies in four directions. The dullness of the dialogue is quite foreign to the passion that would attend such a situation. The lack of action, for apart from the entrance of Mary and her crazy antics there is no action, would render this lifeless as a performance. The wordy arguments of Colm are obviously an expression of Synge's personal grudges and resentments and lose their punch because he tries to camouflage them into language suited to Colm, the heir and estate owner. He is still young enough to be embarrassed when airing private views, and hides behind grandiose

phrases which his nature abhors. Synge does not like his hero, Colm, just as he did not like himself during his years of drifting and inadequacy. Lastly, this play fails because Eileen is a nonentity. Faced with the most tremendous decision that could come to a nun, she is tame as a chicken, does not bring forward one cogent argument to his rhetoric, teeters off to return in the ready-to-hand gown belonging to the woman whom disappointment unbalanced. Nor, having brought her back, thus bedizened, does Synge give her anything of moment to say.

The material for drama is here, however, and Synge sensed it, but this was his first play; he had not yet developed his craft, nor discovered his milieu. He had not yet managed to sublimate the cruelty of Cherry, Chouska and Molly into a work of intensity and power such as he would do later on when the talent that was now hammering for release had been set free. Yeats remarks with forgivable complacency: "It was after its rejection by us that he took to peasant work." This play convinced Synge that "the nullity of the rich" was not the atmosphere in which he was most untrammelled, consequently he devoted himself thenceforward to the world of those any one of who "at one moment is a simple peasant, at another seems to be looking out at the world with a sense of prehistoric disillusion and to sum up in the expression of her grey-blue eyes the whole external despondence of the clouds and the sea."²

1. Collected Works: J.M.SYNGE. Plays. Introd. XVI

2. Ibid

THE VERSE PLAYS.

Three attempts at verse plays remain from Synge's writings, of which THE VERNAL PLAY is the first. There are three references to this work in Synge's diaries: 27th March, 1902, again in April and the following January, 1903. Each reference mentions revisions, therefore Synge found value in this VERNAL PLAY and considered perfecting it. However, in 1902, he was working on RIDERS TO THE SEA, IN THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN and had begun THE TINKERS' WEDDING. As the last three plays were written in Synge's new form of prose, and THE VERNAL PLAY in standard nineteenth century style, including the language with a few exceptions, it is to be inferred that he sensed the preferability of Anglo-Irish as medium to any other speech, and concentrated on completing the other and now finished plays. Speculation is always attractive, and one may ask: "How great would have been the loss had Synge remained in the tradition of his forerunners?" Time's test will give the only correct answer, yet when the VERNAL PLAY is compared with even THE TINKERS' WEDDING the improvement in the latter is remarkable, thus leading one to surmise that the loss would have been great indeed. Yet there is value in the early attempt, even if only as an indication of the playwright's rapid development. Unfortunately, this fragment is missing an essential part, the middle - one might say, the heart. Two young girls enter and join a woman and her husband who are already talking on stage. The four converse for a time, and are joined by an old man. The five exchange some remarks, not very coherent, and then

there is a gap in the script. Synge's scissors had been active and he had not filled in the excisions. When the new scene opens, the young folk are in the midst of a keen which is most unlike the Aran version and which would not be recognised as a keen, were it not that a timely stage direction imparts the information: "Keening". They are mourning the old man who apparently died in the night that must have intervened since the last speaking. It is provoking to miss the events that seem to have been laden with action, because there is no action in the scenes still extant. The speakers use heroic couplets giving a strained and unnatural pace to the conversation.

Yet there are indications of future developments in the dialogue. The themes are death, love, transience of life, life's challenges, in the order of prominence. The laughter of young girls makes a pleasant opening, but soon it is learned that they have lost their way. Moreover, Etain was so confident of knowing the way in the morning, that they did not try to make certain. And now, they come on old people only, and they on the verge of the grave. Innocently, they had hoped for younger shepherds than the "owl's eye'd" old man but he had quickly assured them that luck was against them. Here we have Synge's cynicism in the raw, as it were. Later he will disguise it under laughter and wit, but it will go on from Michael and Bartley

through the disillusionment of the blind pair right to the open grave of Haisi and his brothers. Youth confident and brave, at the mercy of fate, and usually disappointed. The woman who joins the girls at last is a "mountain woman with her herd" - she is Nprah's compatriot, so - who knows the "crook't paths" and soon shows them how they will find it. The emptiness of their mission is now revealed. The young girls left the city at dawn to pick a few flowers in the glen; they say so, but the mountain woman with the wisdom of the aged, knows otherwise and introduces the theme of love. She declares they came seeking love, and had actually made appointments - which of course they deny, assuring the old couple that they came seeking "peace"..... This would sound like a poor joke, did one not know that Synge had indeed experienced some trying years in Europe and had known great isolation of spirit rising from many-sided disappointments. Then it is not impossible that he could envisage young people experiencing a need for that peace which one does not usually associate with them.

However, the play crawls tediously along, and the conversation has none of the sparkle that has come to be regarded as integral to a Syngean production. The second scene opens with the keen, with the dead body on the stage presumably, for at the end of the dialogue following the keen, Germuid drapes his cloak over the corpse, with the strangely undignified remark:

"....

I will throw
my oldest cloak about the old dead body."

Then comes the unexpected twist - also a forerunner of many such in plays to come.

All leave the stage except the husband and wife.

crowning her with blossoms at her request, the husband, Germuid is surprised by an ardent embrace from Boinn his wife and an ecstatic:

"Oh Man, I would ever live lone with you
Where every bough and every hill-turn breathes
with joy,"

but no sooner have they moved off than "two carrion crows come down and perch on the rock above the old man" whose corpse they had just covered. This is Synge's bitter reminder that love and life have but a short reign - the carrion crows are never far away.

Although Synge uses traditional and conventional language and approach to this piece, his own voice comes through quite clearly here and there. Germuid says: "Their like come often", and Naive speaks of "great talk", Etain repeats: "I'm saying" in true dialect fashion and when they left the city, the "old grey cock" was crowing. In the construction: "Some man stole your word off you you'd come out here today" there is a suspicion that Synge is trying his skill with the Anglo-Irish, but with no success. Incidentally, he had an incurable habit of abbreviating "would" as

'ld and not the usual 'd, a habit that persisted even into his manhood.

"Who comes east" is reminiscent of the Aran Islands where the men speak of sitting to the north of the fire - another habit learned from watching their direction when out fishing, compasses being neither known or needed.

"Your like of bird-eyed men would make it brimful, surely." The cadenced sentence will be a familiar sound in the works ahead. The pagan element that plays a prominent part in RIDERS is present here, too: "I call the lambs that browse with fright
To mourn the man who died tonight."

One interesting line in the otherwise uninspiring keen is in Heinn's verse, the second line:

"All must rise from earth and clay
All must end in green decay."

"Green decay" ? Compression of a lifetime in two words. This is a brilliant oxymoron if Synge so intended it, and probably he did for soon after Cermuid has one of his own:

".... With your lips
You women rhyme the death-rhyme, yet your eyes
Still say the songs of love "

which will introduce another generation of life.

Perhaps it is not just to analyse this play so

closely as Synge did not present it for publication; but the very fact that he allowed any of it to remain justifies an attempt to discover why. It does prove, indubitably, that Synge's decision to perfect his dialect was all to his and posterity's advantage.

LUASNAD, CAPA and LAINE.

This is a completed piece - a tragedy based on a record in Geoffrey Keating's HISTORY OF IRELAND Book I, Section IV, with an ending of Synge's creation. The story deals with three Spanish fishermen, storm-driven to an island which was so pleasant that they brought their wives to live there. Soon after their arrival, however, a cloudburst opened above them and, according to Keating, all were drowned. Synge's ending has Luasnad and Laine's wife escape and remain clinging to a rock. Luasnad's infant son was lost with its mother.

From the conversation of the two survivors, much about Synge's outlook and attitude emerges. As in WHEN THE MOON HAS SET, here too, the moon has her special function. The woman asks: "Where is your child, Luasnad?" He replies briefly: "A stone rolled down and killed him" Whereupon Laine's wife, who significantly has no

and nobility of the unsophisticated life he found there. In revolt against insincerity and pretence he dreamt of a return to sources, to origins, which he called - reality. These two people "alone in the world of night" would be the ideal nucleus of the "new mankind". But a wave of melancholy submerges Luasnad's vision for a moment as he remembers:

"The gods will kill us, man must die," which Laine's wife counters with: "There is the moon, Luasnad, and three stars." That moon will ensure the continuity of man on earth, is a favourite creed with Synge. He seeks to deepen his faith in it by a kind of litotes, bringing up all possible ways of man's extermination, particularly, the hatred borne towards him by the gods. While the woman finds good omens in the breaking clouds and white waves racing to the sun, the conservator of life, Luasnad reminds her: "There is no pity in the aimless gods." He defies them, though, by his peculiar brand of pantheism, the first stirring of which Synge, his creator, experienced when a Wordsworthian affinity with nature compensated him for maternal incomprehension:

" we are one
 With all this moon and sea-white and the wind
 That slays us."

Synge will not willingly identify with things or people that pamper him, make decisions for him, seek to direct his life, but he accepts elemental challenges even though they can destroy him.

His concession to the doctrine of re-incarnation appears in the lines that follow on those just quoted:

"..... and our passions move when we die
Among the stars that wander or stand quiet
In the great depths of night."

Meanwhile the storm rages on and the possibility of saving their lives grows remote. Luasnad would signify his indifference to the spite of the gods by

" flashing a last red flame of love

Across the brink of death." in a kiss, but

Laine's wife notices: "A moonbeam has burst through and touched the sea," and while they look, a boat with people aboard comes towards them. The woman is elated, but Luasnad's cynicism is deep:

" If men steer

The gods will guide this vessel with their hate

Till all her beams float down the endless sea."

This is what does indeed happen, but not before Laine's wife has made an interesting suggestion:

"It may be a craft of some wily prophet of the
east

To build up here a little band of men

To make mankind eternal."

This ephemeral bouquet for the east relates back to Synge's fairly recent interest in Buddhism,

the grip it hitherto had had on her. Similarly here, Luasnad passes on to his grave, uttering his version of the defiance as he goes: "In this peril the force that slays us is our own high glory."

In this play Synge's genius resembles R.L. Stevenson's "Bottle Imp", caught and swirling round in vapours. Synge seeks extrication from the established norms of life, of religious belief, or formalised literature. If the blank verse he uses lacks the stateliness that characterises this form; if his inversions are awkward: "I do not like to vanish and
let live

The sea and stars without me."

if the sustained reference to mythology, the gods and their harshness towards men are hackneyed and unexceptional; if the "wandering ghosts in the other life" arouse no fire, having been exploded by fairy-tale vandals long ago, yet his inchoate urge to strip civilisation of its affectations and insecurity, even to have another deluge so that some "wild, new race (could) populate the wreck of this dead world" comes through with force, consistency and impressive authority. Life for Synge is an intense and personal experience, and each man is entirely responsible for the way he conducts the span of years that is his:

"There lives

One only life, one passion of one love,
 one world, wind sea, - then one deep dream of death".
 (The recurrent themes of love and death are inseparable
 from Synge's work). Something of the irrevocability
 conveyed in these lines informs each one of his plays,
 so that the reader is frequently at a loss to decide
 if he is reading paganism or a form of Christianity
 that appreciates almost to exaggeration the privilege
 of life and the mystery of both this present life and
 the form of life to come. The implacability of fate
 is potent in LUASNAD, CAPA and LAINE, residing in
 the fact that all perished in spite of the moon's
 power and obvious willingness to help, because it
 was the decree of the gods against which man is
 helpless.

In this play, the blank verse actually detracts
 from the power of the message. Man's defeat by the
 universe is a mighty subject, and an intense,
 introspective and highly trained intellect like
 Synge's should be competent to deal appropriately
 with it. One feels he would have achieved more had
 he resorted to the simple but elegantly selected
 prose used in his other non-dramatic works. Of course,
 in DEIRDRE, when his Anglo-Irish had been polished
 to a gleaming point of appositeness, the tyranny of
 the gods needs no other vehicle than Synge's

expressions: "There are as many ways to wither love as there are stars in the sky at Samhain.... It's for that we're setting out for Emain Macha when the tide turns on the sand," - they walk open-eyed into the blighting of their love, because Deirdre has been fated from her birth and all Conchubor's efforts could not save her beauty, peerless though it was, from the venomous wrath of the gods of destiny.

As the play now stands, it is acceptable when told or discussed but the reading of the deadening blank verse is not enjoyable, because blank verse is not Synge's medium. While A VERBAL PLAY is a pastoral piece, and LUASNAD, CAPA and LAINE is the working-up of a historical event, the third fragment is nearer to the type of subject in which Synge will eventually find his authentic voice and, on that account, is of interest and invitation.

The title is simply: THE LADY O'CONNOR, thus giving no indication of the contents. When one considers the THE PLAYBOY was first called: THE FOOL OF FARNHAM then, MURDER WILL OUT, and only after the trial of these, did Synge decide on the eventual title, so comprehensive and almost universal, for "Western World" has been applied to the great New World of America as well, one realizes the growth of his dramatic understanding and perceptiveness. Here he is satisfied, apparently, with an unarresting title which makes no impact on emotional or intellectual

reactions; in his major work he will experiment, and each trial will show a deepening of insight. The content of this play, however, is a long and rambling story heard from Pat Dirane on the Aran Islands, and related in all detail in COLLECTED WORKS: PROSE, pp 61 - 65. The facts concern a marriage in which the bride's dowry is to be her weight in gold. Many characters meander through the tale and a shipwreck nearly wrecks the plan and point of the events. From this abundance of material, Synge proposed to create a dramatic version, in verse of four Acts, which is a vast undertaking. A scenario shows that he did arrange the available points in logical coherence, but in the actual writing of the drama, he seemingly deferred to the greater appeal of THE WELL OF THE SAINTS which was being composed at the same time, and which saw due and worthy completion.

The dialogue between the Lady O'Connor and her husband, at which the captain was present for a time is of real interest, for Synge (remembering perhaps how effectively old Pat Dirane told the story,) tries to work peasant dialect into the otherwise tedious iambic pentameters which he uses throughout. Obviously, this blending will be unnatural, and not satisfactory either to eye or ear,

If one is acquainted with Synge's mature plays, one detects a delightfully familiar tang in this, and acclaims at once the introduction of the peasant dialect into the dialogue. This brief scene ends with the young woman, whom they procure with amazing speed, stepping on the scale with the bag of gold balancing against her weight. The young man's eyes, sharpened by desire, notes that they make Moira carry her "boots and shawl" as she is being weighed, and at once demurs at the injustice. Again, familiar strains - the young exploited by the miserly, and always crafty passing generation. Images of another "Dan" of THE SHADOW take definite shape here and by contrast, the second Dan acquires an even stronger personality. The young man's exclamation: "You're a schemy rascal !" has a loudly dialect tone, and reminds the reader of "gamy kings" who will walk in the footsteps of the elusive Deirdre, at whose feet much gold and its concomitants were thrown, only to be rejected. It is clear that Synge's mind was most consistent and so absorbed in his chosen themes that he could play endless variations on the same chords.

Although the characters are necessarily only partially sketched, certain elements in the make-up of the father, O'Connor, are again true to the Synge attitude. The quotation above shows the man's unreadiness to pay tithes to the pastor and his discontent at the sight of those who willingly do,

as the Burkes seem to do for instance. Yet his lips are of the sactimonious type that are ever open on syllables of piety and devotion to God and the angels and every saint that ever graced the calendar or even aspired thereto. It is the moment of the shipwreck, for example, and Lady O'Connor, watching the scene from their window is deeply distressed at the thought of the danger of the crew. She cries in understandable excitement: " I cannot see

Where the ship vanished. West by
Knock-na-lee
The waves are louder. Do you hear them,
Connor?"

He replies: " I hear them surely. I'm thinking how poorly God's honour
Is slighted here where man's hard set
to spare
A little thought from these high seas
of Clare
To think on his soul's weariness and
to taste
The joys that Holy Church lets almost
waste
Among these wild men here....."

to which edifying regret, his wife most sensibly and humanly responds, as she flies to the window again: "Oh, was that a cry?" As the conversation continues between them, O'Connor hears his wife's (Nora-like) complaint:

If even birds and fish are lonesome
here
It's I'm in dread what we'll grow year by year
Where scarce a person comes save tinkers only."

And her concerned husband, whose duty it is surely to relieve her of any loneliness, offers the consolation: "Where God is, Lady, no soul is truly lonely."

Synge's disgust with this hypocrisy clamours for expression, and he finds a comical situation, tinged with his typical irony. The crew on the ship survive against all odds, and the Captain accompanied by a friar, make their way to O'Connor's castle. They are made welcome, and charm the hostess by thinking she is the Lord's daughter. Immediately O'Connor warms up to this preaching theme addressing himself exclusively to the monk and denounces the neighbourhood roundly:

"You see this, good father, there are fewer
Of your like than I'd wish in County Clare.
We live in rivers, hawks in air
And never turn unto the Lord Almighty

Till sin and years have made us weak and flighty."

And while the good friar inisters to the guilt-ridden soul of the holy Lord O'Connor, the Captain and Lady O'Connor engage in an intimate and interesting conversation in the other corner of the room. The Captain learns that she is lonely, weary of "looking all day on the seas and cliffs," and indeed that she would "liefer stray like tinkers through the flats

Leinster's Aluin, or the bogs of Meath

Than sit reckoning up the sighs I breathe."

And why? Because her husband is "half a monk", and the Captain's reaction to that: "Oh, ho!" prepares the reader for the events that Pat related. Unfortunately,

Synge did not reach the point of retelling them; his rich dialect would have rolled off many an entrancing and amusing rejoinder.

The end of Act II Sc. III is likewise the end of the poetic attempt. There follows an extract of Synge's prose rendering, and at once the difference is striking, to the disadvantage of the blank verse.

Lady O'Connor: I've a great wish to go out in those ships do be crossing back and forward through the big world. Isn't it a queer thing you've never set foot abroad among the kingdoms of the Eastern world and you a free rich man

And even piety reads better when couched in natural terms:

O'Connor : The world is a big strange place, maybe, but if it is itself, are not God and the devil as near to Ireland as they do be to Jerusalem and Corinth, and what is there any man would think on a great while but God and his own sins and the fear of Limbo ?

Lady O'C : There are many men do think of other things, surely.

In a few years' time, Synge will render that last quote perhaps : There be many men do think on other things, surely

In this fragment, then, are contained some of Synge's deepest convictions; the injustice of the aged towards their children - personal deduction from experience; the lure of money and the universality of the curse of miserliness; the constant presence of dreams, longings, unfulfilled desires, particularly in the womenfolk who are married to materialistic, short-sighted, egotistical or pseudo pious men; and man's proneness to procure happiness at any cost - even the cost of listening to a wandering ship's captain - or a tramp. As independent drama, however, the piece is of little merit, and so Synge saw it to be.

MAGNA SERENITAS.

Of MAGNA SERENITAS only a scenario remains, arranged for a three-act play. The subject matter seems related to a story contained in Part IV of the Aran Islands. If so, Synge is already exercising what was later a noteworthy characteristic - the deft alteration of endings from a commonplace and logical solution to one of subtlety and originality.

It is a grim tale, at best, but Synge had a certain predilection for such, and never swerved from recounting quite revolting details. On the contrary, he seemed to derive a vicarious sense of

strength and power from such accounts. In the present case, the original version runs that some islanders were preparing to cut kelp and were sharpening their knives for that purpose. To a child's question: "Why are you sharpening your knife?" one man answered: "To kill your father." The boy, grievously disturbed, warned his father, who naturally responded: "I'll sharpen my knife, too, then." Which he did, and repaired to the beach. The two men soon started an argument about the merits of their respective knives, feelings ran high, others joined in, and within a few moments ten men were fighting wildly on the strand. A few minutes later five dead men were stretched on the ground.

So far, it is gruesome enough. More follows. As the funeral procession wended its way to the cemetery the next day, what should the mourners see but the "boy who began the work playing with the son of the other man, and the two fathers going down to their graves." Synge's version includes the wives of the fishermen, "various items of flirtation", men going out in curaghs and a big quarrel at sea after which men rush in with news of deaths. Among the dead are the members of the Costello family, including the father. Great excitement, wailing, keening, and the usual reactions to such a calamity. These incidents occupy two acts. The third act, ignoring any unity of time, shows a fine summer day, a bright village street, chapel to the right. Behind the chapel is a graveyard with many monuments within view. A boy

is standing in front of a large tombstone, spelling out the name - "Costello" - and passing on to the rest. An old woman crosses the stage, likewise pausing at the monument. Then noise breaks out from a pub in the neighbourhood, and the sounds of dancing and revelry. It is the marriage dance of the widow Costello who is being married again - to the satisfaction of all. Only in the background is the old woman, weeping. Callously, the young comment: "She's mad, surely, crying over her sons and they nine months in their grave."

Synge's ending is bitter, cynical, satirical too, for indeed the comment of the young people is a reflection of human nature. Time is a great healer, and Synge, the realist, acknowledges it.

While the real story ended in bestiality only, Synge introduces a poignancy that would be very workable as dramatic material - in any playwright's hands. Deirdre's passionate farewell over the open grave of Naisi leads one to think that Synge would have made a memorable drama from this episode had he succeeded in completing it. The name here is important, indicating the depth of irony of which Synge was capable. He intimates that the only way to serenity or peace, in spite of the sorrow inseparable from life, is to shrug one's feelings

Maternally she turns the word back on himself:
 "It's yourself will be tired sitting there and you
 with no tea taken and - ?" tantalizingly there is
 no more. But in this short scene it is possible to
 find not only characteristics of Synge's writing,
 but the man himself. He cared nothing for external
 trappings, fine hair or eyes. Nowhere in his
 Autobiography is there suggestions that his interest
 in women was merely superficial. Of the "Scherma";
 his name for his first love, possibly Cherry Matheson,
 he says: "She was a devout Christian in her heart,
 and was always doing good among the poor. One day
 I heard people in the street talking of her beauty
 and I made these lines" He grew conscious
 of her beauty only when others made mention of it
 in his hearing, but he had taken due note of her
 activities. Typical of the idealist of realistic
 ways and deeds. So also with the Celliniani who
 earned from Chouska the unflattering title of
 "beautiful animal". To Synge she was "some vague
 growth of the sea" and again "the shadowy Celliniani
 who sits and listens by the window". Bartley, in
 this abortive life of his, is very much like his
 creator, and is quite impervious to "anything you
 can see" and yet, in spite of this safeguarding
 quality, he has become ensnared by the figure in
 the window. Why? It is not unreasonable to
 surmise, because it is a challenge to the imagination,

and far removed from commonplace meetings at the "teas and things" which Synge disliked so heartily. Again, Bartley "would be looking out in the dark nights and out walking around the time there'd be a thick mist..." Immediately the PRELUDE comes to mind:

"Still south I went and west and south again,"
 Through Wicklow from the morning to the night
 And far from cities and the sights of men
 Lived with the sunshine and the moon's delight,"
 which, though poor poetry, is a flawless account of the way he travelled through the Wicklow glens, meeting of necessity the "mists again and they rolling up the bog....." There is also the fact that at the end of 1903, the year in which this fragment was written, the person of Christy Mahon swaggered on to Synge's mental stage, and blotted out the sight of Bartley till there was no time left for his creator to notice him again. As there is no traceable source for AUGHAVANNA PLAY it is all the more regrettable that it was not completed.

BRIDE AND KATHLEEN.

At the request of Frank Fay, the professional actor who with his brothers Gerard and Willie worked indefatigably for the establishment of the Abbey Theatre, Synge agreed to attempt a play on the rebellion of 1793. In Fay's letter he had flattered a little: "If you

could give us a drama as much alive as IN THE SHADOW OF THE GLINN or RIDERS TO THE SEA, showing what the peasants had to endure..... The leaders only give you melodrama, it is a picture of the smaller tyrannies that their followers had to endure that we want." (1) Synge had not his colleague's confidence in the appeal of such a play, but was agreeable to co-operate. His reply shows the idealistic concept of the drama which enthused him all through the vicissitudes of his life as a playwright: "I will do one if I can - but STRONG and good dramas only will bring us people who are interested in the drama, and they are, after all, the people we must have." (2) "Strong and good drama" was more important to him than large attendances. However, he did produce a scenario and some dialogue, of amusing interest in view of the complete impossibility of offering such fare to the religion-and-politics orientated Irish people. Two women, a Catholic and a Protestant, shelter in a cave to protect themselves from assault by roving English soldiers. While they wait in shared terror, they fall to arguing about their respective religions. The argument waxes so high, that one of them dashes out of the cave, asserting her preference to any sort of treatment from any number of soldiers than to listen to such blasphemy..... Synge offered this in all sincerity to Fay and the Company. Their reactions may be easily conjectured. Yeats had expected something of this nature for he had frequently asserted that Synge

(1) & (2) Collected Works: Plays Bk I. Cit. A Saddlemer.

was incapable of a political thought. Allowing for possible overstatement, for Synge was of the "Irish landlord" stratum of Irish society, it is true that Synge did not show any form of political interest whatever. Lured by the persuasions of Maud Gonne and moved by a sense of gratitude and loyalty to Yeats, he agreed in 1897 to belong to L'ASSOCIATION IRLANDAISE as Miss Gonne's Irish League was officially known, and attended the inaugural meeting, but he was not prepared to devote so much time or expend so much zeal and energy on such causes as Yeats and Maud Gonne seemed eager to do, and after a few months sent in his resignation. Though couched in polite and semi-formal terms it nevertheless speaks very plainly and shows Synge's absolute honesty in his dealing with others, even close friends whom he naturally would desire to please. Part of his letter reads: ". I think you will ~~not~~ be surprised to hear that I cannot possibly continue to be a member of a society which works on lines such as those laid down for the Irlande Libre, I wish to work in my own way for the cause of Ireland, and I shall never be able to do so if I get mixed up with a revolutionary and semi-military movement." (1)

An interesting comment on Synge's motive for resigning came from his mother in a letter to Robert: ". . . . he thinks Ireland will come to her own in years to come when socialistic ideas spread in England, but he does not approve at all of fighting for freedom. He thinks things will change by degrees in the world, and there will be equality and no more grinding

(1) Gr. & Stephens. p.63.

down of the poor..." (1) One may question whether he understood no politics.

Certainly, if Synge transferred this judgement to his literature, it can be said to have justified itself. From the hissing and booing of THE PLAYBOY to the general acclamation of the literary world, is a long step; so from the "grinding of the poor" to equal rights or rights on merit is a long way, too, but to Synge not impossible. This explains partly also, why he never once spoke up for his plays, or did anything to make them accepted by the various audiences who objected. He seemed content to leave that to more militant characters, even though it incurred Yeats's voiced displeasure at least on one occasion: "While we are fighting your battles is hardly the moment to talk of resignation....." Synge's method seemed one of non-aggression, and is due, possibly to his constant ill-health which deteriorated steadily with the passing of the turbulent years.

The short extract of the dialogue available is entirely undistinguished. It contains its fair share of Synge's strong language, usually uncalled-for, and one novel image, homely and pleasant in itself and in keeping with the mentality of the speaker, though strangely inappropriate in context. While the two women wonder whether Hell will be capacious enough to hold all the "bloody villains" loose in the land",

(1) Gr. & Stephens. p.63.

Kathleen expresses her trust in Divine Omnipotence thus: "Oh, the Almighty will find a place, surely, and He stretching the walls of Hell the way you'd stretch a shawl for a child." This could only have come from Synge's observation in the homes he visited; he being the youngest child in his own.

That this attempt was not accepted is understandable, unregretfully. Yeats's recollection was that "one night when we were still producing plays in a little hall, Synge brought round a scenario which read like a chapter of Rabelais."¹) As the Company was still reeling from the reception given to Synge's *SHADOW OF THE GLEN* it was more prudent to leave this inflammatory fragment in the drawer of the desk.

NATIONAL DRAMA: A FARCE.

In September 1905, Yeats asked Synge by letter from Coole Park to visit him there and bring any possible writings along. There was a doldrums period at the time, and Yeats needed some meat for his *SAMHAIN*, as well as some drama for the winter sessions at the Abbey. Synge had mentioned that he was working on *THE TINKERS' WEDDING* and other "satire" and accepted the invitation.

The satire was the *NATIONAL DRAMA: A FARCE*, conceived in the aftermath of the flurry caused by *THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN* with all its appalling

(1) Gr. & Stephens. p.268.

implications on Irish womanhood. Synge was still smarting from the blows received then, and almost unconsciously sought comfort in writing this farce. Being a producer as well as writer he gave attention to props and furnishings as stage directions, and in this case amused himself with introducing everything regarded as typically Irish. There are "portraits of patriots", a map of Ireland - and one of Hungary, which is another militantly Catholic country, a harp without strings - and therefore not so much in use after all. Rafferty has been dead quite a long time..., and all the books on the long shelves are bound in green. Fogarty enters, a nationalist distinguished by "a considerable thirst" accompanied by the small and slight Murphy, whose lean and hungry look may be attributed to his knowledge of the three styles of Rossetti and other matters of that nature. Murphy has "papers under his arm". One is surprised there is no brief-case in evidence.

While Fogarty waits for the members to arrive, he employs himself in reading the titles of the books among which are: The Whole History of Hungary for Beginners, side by side with The Re-afforestation of the Sea-Shore. Then there is the useful manual: The Five Parts of Father O'Growney, being the complete Irish course needed for a patriot. The Gaelic League

is represented by: How to be a Genius. (Warming up)
 Next comes: The Pedigree of the Widow of Ephesus.
 (Shades of recent criticism) The Complete Works of
 Petronius and Boccaccio, unabridged, followed in hot
 haste by: The Plays for an Irish Theatre, abridged
 and expurgated by a Catholic critic. The interesting
 list would be ineffectual without: Fairy Tales for
 all Ages and The Dawn of the Twilight... and so,
 sarcastically on. At the end of the reading Fogarty
 enquires: "What will I read, Mr. Murphy? You've no
 novels."

As soon as all are present the Chairman announces
 the subject of the meeting: The possibility, origin
 and future of an Irish National Drama, but requests
 before the discussion commences that the "National
 Bank and the National Gallery and the National Merit
 Society should leave off sailing under false pretences"
 The first speaker then defines Irish national drama:
 "..... one that embodies in a finished form the pageant
 of Irish life and shines throughout with the soft light
 of the ideal impulses of the Gaels." The obvious
 and heavy-handed sarcasm goes on, amusing indeed, in
 a sad kind of manner, for one feels that Synge is merely
 compensating his wounded feelings. As the members
 seek further clarity on the definition, they turn
 to European countries for inspiration, only to discover
 that Molière is not a national dramatist because he

represented France as a country among whose town and cities one might occasionally a suspicion of a little vice or two..... One should mention only a nation's virtues, if one wishes to be a national dramatist. Shakespeare fails the test, too, because his work is "infected with the plague-spot of sex" - serious indictment, this. "The National Drama of Catholic Ireland must have no sex," pronounces Fogarty, and underlines his statement: "That's certain sure, Mr. Chairman." Ibsen is discounted because he "delineates livid realities of the north" and would therefore be detrimental to Irish writers who are obliged to "draw out their materials from the pearly depths of the Celtic imagination, and leave the naked truth perhaps a little on one side." Someone mentioned looking to the Greeks for an example of National Drama, only to be choked with cries of: "Is it more Ehpesian drama you want?"

Such lavish helpings of mockery could only be terminated by a Joycean touch, and Fogarty leans over with the thought that he has been mulling over since Shakespeare's name was introduced: "Talking of the plague spot of the Elizabethans, Mr. Chairman, I'm after hearing a great story below in the office of the Holy Patriot News. There was once a" (He leans forward with a wicked grin - Stage Direction) Chairman rules this out at the moment, bidding Fogarty save it up till they "go out for refreshment" - probably liquid. Fogarty obeys, all of the injunction, and the party breaks up in roaring laughter, each

going his separate way and the problem of National Drama still unsolved.

The undoubted humour in this is slightly soured by the underlying malice. Synge had been hurt and was now hurting back. That his implications were irrefutably true is undeniable, but the piece does not make good drama, though it does provide interesting and entertaining reading.

Synge left another version of his FARCE, a more learned version, and one in which it is possible to detect his own voice. Arguing that national drama should endeavour to catch the tone of the nation - if Irish drama then it should seek "beauty and loveliness", if Holland, homely intimacy and picturesqueness etc. - he speaks clearly and forcefully: "The national element in art is merely the colour, the intensity of the wildness or restraint of the humour, but the other matters that have been suggested have nothing to do with Nationality as the word is and can only be used in the arts." This is valuable opinion and defensible by any standard. The second version is unfinished, which again is to be deplored. It contained much of Synge's considered opinion on the subject which was his chosen profession, and consequently had enjoyed his study and concern.

SCENARIO: THE ROBBERS.

This slight scenario contains a new Synge - an orthodoxically pious one, and a very charming picture he presents in his unacquainted role. The story he tells is so patently foreign to his make-up that for that reason alone, if there were no other, it is worth a glance. He tells that a young monk and a boy were working in front of St. Kevin's cell. They are interrupted by three robbers who enter rudely, and demand food. The young monk reproves them for their insolence, instructs them on the respect they should have for St. Kevin in the first place of course, and for all other monks as well. They are ashamed of their unbecoming behaviour in such a sanctified atmosphere, desist from food-begging and slink off, thoroughly flattened out. The young monk modestly pats himself on the back for the excellence of his administration and the boy adds his adulation. (So far, sound Synge).

The boy, anxious to have his hero, the young monk, publicly acknowledged, rushes off to relay the incident to St. Kevin. He, good man, comes out, sternly commands the young monk to recall the robbers, makes the FOUR sinners line up in front of him for suitable admonition, looks on with satisfaction at the new light dawning in the soul of the young monk who presently kneels down and begs forgiveness from the robbers. The robbers too are converted by

dead, quarrel violently and then repent and love each other.

An alternative version was: Thief woman and thief man in partnership. He incurs her displeasure, she shows it, he takes this to heart, reforms, wakes her pity, then her love, and she runs away with him....

COMEDY OF KINGS.

This scenario is accompanied by an elaborate diagram, both drawing and writing complicated almost to unintelligibility. One concept is clear, however, that the kings are bored with kingship, and eagerly welcome the monk (quite a favourite with Synge in his last writings) whom they inveigle into their seemingly communal palace, listen to his preaching and become converted. "Servant comes in as they are converted. Climax." This is the last direction, presumably the servant was either converted too, or was sent to fetch the christening water.

A RABELAISIAN RHAPSODY and LUCIFER AND THE LOST SOUL.

Ten years elapsed between the writing of A RABELAISIAN RHAPSODY and LUCIFER AND THE LOST SOUL. The Rhapsody was a reaction to the influence of THE IMITATION OF CHRIST and induced by the anxiety of

Valeska lest Synge should develop into a pious person, and so, possibly, out of her circle. On hearing that he had been deeply moved by *THE IMITATION*, Valeska immediately recommended a daily dose of Spinoza to counteract any infection, and the strangely docile Synge obeyed. To convince himself that the prescription had been effectual, he composed the *Rhapsody* - or so it seems. In defence of the *Rhapsody* he wrote in his diary in 1898: "Here is my Rabelaisian *Rhapsody* I believe in gaiety which is surely a divine impulse peculiar to humanity and I think Rabelais is equal to any of the saints." This title is taken from this declaration, and although the piece has no pretensions to didacticism, it contains many truths which he presumably garnered from *THE IMITATION*, and never quite succeeded in forgetting.

Therefore while with Rabelais and Christ too, he realises that what enters a man does not defile him, but rather what comes from him, at the same time he reproves Rabelais for absorbing just every sensation that offers, and allowing himself to become "a great flood that bears along with it dead dogs, and swine and dunghills." Nature, in her loveliness, will not be excluded for long, Synge could not do that, and *THE IMITATION* is described as: "a well of water, with ferns around it and the fragrance of the earth." From this it is a short distance to the great *Credo*, which is pronounced as Jacob Boshma passes over the stage:

"The poet sees the idea of God within the forms of the world." The appropriateness of having the great Lutheran mystic pass just then is clear when one recalls the nature of Boehme's doctrine: "the creative power of God makes all things, each thing manifests the divine cause; material and moral powers are substantially one; evil is a proof of the divine anger with man; in the end, love conquers and evil is destroyed."

Boehme lived from 1575 to 1624, and seemingly was an interesting philosopher in the eyes of J. Synge, whose splendid concept of the oneness of creation follows in the list: "Life is a chain - God, angels, man, WOMAN, children, animals, nature."

He wishes to place WOMAN as the focal point. The conflict that he recognizes between the happiness engendered by self-control and that born of self-indulgence is one he shares with those soldiers of God among whom he irreverently places Habelais, but unlike the saints, he fails to unify for the idealist, "the life that remains human, and the exaltation."

On the whole this is an illuminating fragment, revealing Synge's Pauline battle between good and evil, between Self and Anti-Self as Yeats would express it. The piece ends indecisively; one turns the page looking for more substance, but as Synge did not regard it as a major work it is left partially unfinished.

The LUCIFER AND THE LOST SOUL tail-end piece is

likewise incomplete. It is the anti-clerical and anti-Catholic Synge having a little excursion into sarcastic and witty observations. Yeats prophesied that Synge would never be popular in Ireland because of his sarcasm, but if it is read in the light of the humour that underlies it, and the fact that it is the opinion of one individual - if indeed it were sincere - there is no offence to be taken. Lucifer asks the lost soul, for example, the nature of his wrongdoing that he merited Hell. The soul replies that "I went writing pages for the Catholic Young Man"

Lucifer: What kind were your pages?

Soul : They were - mighty flat, your reverence.

Lucifer: That's a sin (Writes) Putting out pages makes men swear oaths. Go on.

This is so irrefutably true that there is nothing more to be said about getting annoyed with the mischievous but not malicious playwright.

DEAF MUTES FOR IRELAND consists of two scenarios of satirical anger. It is aimed at the Gaelic League which Synge loathed, because it was more political propaganda, he claimed, than true patriotism. He shows a Pan Celtic congress being held and a prize offered for any Irishman who knows no English. None can be found - all betray themselves, usually in

reacting to such war-cries as: "To Hell with the Pope" or "Long Live the King." At last one candidate, showing no emotion of any kind, convinces the judges that here is their man. They call in all the potentates of the vicinity to celebrate this find, and hoist him on a dais to make a speech in Gaelic. The victor mounts the platform, finds his stance, and begins the Sign Language. He is a deaf mute. He advocates a deaf mute society as the only safeguard against Anglo-Saxon linguistic influences. Synge uses strong terms, such as "dirty English stories" and "profane swearing" while describing English; while Irish is "the hope of the Gaels - and indeed of the whole of Europe and the civilized world." Perhaps it is just as well for Synge that these words did not escape the confines of his diary till he was out of reach.

To omit these scenarios, dialogues and fragments from a study of the work of J.M. Synge would deprive the reader of seeing a man learn to know himself, test his aptitudes and capabilities, make efforts with variable success, develop and retain confidence in his own judgement, and finally pursue his ideals with unyielding tenacity even though death found him largely despised and misunderstood by his countrymen.

THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN.

Completed in 1902, performed in 1903, published in book form in 1905, THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN is one of Synge's earliest plays and the first to be staged. He took the plot from a well-known folk-tale - Galway had no fewer than four versions of it - concerning an elderly husband's shamming death to trap his young wife in unfaithfulness. Synge was accused of borrowing from THE WIDOW OF EPHEBUS which Chapman used in 1612 as plot for THE WIDOW'S TEARS. It is difficult to justify this accusation, however, not only because Synge told the story as he heard it directly from the lips of Pat Dirane in the Aran Islands but also because of wide discrepancies in the accounts. The Ephesian heroine was indeed a widow, her husband dead, buried, sealed in his tomb and officially if not too efficiently guarded. Norah was not so fortunate. Dan was hale and hearty, and proved himself an accomplished actor by his "death" sustained successfully "since the sun went down"(1) till the present moment of "the wild night and the rain falling" (2).

Synge's intention was to transform this rather slight and crude material into a one-act play, a form in keeping with his usual economy of words, and which seemed best suited to the presentation of a single, not too profound idea. Some at least, of the characters should win the sympathy of the audience, and as all the world loves a lover, it seems reasonable to expect that Norah and the man of her choice will be attractive and emotionally appealing.

- (1) THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN: Everyman's Library. p.5.
 (2) IBID p.3.

to the stranger's mention of this splendid creature who "would run from this to the city of Dublin and never catch for his breath." (1) The tramp remembered further that Pat "would walk through five hundred sheep and miss one of them and be not reckoning them at all." (2) These eulogistic memories draw deep appreciation from Norah, an effect which in its turn quickens the suspicions of Michael, sensitive of the reputation of his wife of the near future when "himself will be quiet a while in the Seven Churches." (3) Norah confesses that she has indeed "known a power of men, for I was a hard girl to please and it's a hard woman I an to please this day." (4) Far from being perturbed by this superiority of mind, Michael points to the dead man and wonders: "Was it a hard woman to please you were when you took himself for your man?" (5) to which, equally untroubled, Norah replies with illuminating truthfulness: "What way would I live and I an old woman, if I didn't marry a man with a bit of a farm and cows on it?" (6) Here Synge reveals the harsh paradox of Norah's condition - the urge to survive necessitating a living death. Norah now enjoys the full sympathy of the audience.

"AND DAN SNEEZES VIOLENTLY...." (7)

The ensuing scene is nothing less than macabre, at least until the initial horror subsides. The dead man

(1) SHADOW OF THE GLEN. p.10.
 (2) IBID p.10.
 (3) IBID p.13.
 (4) IBID p.11.

(5) IBID. p.11.
 (6) IBID p.11.
 (7) IBID. Stage direction p.13.

leaps from his bed, his flowing nightgown like a sail in his wake, hair "sticking out round his head" like an avenging ghoul dispensing judgment, and solemnly intones that Michael will NOT marry Norah "the time I'm rotting below in the Seven Churches" and Norah "will walk out of that door and it's not tomorrow or the next day or any day of your life that you'll put your foot through it again." (1) Michael's poltroon image becomes indelibly etched on the backdrop of the glen, as his suggestion slides through the room: "There's a fine Union below in Rathdrum." (2) (A Union in Ireland was a poorhouse, the last indignity of any community of Irish people) But Dan knows his woman better than that in spite of her present disgrace, and there is a certain pride laced into the scorn of his voice as he replies: "The like of her would never go there. It's lonesome roads she'll be going and hiding herself away till the end will come." (3) So he had studied her all those dead months and years; had noted the tortured muscles that ached from wanderlust but were compelled to run after stubborn cattle and stupid sheep, day in day out. He had seen the loathing in her eyes and sensed the dreams of distant delights that had obliterated the drabness of her dwelling place..... Yet he could not resist the chance to hurt: "They'll find her stretched like a dead sheep with the frost on her, or the big spiders maybe, and they putting their webs on her in the butt of a ditch." (4) Norah rounds on him for this and the altercation goes on until the tramp, suddenly coming into his own as the Syngean surprise-hero, announces: "We'll be going now, lady of the house; the rain is falling but the air is kind, and

(1) SHADOW OF THE GLEN. p.13.

(3) IBID. p.14.

(2) IBID.

p.14.

(4) IBID. p.14.

maybe it'll be a grand morning, by the grace of God."(1) The gentle irony of "lady of the house" is but a figure of things to come and the unexpectedness of the tramp's invitation will be forgotten in the picture of the tranquil scene with which the play, still more surprisingly, is about to end.

Norah's conversation throughout the play has suggested that she is indispensable in the maintaining and organisation of Dan's home. She sees to the drawing of the turf, the herding of the sheep into the fold at evening, the boiling of food for himself and the black sow (fortunately in that order) and the baking of cakes at the fall of night. Now she learns that Dan is indifferent to her going - he is actually sending her off and indicating clearly and contentedly that he will not notice her absence. Already he has assumed his rightful position as head of the house in true masculine tradition: "Sit down now, and take a taste of the stuff, Michael Dara, for you're a quiet man, God help you, and I don't mind you at all. Your good health, Michael!" (2)

This peripeteia is sudden, but it has been indicated. There is one solid intimation that Dan is a hen-pecked husband. When Michael pleads for his life in the face of the resurrected ogre, he uses this argument to Norah: "He always did what you told him and I'm thinking he would do it now." (3) Perhaps Dan, recognising in Michael the re-incarnation of Macbeth's lily-livered boy, prefers his

- (1) SHADOW OF THE GLEN. p.15.
 (2) IBID p.16.
 (3) IBID p.16.

mild society to that of the virago now on the doorstep. Dan has been biding his time and after all, he had plenty of leisure to have a close-up of Michael from the depths of his death, even though he was "destroyed with the drouth." (1) Michael's^y prudence in the matter of the stocking, his appreciation of "the good sum, £5.0.0. and 10 notes" (2) are qualities after his own heart. Michael and he speak the same language, and hence, they must drink to the discovery.

From a dramatic point of view, the tramp's proposal to carry Norah off and her acceptance, are a little too facile to be satisfying. True, he understands Norah's longing and vagaries ~~and~~ much more perceptively than either Michael or Dan could ever hope to do. He and Norah found a common idiom at once and could conduct a dialogue in which the attentive Michael had no part:

- " Michael (to Norah): Mountain ewes is a queer breed, and I am not used to them at all.
- Norah : There's no man can drive a mountain ewe but the men do be reared in the Glenmalure - men like Pat Darcy, God rest his soul.
- Michael : Is it the man went queer in his head the year that's gone ?
- Norah : It is surely. (One can hear her sigh of useless impatience).
- Tramp : That was a great man, young fellow, a great man, I'm telling you. There never was a lamb from his own ewes he wouldn't know even before it was

(1) SHADOW OF THE GLEN. p:8.

(2) IBID p.12.

marked. (He has caught the spark, and if Pat knew the lambs so well, how quickly would he recognise the ewes, the mountainy, untamable, restless ewes ?)

Norah

: (Stage direction: 'turning round quickly')

He was a great man, surely, stranger, and it's a grand thing when you hear a living man saying a good word of a dead man and he mad dying. " (1)

Michael is not in this at all, but the tramp and Norah intercept each other's thoughts. Nevertheless, this slight kinship of spirit barely justifies her throwing in her lot with his and even she has misgivings - showing that Synge was aware that his ending was not quite the perfect thing he sought but which eluded him. Norah blends common sense with her dream of release and voices both in her half-joking reply to the tramp's offer: "I'm thinking it's myself will be wheezing with lying down under the heavens when the night is cold. But you've a fine bit of talk on you, stranger, and it's with yourself I'll go." (2) The "fine bit of talk" is Norah's plea for a glimpse into another world than that of narrow provincialism where all that matters is the health of cows and sheep. The tramp's consolation for her fears takes the practical form of: "You'll be saying one time 'It's a grand evening, by the grace of God' and another time, 'It's a wild night, God help us, but it'll pass surely," (3) by which he means: "You'll have to take what comes and make the best of it." He does not draw any

(1) SHADOW OF THE GLEN. p.10.

(2) IBID

p.16.

(3) IBID. p.15.

idealized image of only herons and rising larks, he is too long on the road for that and knows from repeated experience that nature is not always sunshine and meadows of green grass. Synge knows this well, too, recalling holidays in Wicklow when "heavy rains fall for often a week at a time, till the thatch drips with water stained to a dull chestnut. Then the clouds break, and there is a night of terrific storm from the south-west....." (1) But no future could be more dismal than one under Dan's roof, therefore Norah is determined to make her escape.

THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN was coolly received as the audiences did not like the implied slur on the women of Ireland. Who could whisper of marital improprieties there? Yet there was the Irish Helen, Devorgilla, carried off from the Lord of Breffni by the King of Leinster. And, further back, there was Finn's queen, Grania, who fled with Diarmuid and thereby provided Lady Gregory with material for her play DIARMUID AGUS GRANIA. Tristan's Iseult, it must be remembered was Iseult of Ireland. It is therefore unjust to maintain that Synge meant deliberate offence to the Irish nation of that period. He was, true to his tenets, seizing a characteristic aspect of Wicklow peasant-life and presenting it as a one-act play.

As this is the first of Synge's plays to be performed and the audience had to get accustomed to his peculiar Anglo-Irish dialect, perhaps this would be the appropriate place to indicate briefly how the dialect differs from

(1) IN WICKLOW, W. KERRY & CONNEMARA. p.13.

Standard English. It is a little like speaking Gaelic with the vocabulary of English and the syntax of Gaelic. This may be over-simplified, but it is sufficient for the present purpose. At the opening of the nineteenth century the population of Ireland was about five million, of whom four million spoke usually Gaelic and the rest only Gaelic. By the end of the century the two languages had become so intermingled that a hybrid came into existence. Synge found great charm and possibilities in this hybrid, and devoted himself to cultivating it with a view to using only Anglo-Irish as medium for his work. He took pains to learn the Gaelic language directly from native speakers, then listened purposefully to the variations of both Gaelic and Anglo-Irish that he heard in Wicklow, East Ireland, in Kerry, South Ireland, and Galway in the West. Linguistically gifted, he found this intensive study rewarding and interesting, with the result that his mastery of all Irish dialects has been regarded as perfect. Subsequent playwrights have tried to imitate his style, using the vocabulary and the falling cadences as he did, but they fail to reproduce his rhythm and an indefinable atmosphere surrounding his speeches that is experienced rather than understood. T.C. Murray, for example, who like Synge, draws from peasant and farming life, concentrates in MAURICE HARTE on peasant mentality and aspirations and uses what he regards as the appropriate dialect:

Mrs. Harte : Will you be talking wild, frightening, foolish talk about your conscience, and not think at all of them, nor of us, and all we done for you ?

Maurice : (Distressfully) Mother ! Mother !

Mrs. Harte : You'll go back, Maurice? The vocation will come to you in time with the help of God. It will surely.

Maurice : Don't ask me ! Don't ask me !

Owen : 'Twould be better for you, Maurice. 'Twould, surely. (1)

The conflict in these lines is obvious and realistic, but the flow of the language is lacking. Compare:

Lavarcham : Let you rise up, Deirdre, and come off while there are none to heed us, the way I'll find you shelter and some friend to guard you.

Deirdre : To what place would I go away from Naisi? What are the woods without Naisi or the seashore?

Lavarcham : If that's the way you'd be, come till I find you a sunny place where you'll be a great wonder they'll call the queen of sorrows; and you'll begin taking a pride to be sitting up pausing and dreaming when the summer comes. (2)

These lines rise and fall with the inflections of the old woman's dreamy, coaxing voice, as she persuades Deirdre, who to Lavarcham is always the child she reared for the king, to do something as difficult as a return to the monastery was for Maurice in Murray's play. Synge's achievement was the outcome of diligence and the application of his innately intensive nature.

Here follow a few typically Anglo-Irish expressions:

1. By omitting the Auxiliary one gets:

It is, surely, and I walking to Brittas.

2. To obtain emphatic effect, 'it is' may be used to

(1) MAURICE HARTE: T.C. Murray. Act I

(2) DEIRDRE: J.M. Synge. Act III

introduce the sentence:

It is to Aughria we were going.

3. The word 'itself' meaning 'even' or 'actually':
".... and he not tidied or laid out itself"
4. Often the Relative Pronoun is omitted, resulting in:
Is it the man went queer in his head ?
5. The Present Continuous Tense is often used instead of the Present Habitual:
"Go along, I'm saying, and have your game" - normally:
"I say".
6. "Himself", "herself" and "myself" instead of the ordinary Personal Pronouns:
Hurry, or herself will be back again. OR You're not huffy with myself ?
7. Constructions such as "three days or four" instead of "three or four days".
8. The Imperative in 2nd person with "let" is generally used:
"Let you be falling asleep now, or I'll need a middling time yet before we go."
9. Use of "after" and "on" is unusual in Standard English:
"He's after daying on me, God forgive him."
My road is lost on me now. I'm thinking I'll stay with you here."

10. Use of "and" instead of "when" or "as":

It was raining and I setting out on my journey.

11. "do be" or "does be" for "am" and "is" and "are".

There's no man can drive a mountain sheep but the men do be reared in Glenmalure.

12. "the way" instead of "so that":

"..... and I with my gowns ready the way I can wed you, and not wait at all."

These are individual words and phrases. There is also the "fall" or cadence of the sentence, usually procured by ending with a present participle or an adverb. This gives the musical, lilting and often melancholy effect that is fascinating - for a time, but can grow dreary if one reads too much at a session.

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

Or of ending with an adverb: "Tell me, stranger, if it's cold he is surely."

Synge employs all of these characteristics with a fluency that seems effortless and has likewise mastered the quick wit, imagination and sometimes brilliant sparkle that darts out of a sudden repartee:

SARAH: (from THE TINKERS' WEDDING) Give me the jug now, or you'll have it spilt in the ditch.

Mary: Let you leave me easy, Sarah Casey. I won't spill it, I'm saying. God help you, are you thinking it's frothing full to the brim it is at this hour of the night, and I after carrying it in my two hands a long step from Jenny Neill's ? (sees the Priest)
God save your reverence. I'm after bringing down

a smart drop of this; and let you drink it up now, for it's a middling drouthy man you are at all times, God forgive you, and this night is cruel dry.

From: THE PLAYBOY.

PEGGERY : Let you stop a short while anyhow. Aren't you destroyed walking with your feet in blisters and your whole skin needing washing like a Wicklow sheep ?

CHRISTY : It's a nice room, and if it's not humbugging me you are, I'm thinking that I'll surely stay.

JIMMY : Now, by the grace of God, herself will be safe this night, with a man killed his father holding danger from the door - a lad, I'm thinking would face a foxy divil with a pitchpike on the flags of hell.

In THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN, however, Synge was still experimenting and there are occasional lapses into nonsensical repetition such as the people from whom he claimed to have learnt would never use. An example of this is Norah's complaint that at times "you do be sitting looking out from a door the like of that door, and seeing nothing but the mists rolling down the bog, and the mists again and they rolling up the bog, and hearing nothing but the wind crying out in the bits of broken trees...." So much bog and so many tumbling mists goaded a Belfast writer, Henry Morrow, to produce a mocking playlet called: "THE MIST THAT DOES BE ON THE BOG", produced in 1909. However, by that time, Synge had weathered so many critical tempests that he was immune to such a harmless

piece as this. Moreover, It is easy to overlook the bugs and mistakes when "the air is kind and it'll be a grand morning, by the grace of God". Although the solution of the play is not wholly successful, THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN raised considerable protest, proof that some of its intended shots had reached their targets. "Better any day to have the row we had last night than to have your play fizzle out in half-hearted applause," Synge wrote to Molly and THE PLAYBOY première, an opinion shared by actors and producers the world over.

RIDERS TO THE SEA.

Written from 1902 to 1903 and performed in the Abbey Theatre in 1904, RIDERS TO THE SEA is the shortest and most readily accepted of Synge's published plays. It is a simple tragedy revolving round MAURYA, the matriarchal figure who has suffered the loss at sea of her husband, father-in-law, and four of her six sons. The fifth son, Michael, has been missing for nine days and is believed to have perished also. The play deals with the drowning of Bartley, her youngest and only remaining son, while two daughters, Nora and Cathleen, complete the family.

The scene is the Aran Islands made familiar to Synge by many and happy visits. His first sight of the islands was in May, 1898, when he stayed for fourteen days in the Inn at the Seven Churches (mentioned later in THE SHADOW OF THE GIEN) and one month at Patrick MacDonough's cottage on the island of Inishmaan. During this stay he took an outing to Inishere, the most southerly of the islands, from which island he returned to Galway. The following year he returned in September, 1899, and this time went directly to the MacDonough home for three or four weeks. On this occasion he visited the third island, Inishmore, and from there took boat back to the mainland again. Galway was going gay - or sorry - that day, in memory of the national hero, Parnell, whose eighth anniversary they were celebrating, but the "platform crowded with intoxicated people" impressed Synge only unfavourably. In Autumn 1900,

Synge renewed his acquaintance with the island, Inishmaan, where he stayed a week, thence to Inishere for a few days, a guest of new friends, the Powell family, returning again to Inishmaan to Thomas Connelly's inn. Missing one year, Synge sailed for Inishmaan again in 1902, and at the end of that year, he took leave of the islands, having gathered a lifetime of experiences and material for the book on the islands which he wrote so sympathetically and inspiringly, and which was published in 1907.

Synge owed much to the islands, besides his remarkable "new" language which he soon recognised as his best medium of expression. His close approach to the people in the vicissitudes of every day enriched him with the sense of peasant life which gives authenticity and charm to his descriptions of the islands, their population and their incessant struggles. In *THE RIDERS TO THE SEA* he found opportunity to utilise all he had noted, experienced, and heard on the islands, so that setting, colour, incident, behaviour of the people in specific situations - all are true to fact, and Synge is the reporter who nevertheless is strangely at the very heart of the incident. Not that he deliberately identifies with any of the characters; on the contrary, each is individual in his own right, but the manner of telling and the attitudes he bestows

on his speakers betrays his intense understanding of the sentiments that animate them on such occasions. He interprets unerringly, the blending of paganism and Christianity, so that, just as the peasants themselves, is the reader also uncertain where one ends and the other begins.

The source of the play is found in the prose Aran Islands, Part III, where the story is told with a detail exactly resembling that of the play. It was a source of pride to Synge that the sources of his plays, Deirdre excepted, were the tales he had heard from the people. In the present story, "the sister of the dead man came in through the rain with her infant, and there was a long talk about the rumours that had come in. She pieced together all that she could remember about his clothes, and what his purse was like, and where he had got it, and the same of the tobacco box, and his stockings. In the end there seemed little doubt that it was her brother.

'Ah !' she said, 'it's Mike sure enough, and please God they'll give him a decent burial.' Then she began softly to keen to herself." The story is identical with the play, and indeed the prose account is most touching in the simplicity and dignity of its wording. A second such account occurs in Part IV which is more terrifying in

its events. Synge describes with intense sympathy, the keening of the women in their red dresses and red shawls the measuring of the grave with lengths of bramble switches, the finding of her own mother's skull by the woman whose son was being buried and her semi-demented caressing of the grisly souvenir, the mourners beating the coffin lid with the flat of their hands as though they would draw the dead man out again to go on living and enduring with them.

The distress and despair surrounding that burial attend the opening scene of RIDERS TO THE SEA. Nora peeps into the kitchen and whispers: "Where is she?" Cathleen answers that "she" (Maurya) "is lying down, God help her, and may be sleeping if she's able," whereupon Nora comes in softly, and takes a bundle from her shawl. This bundle is the introduction of the tragedy - and identifiable shirt and sock, Michael's. Just as in the PLAYBOY, where Pegeen's pub was a centre for the region's social life where all found an open forum and all were equally welcome to contribute their opinions provided they were prepared to have them discussed there and then, so too was the kitchen of Maurya's home a focal point where ideas and comments might be shared and energies pooled for the constant community battle against the communal enemy, the sea.

From this point on, every word and every gesture are fraught with ominous significance. There are some general symbols in RIDERS TO THE SEA, familiar in Synge's work and especially useful here. There is his interpretation of colour. On the Aran Islands, Synge was often cheered by the bright red of the women's skirts against the monotonous grey of the rocks and barrenness of the soil. Consequently, red became for him symbolic of vitality, blood, which is synonymous with life and activity conducive to longer and richer life. Consequently Bartley sets off on a red horse. But as so often with Synge, there is a reversal to reckon with, and the sea is usually an unfriendly agent in the fisherman's world. So it is here. The sea changes the red of life and strength to that of blood indeed, but the blood of sacrifice. The grey horse, grey retaining its meaning because that suits the inimical ocean, sneaks along behind him, and takes the first opportunity to push him into the water. In this overriding and unjust power of the sea which compels the red to change its function, one can see, even if remotely, Synge's ever present complaint - authoritarianism depriving a weaker subject of its inalienable rights. Morah in THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN, the tinkers in their freeestate, the two blind beggars who elected to remain so and the Saint would oblige them to accept his

ministrations, Christy who found his rebellion the open sesame to his new self, Deirdre, who died and took the sons of Usneach along with her, rather than submit to loss of freedom however great the promised compensations, all are victims of some implacable and hostile superior force.

Bartley's determination to take part in the Connemara horse fair - "the one boat for two weeks" may not be missed - in spite of his mother's vehement dissuasion, is doomed to disaster because they forget to give him bread - sustenance for the way. Seen as a Catholic symbol, all the inhabitants of the islands were Catholic in spite of the efforts of Synge's uncle who had visited them as Anglican Missionary, this bread is of vital importance. It would become his VIATICUM, his bread for the journey which is the name applied to the Church ceremony preparing a Catholic for death. Now Maurya, the high-priestess of this sacrifice of her son, forgets to have the rite completed in the consumption of the victim-bread by the person whose death had to be provided for. Consequently, her extreme agitation and unrest, but strange reluctance to meet him with the bread at the corner. Yet, she goes on instigation of her daughters; of herself she seemed disinclined. Why? Because of her second sight. She knew that Bartley would never eat that bread of life. That same bread will later be eaten by the men who make his coffin. Maurya's failure to give him her blessing

for the journey indicates that the trip will be unblest, and so it proves to be indeed.

The disagreement about the new rope, --"the pig with the black feet" had been nibbling it -- black symbolising death and mourning. Maura does not want to part with it, but he insists. Later, his dead body is drawn to the shore by means of that same rope. Bartley's advice to Nora to sell the pig should an opportunity arise, is unwise. The pig would have warned him by preventing his procuring a halter (nibbling the rope); he refused to heed the warning -- he will never receive another. Bartley takes Michael's second shirt with him, not knowing that Michael will never use it again -- nor that he himself will follow in Michael's path even as he wears his clothes. Clothes, too, are weighted with meaning in Synge's convention. In *THE PLAYBOY*, Shawn renounces his claim to Pegeen by allowing the men to strip off his coat as he attempts to run away. Later, he bribes Christy by giving him a lovely outfit -- putting thereby his manly right to Pegeen on Christy's willing back. In *RIBERS*, too, though not so happily, Bartley, in donning Michael's shirt, takes on his fate as well. All these omens follow in quick succession and lead step by step to the climax.

The girls' kindly efforts to keep from Maurya the news concerning Michael, is rendered futile by her mysterious second sight. The young priest's well-intentioned but superficial comfort is repudiated by Maurya from the depth of her experiential maturity: "It's little the like of him knows of the sea." For she has learned that with the sea ordinary values do not count. Ordinary values are just; those of the sea are not. It claims the young, the healthy, the breadwinners, but leaves the old and decrepit, to mourn their loneliness and long for the demise that lingers in coming. The priest's knowledge is conventional and correct for normal situations, but the sea has its own system of laws and peculiar standards of justice.

The growing conviction that no prayer will alter a man's predestined course is pagan and consequently a challenge to the Almighty. Another bad omen. As old people will, Maurya reminisces aloud. Pageantwise, the history of her life and of the deaths in the family pass before her eyes and she describes one after the other till ".....there were men coming after them and they holding a thing in the half of a red sail, (again a change of function) and water dripping out of it - it was a dry day, Hera - and leaving a track to the door." She pauses with her hand stretched out towards the door. It opens softly and old women begin to come in, crossing themselves on the threshold, and kneeling down.

MAURYA : Is it Patch, or Michael, or what is it at all ?

CATHLEEN : It's Michael, God spare him, for they're after sending us a bit of his clothes from the far north.

But Nora looks out. She sees her mother's recent recounting, taking place again.

NORA : They're carrying a thing among them, and there's water dripping out of it and leaving a track by the big stones.

CATHLEEN : Is it Bartley it is ?

A WOMAN : It is, surely, God rest his soul.

Thus with gentle directness, Synge announces the crucial moment of the tragedy. It is as if his filial sentiments towards the old woman urged him to spare her unnecessary anguish by immediately imparting the worst. A lesser artist would perhaps have sought to prolong the tension. Maurya responds magnificently. Sparing as Synge with his words, is she with her demonstrations of sorrow. While the keening women wait for her signal, they see her control and complete resignation as she "raises her head and speaks as if she did not see the people around her" : "They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me....." Her concluding words are a splendid Christian prayer for the eternal happiness of her children,

contradicted in the same breath by the fatalism of: "Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied."

Synge is very perceptive here in allowing Maurya her Christian and pagan prayers all in one breath. With people of a still primitive culture, there is little distinction between this world and the next, (for of course, they have no doubts concerning the reality of both worlds). Superstition and sanctity are so closely intertwined that in praying to God, Maurya includes all of his creation as well, for all things are infused with life, and God is Life... With her, there is no petulance in "We must be satisfied" - it is merely a statement.

"There's nothing more the sea can do to me" - this is her triumph. The sea has done its worst; she has withstood and is still capable of further existence, even a happier one than heretofore. It is she who is the conqueror, though neighbours look on her with pity and keen for her child.

It has become customary to find in *RIDERS TO THE SEA* the elements of a Greek tragedy. The sea, all pervading and all powerful, is the protagonist. Maurya, the tragic heroine, is the new Hecuba wailing to Hector (Bartley) not to go forth again to battle with Achilles beneath the battlements of Ilios.

The keening women are the Chorus, mourning the

untimely death of the hero, who was cut off before he could justify his promise.

Maurya's sentence, quoted above, is seen as a paraphrase of:

"Therefore, my friend, die also. What help lamenting now?"

Even Patroclus died, that was better far than thou." from the Iliad, and an echo of Solon's counsel to call no man happy till he is dead. The ancient Greeks did not look for happiness in this world; neither did Maurya. They were satisfied to wait for Elysium; she for the comfort of a deep grave and a clean burial.

Its dramatic qualities, too, sustain comparison with the austerity of Greek tragedy. There is the plot, bare, unornamented, plainly told. Clues are obvious, though heavily ominous. The three women may be regarded as representative of the three Fates, and again the perversity of the sea is noted, for the Fates controlled man's destiny, while here the three women are themselves at the mercy of their antagonist. Cathleen's spinning corresponds to the spinning of the web of life, and characteristically they discover that in knitting Michael's stocking, Nora had broken the web of his lot by dropping the stitches. She dropped four stitches - for Michael's four brothers who were already dead. As for Michael himself, his shirt would be his death-symbol, and

it had already passed on to the next victim, Bartley. The resistance of the black knot to their attempts to open it represents the closed mystery of the sea who takes her victims when and where she decides, and invariably without warning. Moreover, in the case of Michael, she will not even reveal his burial place. She will guard her secret with a hard, black, salt-caked knot - salt-caked even as the shirt which Bartley could not even get on that morning, and was consequently forced to wear Michael's. Fate presides, doling out the omens one by one, implacable in her determination to reduce Michael and Bartley to victims of her decision; to pursue them to their bodily death and to bring Maurya to the astounding conquest of her natural grief and rebellion. There is no parade of sentiment, no needless situations, no side issue. Many events are only mentioned, and those which are acted, progress in stately, unhurried procession to the prepared-for climax. Clear areas may be labelled as Exposition, Climax, Anti-climax - for instance, the domesticity of the daughters, their identification of the clothes, their kindly shielding of Maurya from unnecessary and premature suffering, Bartley with innumerable last minute injunctions so engrossed that he hardly hears his mother's importunings - all of this is Exposition.

The episode of the forgotten bread and withheld blessing proved the first stage of the Climax,

insofar as it helps the girls to get Maurya away that they may examine the clothes and verify their suspicions. This gives directly on to Maury's vision of the man on the grey horse all dressed in new shoes and shirt..... The atmosphere of mystery intensifies and the old woman's foreknowledge of the then unknown transforms her from the fisherman's wife of the Aran Islands into the essential Woman of all the world, whose heart beats in empathy with that of each of her children in their great moments, either of danger or of ecstasy. A type of all women, face to face with - death. Eve at the discovery of her son, Abel, learning the appearance and message of death.

All attention is now veered towards Maurya. The climax approaches. It comes. Fades. Maury's tranquillity and rapid resignation are uncanny. The girls are chilled and frightened. "The day Michael was drowned you could hear her crying out from this to the spring well." That was the natural woman, before her transfiguration into a marmoreal figure of tragedy.

The language of RIDERS is also comparable with that of the proposed models in its level, restrained dignity. It has no need for cynicism, savagery, the thrust and parry of comic repartee. Christy's exuberant splendour would be unforgivable solecism in this chastened atmosphere; nor would it even find

a foothold on the barren rocks of RIDERS as they glisten with the crystals hardened from centuries of tears.

How far one could trace resemblance depends on one's preference. The idea that Synge had Greek Tragedy in mind is an elevating influence, imparting the elegance of Homeric eloquence to the fisherfolk of wild and windswept islands.

Do they need it? And did he really intend it? Greatness is inherent in the individual. These islanders, isolated, battered by storm and rain, swallowed by swollen tides and spewed up again on rocks spiteful and inhospitable, yet maintaining their courage and humanity, their courtesy and humour, their concern for one another and their generous welcome to the stranger, their perseverance and resilience however severe their rebuffs. They are heroes in their mode and environment even as Hector and Achilles were in the magnificence of their era. History might still reveal many Helens among the Noras and Cathleens; many a hidden Hecuba wearing a read dress and swathed in a shawl.

Synge may indeed have fashioned this play on ancient models, and creditably so. Yet, it is remarkable that in such a short piece, he has touched on every possible aspect of Aran life, sometimes merely a mention, sometimes a detailed description. He has noted the early womanliness

of the daughters in their assuming complete responsibility for the household affairs, not only in ordinary times but also in the arrangements for the funeral, coffin and waking. He has brought to notice the solidarity that unites the islanders as one family - all know well, when the boat is leaving and who is leaving on it and why. He refers to the illicit poteen trading, of which everyone on the island is perfectly aware, and to which no one ever overtly refers. He mentions the kelp-making, the spinning, knitting, burning of turf that is stored in the typical loft over the kitchen, the concern of the priest for his people and their easy familiarity with him - familiar even to discounting his opinion: He has observed the "pot ovens" and probably felt their metallic heaviness and tasted the luscious oven-cakes that their sturdy resistance to coals above and beneath produces. He has caught the Irishman's incapability to resist a horse bargaining bout; not all the angry oceans of the cosmos would prevent Bartley from participating in the Connemara feast of haggling over prices and expressing views on equine excellence. And of course, the inseparable union of superstition and genuine religion that allows Maurya to pray in conventional and accepted Christian terms while thinking frankly heathen thoughts at the same time.

The reference to SAMHAIN illustrates this point. SAMHAIN (pronounced Soven "o" as in "how") is the second day of November, a day on which the Catholic Church invites her members to pray particularly for the souls of the dead that they may soon be released from the place of purgation and transported to the joy of Heaven. This is reasonable to the Catholic, but the popular imagination has leaped beyond the Church's doctrine and invented armies of "holy souls" who wander around the brens and houses where they have lived on earth imploring on their own behalf the assistance of their friends' prayers. This is superstition and condemned by the Church. Yet, it is only an imaginative extension of the truth, and who knows but that there is perhaps some element of reality in the belief? So close are the territories of reality and dream.

The Caoin or "keen", the permitted English spelling, has no counterpart in Greek, and therefore would not testify to a Greek model for the RIDERS having been followed. The Jewish people practised some form of ritual mourning - the death of Jairus's daughter evidences that. In Spain there is the Saeta, of which the Basques render poignantly haunting melodies in times of national mourning - when exiled for political reasons, as happened at the beginning of World War II when numerous Basques sought refuge in the South of England. Their

1a:

"Tá sé imighthe uain
Go deó, go deó, go deó."

Translation: He is gone from us for ever, for
ever, for ever.

At the first production of RIDERS at the Mossworth
Hall, 1904, the score for the keen was:



The introduction of the crotchets at the end produces the effect of a sob. None of the Abbey players could perform the play if the keen were omitted, and the story is told of Lady Gregory getting a woman from the west to come to Dublin on the specific errand of teaching the actors how to do the keen. They took her to the parlour of Lady Gregory's Dublin residence, but she could not do it there. She had to be taken upstairs, to a bedroom, and standing near the window, looking out into the then darkening street, was she able to produce the mournful music with which her soul was full. It was a deeply moving experience for

the young ladies of Dublin, and had beneficial effects on their subsequent performance.

With such abundance of rich material at hand, and having personally witnessed the ceremonies he is describing, it is unlikely that Synge, who set such store by originality, should deliberately copy the form of Greek tragedy; the resemblance is accidental, and almost inevitable, considering the customs of the two countries.

Although the roles of Cathleen and Nora are less prominent than Maurya's, yet Synge has delineated them with meaningful realism. Practically everything they do or say is either a direct forward-movement of the play, or an eloquent symbol. At the opening scene, Cathleen "kneads the bread, puts loaf in oven, wipes her hands and sits down at once to the spinning wheel." (Stage directions) The bread is responsible for the maintenance of life; the wiping of the hands represents reverence for the course of life, ordained by the gods, which she is going to work out on the wheel, the web of destiny. She fashions the web, but only according to the mechanism of the wheel - the gods decree, and man obeys.

During the conversation with Nora, homely and sisterly, she asks: "Is the sea bad by the

white rocks?" Instinctively they glance towards the "white boards" which Maurya had already provided in the event of Michael's death being verified by the washed-up body, and the need for a "decent burial", for the coffin boards are white, and Cathleen's query about danger near the "white" rocks spells disaster. Both girls try to keep the rumour from their mother as long as possible. Both speak of the tide and the turning of the tide - they have learnt how dependent are the villagers on the vagaries of the sea, and both have already assumed adulthood, at least in the matter of suffering. Every woman on the islands knows only agony till her husband is safely back from a fishing trip, and the girls know this anguish very well. Cathleen is the more vigorous of the two. It is she who defends Bartley for insisting on going to the fair and shows in her answer a wisdom acquired by observation and some experience in the deaths of her brothers. It is Cathleen who discovers the oversight in connection with the bread, and forces her mother to take it along to intercept Bartley on his way. And when the fatal news is proved incontestably true, Cathleen takes command, seeing Maurya is no longer able. To Nora's more thoughtful remark: "She's quiet now and easy, but the day Michael was drowned you could hear her crying out from this to the spring well,"

she gives a brisk and practical rejoinder: "An old woman will soon be tired with anything she will do, and isn't it nine days herself is after crying and keening and making great sorrow in the house?" This is reminiscent of MAGNA SERENITAS - the best cure for sorrow is to thrust it from you after your due of grieving; get tired of it as of any other task that has to be done. One senses in these two sisters a distinct Martha-Mary relationship, although Synge was perhaps unaware of it. Bartley seems a little headstrong and more than a little foolhardy. Being a skilled fisherman he knew the signs of the sea and should have recognised his danger. But was there danger? What exactly happened to Bartley? Maurya would give the best reply to this query, and she would maintain that Michael "fetched" him from the seat on the grey horse - and thus explain why Bartley showed such dogged self-will - his time had come and he was no longer a free agent. It is as if the water drew him into its keeping, just as Maurya will later try to save his soul from other clutches - Satanic, as the enmity of the sea paints her to her victims - by liberal sprinklings of blessed water from the Church.

Although RIDERS TO THE SEA deals with one event in a small and closed community, by singular skill on Synge's part, the scene becomes a nucleus

of a whole world of similar subjection to stronger and inevitable forces. Michael's clothing represents himself there among his friends, and yet "there does be a power of young men floating round in the sea" and Michael stands for them all. Michael is more "alive" in that household than than perhaps during ordinary times when he is seldom home at all. But today, it is his shirt that Bartley is wearing; it is his stick that Maurya leans on as she tries to sustain Bartley in the trials he is about to face, Michael has not relinquished his place in the group, for his fate will be repeated by many a young man, there will be endless repetitions till the end of time, for the sea will never yield her sovereignty. The neighbours who bring in the body of Bartley do so with ease and grace, as if performing a task with which they have long since come to terms, and it is no longer an effort. The entrance of the keepers is most effective in reality as well as on the stage, and here the resemblance to Greek tragedy would be strongest. Synge's prose description of the effect of the keen is a memorable passage: "This last moment of grief was the most terrible of all, The young women were nearly lying among the stones, worn out with their passion of grief, yet raising themselves every few moments to beat with magnificent gestures on the boards of the coffin. The young men were worn out also, and their voices cracked continually in the wail of the keen."

ornament, but the use of strong colour supplies vivid suggestions - far north, white boards, pig with black feet- destined himself for death as soon as the official comes round, and there is Maurya's plea for a "clean burial" for her children. Synge moves from homely images of a pig chewing a rope, through Nora's childish questions about the way and distance to Donegal, and to the semi-historical "the day Bride Dara seen the dead man with the child in his arms" right on to the strangely oracular vein in which Maurya reflects: "They are all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do."

The protagonists of RIDERS being the sea, an immense body of rhythmically moving water, it is fitting that the language should contain similar rising and falling in its sentence structures and cadences. Synge provides these in practically every sentence spoken, but with special success and beauty in Maurya's last speech. While during the dialogues - and there is usually a pair of speakers on the stage together, first Nora and Cathleen, then Maurya and Bartley, returning to dialogue in hushed tones between the two girls over the bundle of clothing till Maurya's re-arrival - comment and reply seem to eddy to and fro in a normal, conversational rhythm, in the grand farewell of Maurya, the tone is completely altered to a dignified

and solemn dirge tone in which she releases one by one, the pent-up emotions that have accumulated over the years with the loss of her family. "They're all gone now" echoes "They're gone now, the lot of them" a few minutes previously, and also her exclamation on the departure of Bartley, so much against her wishes, "He's gone now, and I'll have no son left me." This repetition has a litany-effect suggestive of prayer-and-repsense customary at Church services, thus Maurya's soliloquy becomes almost a ritual of death. She paces steadily on: "I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the south...." which when read, moves with the tempo of poetry, and the whole speech is poetic in the texture of free verse, with distinctly marked stresses and inflections. Here it is the perfect balance of "surf in the east..... surf in the west.. wind from the south" leading up to the climactic "great stir" when they "hit against each other." So, too, in her own heart there have been unceasing waves of emotion, joy, sorrow, hope, fear, reward, disappointment, loss, gain of a new child or a good intake of fish. They have led up to the "great stir" that is now rending her soul apart, only to allow her will to collect the scattered elements and compose them again into a splendid resignation. The innate superstition in the lines "no call to be going down and getting Holy Water in the dark

nights after Samhain" has been a source of terror to her everytime she had to make that little journey, a terror which she bore alone, because it would hurt the other children to think their mother shirked any duty for a dead son. A perspicacious poet only could make the following observation: "..... and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening." This does not mean that she will no longer be disturbed at the loss of fine young men, nor that she no longer sympathises with others in desolation - but the phrase: "I won't care what way the sea is.." touches on a very human truth. While we sympathise with others, are we not thinking interiorly: "Does the like of this happen often and shall I, possibly, be the next victim?" Maurya will still feel keenly the loss of lives, but it will be impersonal, and she is honest enough to admit that the grief will then be less. This idea is expanded to excellent purpose in PLAYBOY where all listen with rapture to the story of the murder - as long as it remains on a high, windy, and extremely distant hill, but let it take place under their eyes

"It isn't that I haven't prayed for you, Bartley, to the Almighty God" - Maurya's maternal duty was not neglected, and her little examination

of conscience is as natural as it is touching. Then, humanwise, she expects and looks forward to her reward: "It's a great rest I'll have now - great rest (repeated to impress the release on her own mind) and great sleeping...." She has not slept much over the years, worrying, watching, waiting, and at all times, longing. Now all is over - she can let go. The impression is conveyed that the old woman's mind now is perfectly tranquil, she has accepted the fate destined and has grown through the acceptance from a solitary figure on an island, to a picture of mankind, buffeted and harried for the greater part of life, then ultimately achieving a breadth of vision and detachment larger by far than the difficulties that seem at one point in the span of the individual, unjust and insurmountable. Just as the two girls acquired in such a short time the maturity of grown women, and were capable of assuming the mother's role in managing the affairs of the house and funeral, so, does Synge imply, must life's challenges be faced. One must emerge from trial, strengthened, and given a new dimension of potential heroism and initiative through the effort required to overcome the obstacles that seemed so formidable.

It is therefore difficult to remember only the tragic element in RIDERS, rather the picture that remains is one of dignity, refinement,

understanding of one another and a willing participation in the suffering inseparable from human existence. Some of Synge's friends suggested that he put more "life" into the scene after the bringing in of the body. This is a strange request, as the whole act throbs with such intense feeling and pain and sense of loss, that there is no place for passivity, therefore no need for more "life". Everyone on the stage is active to exhaustion, and indeed the depth of their involvement in the events communicates itself to the audience, so that the Greek tragedy's "purgation" is markedly experienced.

THE TINKERS' WEDDING.

The first reference to this two-act play occurs in Synge's diary for summer, 1902; by the end of 1903 the first draft was completed; it was published in 1907, but performed for the first time only in 1909. Why the delay? The answer lies with the play-wright himself. Although accustomed to dispassionately assessing his own works, Synge seemed unsure about this one. It did not quite satisfy him, neither was it poor enough to be discarded. In 1904 he offered it, in MS., to Elkin Mathews for publication, but withdrew it the same day for further revision. Yeats asked for it in 1905 "to discuss for our winter session" but Synge did not surrender it. Yeats then spoke to George Roberts, editor of THE ARROW (an occasional pamphlet, the purpose of which was chiefly to refute critics of The Abbey Theatre) about the possibility of using the play. Roberts contacted Synge at once, asking to see the MS. Synge refused him also, but promised to let him have it at a later date. The interest shown by Yeats and Roberts encouraged Synge, however, to approach Dr Max Meyerfeld, who had already translated THE WELL OF THE SAINTS into German, with a request that he would do the same for THE TINKERS' WEDDING. Synge wrote: "We have never played it here as they say it is too immoral for Dublin. There is talk of having it done in London, though nothing is decided yet. I am inclined to think it would do rather well in Germany".

partial dissatisfaction with it, adding "what merits it has lie in a humorous dialogue that would have to be very richly and confidently spoken". It has never been put on in Dublin; a few times, and uneventfully in England, and also in America where its existence was entirely obliterated by the reception given to THE PLAYBOY - sweeping enthusiasm following scenes of violent rejection. It is not unreasonable to suppose that Synge's ultimate decision to publish THE TINKERS' WEDDING was supported by his reaction to the THE PLAYBOY RIOTS as they were called - a determination to prove that he meant what he averred to PLAYBOY enemies: "I don't care a rap".

However, he did present this play to the world, and perhaps his judgement is a little too modest.

The plot is simple and based on a story heard in Wicklow of a tinker couple who once persuaded a priest to marry them for half a sovereign and a tin can, but then pretended the donkey had kicked the can in the night. The priest does not marry them. In Synge's tale, the donkey behaves kindly enough. It is Mary, the husband's mother, who sells the can and blissfully drinks its value while her son and daughter-in-law are stealing fowls. The priest makes the discovery, in his precaution to open the sack before the ceremony. A wild scene ensues, climaxed by the tinkers' stuffing the priest into a sack and flinging

him into a ditch while they pack their "stinking rags" in fear of the approaching police. Such treatment for a priest in Ireland, where the Sagairt Aruin is all but adored? How could Synge dare? Could he have lived so long in Ireland and failed to sense the relationship between pastor and flock? He knew all about it. He foresaw strong, even violent reactions to this play and made provisions in one of his rare prefaces. So careful and so saving of his literary comments is he, that any opinion he offers deserves assiduous study. When, then, he differentiates between the meaning of the word "serious" in English (grave, solemn) and in French (real, true) it is to be expected that he will use this word circumspectly and with set purpose. In the preface to *THE TINKERS' WEDDING* he writes: "The drama is serious - in the French sense by the degree to which it gives nourishment, not very easy to define, to the imagination." Thus the criterion of worthwhile drama is not its satisfactory handling of important matters but rather its power to stimulate the imagination so that the audience may perceive, through the presentation, dimensions that underlie the obvious. He insists that the drama "does not teach or prove anything" and this directs the imagination in its enterprising search for what is implied rather than what is merely evident. He desires that there should be no didacticism, no moralising, no implied criticism. Yet, in the play, he is implicitly criticising in so far as the priest represents authority and a way of life organised according to a regular programme; while the tinkers are children of nature, accustomed to entire, ^{freedom} who can neither

adopt the priest's discipline nor expect him to have part in their wild liberties. As Synge saw them - "never the twain shall meet." Like the symphony - a favourite comparison with him - which has the power to unite various instruments in a movement that will produce harmony and beauty, the drama brings together many living characters who will cooperate to produce a portion of actual life.

Having emphasised the importance of the imagination, the Preface now delivers its chief message. "The most needful thing to nourish the imagination is humour, and it is dangerous to limit or destroy it." He drives the point home by reflecting that Baudelaire condemned laughter as "the greatest sign of the Satanic element in man" and grew morbid as a consequence. Likewise "where a country loses its humour as some towns in Ireland are doing, there will be morbidity of mind." Summarising Synge's preface reduces its message to two points:

1. His conception of drama is different from that held by most people, and he desires that the audience should interpret this play as he saw it while composing it.
2. His premonition that the Irish people would not tolerate such a play on account of the strong language and disrespectful attitude towards the priest, prompted him to make the apology before they had the opportunity to express their grievance. There is no minimising the urgency of the appeal to regard THE TINKERS' WEDDING as nothing but good fun, broad comedy, an invitation to laugh. Synge is not trying to reform the priesthood, to eradicate the plague of tinkers from the roads

and commons of Ireland, to close all the "pubs" at the fall of the evening and clap all vagrants behind bars to ensure the safety of the farmers' poultry. He is not interested in such matters, for he is no social reformer. He is concerned rather with the perpetration of the deed and the mentality of the perpetrators, to whom he is partial rather than condemnatory. One remembers his poem:

"We'll stretch in Red Dan Sally's ditch
And drink at Tubber fair;
Or poach with Red Dan Sally's bitch
The badger and the hare,"

and realises on whose side he would be in a lawsuit against tramps, poachers, tinkers and any homeless vagrant.

The preface now becomes positive in its suggestion. Synge recalls that the Irish people have the reputation of possessing humour, even when the jokes are barbed and aimed at themselves, and deduces: "I do not think that these country people who have so much humour in themselves will mind being laughed at without malice, as the people in every country have been laughed at in their own comedies." One feels that Synge is correct. Then why was his play not accepted, and why was he so hesitant about showing it even to his friends? Because the "country people" whom he mentions would probably never see it. His WEDDING would grace the stage of the by then quite sophisticated theatre of Dublin city, and the audience would feel humiliated and degraded by the portrayal of Irishmen and women whom they had never seen - who would drink, answer normal questions with swearing, truss a priest in a sack and

throw him into the nearest ditch? Synge did not, of course, insinuate that ALL Irish people were tinkers - but the Dublin folk would surely choose to think he did. They could never forget that Synge's ancestor sang for Henry VIII..... He had descended, step by recorded step, from the Protestant Ascendancy - how, then, could he do otherwise than denigrate the Irish people ?

Synge's judgment of the homely humour of the people referred to the country folk. Among them he was a welcome and honoured guest. On the Aran Islands they vied with one another to have him in their homes and boasted of the letters they received from "Johneen." But among his social equals it was not so. The Abbey players were afraid of him because he was aloof and reticent. He was self-contained, but very shy, almost timid - a surprising contradiction with his assurance about the wording of his plays, for example. There, nothing would induce him to alter a comma! That beneficent fairy, Lady Gregory, whose home was the haven of many unfolding geniuses, couldnot hold Synge for longer than a fortnight at a time. While Yeats, Moore, Martyn and the Fay brothers sat at the good lady's table and counted the swans on the lake, Synge would quietly pack his typewriter and a dozen notebooks and depart for Kerry, the Blaskets, or the Wicklow hills, either to revise and polish his plays, or wait for fresh inspiration. This was to the advantage of the Society in the long run, but it estranged him from the members, and when he returned with a finished work, he

was never keen to discuss it or ask suggestions for improving. One deduces from history that Synge lived in a world considerably apart from the mundanities that are indeed essential, but that encroach too far on what is even more essential, the life of the spirit. Because Synge preferred the world of the spirit, he failed to sound the temper of his countrymen as accurately as Yeats or any of the other members of the Society could do. This is a weakness of his seeing that his profession necessitated co-operation. It is remarkable that he fought none of his own battles in connection with controversial plays; he gratefully left that piece of generalship in the capable hands of Lady Gregory and her reliable henchman, Yeats. Was he too lazy? Or too proud? Hardly: but his paramount concern was the intrinsic value of his work as art; how the public received it was - not negligible by any means - but of secondary importance in his eyes. That is why he judged his plays so severely and polished them so meticulously. His objectivity was not understood by his colleagues, mainly because he was too sensitive to explain himself fully to them.

The Preface, then, prepares the audience for humour. Synge himself says that the humour lies in the comic dialogue, which suits the characters so perfectly that they too, must be comic to no small degree, and indeed they are, thus contributing richly to the attractiveness of the play. True humour is a poignant blending of the smile and the ready tear, and occurs in THE TINKERS' WEDDING time and again. The play opens with the

happy anticipation of Sarah as her plans for a wedding ceremony near completion. It sounds ordinary enough, till the attendant facts reveal that she and Michael have long accepted the unwritten code of the tinkers in this matter and that she deserves his bewildered complaint: "You to be going beside me a great while and rearing a lot of them, and then to be setting off with your talk of getting married, and your driving me to it and I not asking at all." (This passing reference to the tinkers' children is all that remains of intermediate drafts of THE TINKERS' WEDDING in which the children play a more prominent role. But their presence introduced too many figures, and thwarted his ideas of concentration on the leaders.) It does not strike either of them that Michael's astonishment is preposterous, because among tinkers, convention is unknown. Their annual wife-trading is accepted as tradition, and any other form of finding a wife is not even contemplated. Actually, the source of his play is in two of the Wicklow pieces--THE VAGRANTS OF WICKLOW and AT A WICKLOW FAIR. In the first, a man 'on the side of a mountain east of Aughavanna; (Note the detailed geographical information - Synge's canon) discourses on the marriage customs of the tinkers when one of those "gallous lads would swap the woman he had, with one from another man, with as much talk as if you'd be selling a cow." In the second, a herder in Auhgrim tells about a tinker and his woman who "went up yonder to a priest in the hills and asked him would he wed them for a sovereign, I think it was. He said it was a poor price, but he'd wed them surely if they'd make him a tin can along with it." When they came back three weeks later,

he asked them if they had the can. "We have not," said the tinker. We had it at the fall of night, but the ass gave it a kick this morning the way it isn't fit for you at all." "Go on now," said the priest, "it's a pair of rogues and schemers you are, and I won't wed you at all." They went off then, and were never married to this day."

Sarah's sudden demand for a Church marriage is an outrage to Michael's way of life and the custom of his kind. Dramatically, there is something unsatisfactory about this marriage issue, as well. Sarah's wish, though perfectly reasonable in itself, is in these particular circumstances, difficult to reconcile with the probability that may be looked for when a writer is as fanatic about truth and reality as Sygne is. If it is, as she declares, an effort to escape the censure of respectable members of society, she must be referring to a society with which she has no connection, for the tinkers, her society, have no qualms about the marriage she is now enjoying. In a later speech, she carefully broadens her reason into a region where no one can judge of its validity. She says it is a whim - an unaccountable fancy, perhaps she can attribute it to the Spring..... This is hardly acceptable as there have been many Springs since she met Michael; she has withstood them all. Now, if Sygne wished to suggest that marriage ceremonies were unnecessary anyway, he made an unhappy choice in illustrating it through tinkers, as their testimony, in view of their attitude, would be valueless.

However, it was Synge's situation and he had to provide for the events he had in mind; Sarah's wishes promoted his plan for the play. It is natural that a wedding calls for a ring. Sarah demands this outward sign of respectability, and Synge pays much attention to this nuptial symbol. Michael, normally a skilled tinsmith - the priest was satisfied with the promise of a good can, and it is unlikely that he would be done in on a bargain - yet has found great difficulty in cutting this simple strip of the metal he handles every day. He hurt his finger more than once; when she tries it on, it is sharp and too tight. It is altogether an awkward ornament and a tremendous disappointment. Why couldn't Sarah deduce from this that the thing she is contemplating is "not for her like at all" in her idiom? The ring is referred to again towards the end of the play, when Synge in a master stroke of irony makes Sarah bequeath it on the priest as a covenant with them regarding any possible communication with the "polis" ! Again, the cheapness of the ring could well be Synge's revenge on marriage for the failures and suffering he has experienced in its pursuit. Cherry, Valaska the Celliniain, and now Molly Allgood - he has sought happiness with each of them, but in vain. Better be like Sarah, and fling the emblem back to the person who would want it least

Apart from this aspect, and a momentary yielding on the part of old Mary, Michael's mother, to intense melancholy, the play is farcical comedy with the old woman as main performer. Synge drew Mary with great care. Almost loving care.... Old as she is, scarred from many battles, living on the very limited charity of

her son and daughter-in-law, she meets daily challenges with mature and equable reactions, with a pardonable duplicity reminiscent of the Biblically recommended wisdom of the serpent. In her dialogue the most amusing repartee is found, let her talk either with the priest or with the other two. Already at her entrance she crosses swords with the priest, unknowingly, which on the stage would add to the comic effect. Drunk, and delighted about it, she staggers into the circle of the fire singing with all the stops out:

And when he asked what way he'd die
 And he hanging unrepented -
 "Begob" says Larry, " that's all in my eye
 By the clergy first invented."

(Note in passing, the words of the song. They unite law and Church, prefiguring the denouement. This, with his deliberate concentration on a few characters, marks Synge's steady progress in his development as artist and playwright, and is one of the chief merits of THE TINKERS' WEDDING.)

As soon as Mary becomes aware of the priest, however, the courtesy and hospitality of better days, perhaps, assert themselves and she immediately holds out the jug of beer with:

"God save your reverence. I'm after bringing down a smart drop; let you drink it up now, for it's a middling drouthy man you are at all times, God forgive you, and this night is cruel dry!" To his credit let it be remarked that the priest's first word to her is one of kindness. As she lurches towards him, bearing the jug, she comes perilously near the fire, and as he waves her

she murmurs sympathetically: "It's destroyed you must be, hearing t he sins of the rural people then in the fine Spring." But she will lift him out of his responsible despondency: "It'd break my heart to hear you sighing and talking the like of that, your reverence. (She pats him on the knee.) Let you rouse up now, if it's a poor single man you are, and I'll be singing you songs unto the dawn of day."

Indicrous though this seems, it nevertheless indicates a power of sympathy in Mary which allows her to empathise with others; then her innate goodness of heart prompts her to comfort - in her fashion. The prospect does not enchant the man of God as much as Mary hoped. He rejoins smartly with a pastoral warning: "What is it I want with your songs when it'd be better for you to be down on your two knees saying prayers to the Almighty God?" but is hardly prepared for the answer: "If it's prayers I want, you'd have a right to say one yourself holy father, for we don't have them at all, and I'm told that's what you're for. Say one now, your reverence, for I've heard a power of queer things and I walking the world, but there's one thing I never heard any time and that's a real priest saying a prayer."

To his horrified: "The Lord protect us!" (covering presumably, a swift examination of conscience) she continues: "It's no lie, holy father, and I'm thinking it should be a great game to hear a scholar the like of you, speaking Latin to the saints above." Mary will remember this pious wish when the priest commences his Latin curse on them at the close

of the play. However as he shows no inclination to grant her petition, she bribes him a little: "Stop till you say a little prayer, your reverence, and I'll give you my blessing and the last sup from my jug." HER blessing! A reversal of roles.

Mary is thoroughly Rabelaisian in her undisguised joy in living and her vowed intention to get the most out of every moment and its opportunities. She appreciates the "grand sleep in the fine morning," and she understands the pleasure of a "full pint when the night's fine and there's a dry moon in the sky." She loves the "warm sun and a kind air, and the cuckoos singing on the top of the hills" just as much as that other world of imagination, fostered by folk-songs and tales with which Ireland abounds. She can promise Sarah the "finest story you'd hear any place from Dundalk to Ballinacree, with great queens in it making themselves matches from the start to the end, and they with shiny silks on them the length of the day and white shifts for the night." And she has even better stories of "great queens 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."

Mary provides the fun of the play, yet she has much wisdom. Michael agrees to this foolishness of marriage in Church because he hopes it will keep Sarah with him - "there isn't the like of her for getting money and selling songs

to the men" - but Mary asks him with the scorn of the worldly-wise: "And you're thinking it's paying gold to his reverence would be a woman stop when she's a mind to go?" This is Synge's regard for reality as lived and experienced, not as it is idealised and erected on dream foundations. Mary has known all along that this whim of Sarah's will wane with the moon for "Isn't she a terror since the moon did change?" is her sensible complaint against Sarah's "rousing cranky at the break of dawn."

Her complete turnabout when the priest retracts his promise and refuses to marry them because the canon is not forthcoming is true to type. Honour among thieves applies logically, to thieves as well, and when she hears the opening thunder of the Latin malediction "in a loud ecclesiastical voice" she is the one to scream: "There's an old villain!" and lead the hasty exodus from the scene of terror. One wonders if they were really afraid of the wrath of whatever deity the priest was invoking - certainly not the God of the Christians who does not curse His creatures - or whether they were merely scampering off like irresponsible children, as indeed at heart, they were.

If we attempt to see more in this play than Synge asks us to, it is possible to find a resemblance to *THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN* in the persons of Norah and Sarah. Both are prominent characters, both are unhappy, both seek fulfillment by moving away from their environment. Norah in *THE SHADOW*

of the play in Dublin, hence it is practically unknown. Had it been presented in America before *THE PLAYBOY* it would have had a better chance of attention and survival, but the greater success of the earlier play completely overshadowed it. For it is not an unamusing farce, and would be a fair production in that category, given the "richness and confidence" Synge demanded for the speech.

It was in London after the playwright's death, at a two-thirty matinee performance in November, 1909, that *THE TINKERS' WEDDING* first appeared on the stage. In the United States there was a New York production by the Washington Square Players in 1919, from which event no disturbances are reported, save the sputtering of carbon arcs.

THE WELL OF THE SAINTS.

With a Preface, sympathetic and authoritative, Yeats launches THE WELL OF THE SAINTS. He begins with a favourite story, his meeting with Synge in Paris, then the counsel to go and be absorbed by THE ARAN ISLANDS, as a prelude to describing them, the compliance of Synge with his suggestion and the remarkable results. He speaks at length of "the beautiful English which has grown up in the Irish-speaking districts" taking its vocabulary from the time of Malory and from the time of the Bible, but its idiom and vivid metaphors from Irish. Yeats mentions that Douglas Hyde and Lady Gregory had already used it, but "they had listened with different ears." Synge had made "his own selection of words and phrases, choosing what would express his own personality."

He then analyses this new speech and assesses its effect when used by Synge. "It blurs definition, clear edges, everything that comes from the will, it turns imagination from all that is of the present, like a gold background to a religious picture, and it strengthens in every emotion whatever comes to it from far off, from brooding memory and dangerous hope." The accuracy of this observation is evident, for example, in the strangely exultant resignation of Maurya when her last son has been claimed by the sea, and her powerful conviction that they will be reunited. There, certainly, "definition is blurred", and the imagination rendered oblivious of the present in the greater reality - for Maurya - of the time to come. He declares that the language with its peculiar rhythm gives the speakers "an almost innocence, even in their anger and cursing," a necessary effect when one

recalls Martin's prayer that "the devil mend Timmy the Smith for killing me with hard work and ten thousand devils mend the soul of Molly Byrne and the bad wicked souls bidden in all the women of the world." Yeats pays Synge a lofty compliment for his concern to exalt the living language asserting that "if one has not beautiful or powerful and individual speech one has not literature." He finds further praiseworthy aspects in Synge's talent and does not hesitate to say so: "Mr. Synge has in common with the great theatres of the world, with that of Greece and that of India, with the creator of Falstaff, with Racine, a delight in language, a preoccupation with individual life." He stresses Synge's recurrent theme: People driven by a dream are continually experiencing how their dream conflicts with reality: "Synge tells us of realities but he knows that art has never taken more than its symbols from anything that the eye can see or the hand can measure."

In his last paragraph Yeats becomes conversational and confides that "while I write we are rehearsing THE WELL OF THE SAINTS and painting one or two mountains in flat colours without details, ash and sally in something of a recurring pattern....." Because they are seeking to express "something which the eye has never seen".

With such a noble precursor, THE WELL OF THE SAINTS should rejoice as a giant to run its course, but it comes in sombrely enough. For one thing, Synge's customary good humour is missing, its place being usurped by a new kind, edged with cynicism and touching here and there on cruelty. Martin and Mary Doul, the protagonists, are

unsympathetic figures for the greater part of the play (an attitude which Synge gives them that he may alter it dramatically later on), the other three major characters, Timmy the smith, Molly Byrne and the "Saint" are stupid, vapid, and colourless respectively.

From such unpromising material Synge creates a play that humbles, chastens, baffles and at last elevates, in a manner wholly unforeseen at the beginning of the action. It is a three-act play, with abundant dialogue, exciting moments of incident, and a typically Syngean ending, brilliant and unexpected.

The plot is more complicated than his plots usually are.

Martin and Mary are blind now, but both have had the power of sight, therefore both realise the immensity of their loss. At the time of their first meeting, however, both were already blind, so that neither has seen the other. The village folk have told them that they are exceedingly handsome, merely to let them have the pleasure of thinking so, and thus ameliorating their lot a little. The two are quite happy in this illusion. They make repeated reference to their good looks, and it is clear that the thought gives them the comfort the people intended when they thought up the plan.

Two young folk of the neighbourhood play an important part in the history of Martin and Mary. They are Timmy the smith and Molly, his fiancée. Timmy's characteristics

are: much brawn as becomes his trade, love for Molly which is a jealous love indeed, and a great eagerness to be the bearer of startling news - "queer wonderful things and the lot of them nothing at all" in Martin's opinion, and "queer humbugging talk" in the ears of Mary. Molly is a buxom lass, easy on the eye, sharp and quick of tongue, heartlessly callous in her material and emotional security.

To the village comes a wandering friar, bearing water that can restore sight to the blind. The villagers drag Martin and Mary forward, their sight is indeed restored - and they see each other. It is a devastating recognition. Shortly afterwards, the blindness returns. The friar, undaunted, delights the people by a bland assurance: "Those I cure a second time go on seeing till the hour of death", and offers to prove his point, but Martin and Mary refuse with the ultimate in firmness. No consideration in all the world would induce them to forego the beauty of their illusions and accept instead the sordidness of reality as they have now learned to know it.

Two themes animate the play. The obvious one is that the atmosphere of reality is too thin to sustain happiness and has to be enriched by the atmosphere of illusion. The second theme is Synge's respect for the inviolability of man's right to entire, personal freedom. The two blind people he has created have adapted to the life imposed on them by circumstances; they are contented in it, and no one is entitled to force them to a change as violent as that inevitable from a restoration of sight. Should anyone

try, as the Saint has done at the villagers' demand, the effort is bound to fail, because it infringes on their "good right to be sitting blind, hearing a soft wind turning around the little leaves of the Spring..." just as "'tis a right some of you have to be working and sweating like Timmy the smith," or "fasting and praying the like of yourself." (1)

A third theme is discernible, not so forcefully enunciated, but too clear to be ignored. It is Synge's faith in the healing and hallowing power of Nature. As Martin and Mary choose to return to blindness, Martin gives the reasons for their choice; "Isn't it a finer sight ourselves had a while since and we sitting dark, smelling the sweet beautiful smells do be rising in the warm nights, and hearing the swift flying things racing in the air will we'd be looking up in our own minds into a grand sky and seeing lakes, and broadening rivers and hills waiting for the spade and plough." (2) The loutish Simon's comment: "It's songs he's making now, holy father" is more apposite than he is capable of recognising. Doubtless Synge has not forgotten the long days on the rocks of Innishmaan when "the sense of solitude was immense. I could not see or realise my own body, and I seemed to exist merely in my perception of the waves and of the crying birds and of the smell of seaweed." (3) The touch of Nature then was gentle and strengthening, and so henceforth would it be for Martin and Mary. Martin's vision of perfect content includes no reference to wealth

(1) Everyman's Library. WELL OF THE SAINTS. Act II p.102.

(2) IBID. Act II p. 99.

(3) Collected Prose. THE ARAN ISLANDS.III p.129.

or prestige; like Synge, Martin has learned that happiness is from within, independent of external conditions or human approbation.

That the blind people's choice should be acceptable, Synge is obliged to present the people of the village as unattractively as possible. He does so, with customary vigour and assurance. Timmy is officious and brutal in his harshness towards his employee, Martin:

TIMMY: There's no fear of your having gold, a lazy, basking fool the like of you. I'll teach you to work hard, Martin Doul. Strip off your coat now, and put a tuck in your sleeves, and cut the lot of them, while I rake the ashes from the forge, or I'll not put up with you another hour itself.

MARTIN: (horrified) Would you have me getting my death sitting out in the black wintry air with no coat on me at all ?

TIMMY: (with authority) Strip it off now, or walk down upon the road. (1)

With such uncalled-for bullying Timmy alienates the sympathy of the audience, which passes over almost instinctively to Martin who in so many ways needed special consideration in his rehabilitation process.

Kolly repels by her cruelty and clumsy coquetry, in her role as the Saint's chief acolyte, but particularly as Timmy's desirable fiancée.

KOLLY: You've great romancing this day, Martin Doul. Was it up at the still you were at the fall of night ? and again, although she must see that Martin is almost mad with disappointment and frenzied longing, she screams to

her gallant Timmy: "He's a bigger fool than that, Timmy. Look on him now, and tell me if that isn't a grand fellow to think he's only to open his mouth to have a fine woman, the like of me, running along by his heels?" (1).

Even Mary has to feel the lash of her folly and immaturity:

MOLLY: (Mary has just hit Martin in the face with an old sack). That's right, Mary. (Clapping her hands) That's the way to treat the like of him is after standing there at my feet and asking me to go off with him, till I'd grow a wretched old road-woman the like of yourself.

Fortunately, Mary is more than equal to the invective - challenge: "When the skin shrinks on your chin, Molly Byrne, there won't be the like of you for a shrunk hag in the four quarters of Ireland.... It's a fine pair you'd be, surely." (2). Moreover, the onlookers are rendered obnoxious by their merriment at Martin's perplexity and pain when he sees his wife, "the beautiful dark woman of Ballinatone." And the Wonderworker, who should be impressive as the vessel of grace to the afflicted pair, is vague, shadowy, and not even a good magician for his trick lasts only six months. Nor is he at all convincing about the celestial source of his curing water - who were the "four holy friends of God" and where was their communal shrine? Synge leaves them unlocalised, because they are merely accessory. It is the reaction of Martin and Mary to their restored sight that is noteworthy;

(1) Everyman's Library. WELL OF THE SAINTS. Act II p.84.

(2) IBID Act II p.87.

their thoughts and words as they are shuttled from darkness to light and back again to the brighter world of their own night with its interior illumination. For they are types, timeless and universal. So are their needs and the method of healing. So, too, are the well-intentioned sensation-loving villagers. There will always be a shadowy line between superstition and supplication; there will always be the excitement of novelty and the enthusiasm of miracle-peddlers. Benefactions will always be devalued by the egotism of the benefactors whose primary aim is the gratification of self-complacency. The Saint's finest feature is his detachment. He offers his gift the second time, it is refused. He shows no resentment but realises: "They have chosen their lot and the Lord have mercy on their souls." This could well be the verbalising of Synge's wish in regard to himself.

Although the plot of *THE WELL OF THE SAINTS* is not without interest, the chief charm of the play is the language. By turns violent and abusive, wheedling and cajoling, querulous and placating, it is always compelling, original, unique. Among his papers are six drafts of Act I, six of Act II, five of Act III and ninety-two careful explanations of words and phrases in the MS. to Max Meyerfeld for translation into German. A few examples of these elucidations supplied by Ann Saddlemyer who has had access to all papers and documents in the Synge Estate show how concerned Synge was about the accurate interpretation of his play.

"He'll be climbing above" he glosses as "He will have to climb through the wood up to Grianan."

"The archangels fell out with God" means "The archangels down in hell that quarrelled with the Almighty God."

"Lepping" means "leaping or jumping".

"You're too cute a fellow to be minding me at all," may be understood as "You're too clever to take notice of me."

"It's a wonder enough we are ourselves" means "We are such fine, wonderful people that we are enough wonder for this place, and we don't wish you to do anything here that people would think of instead of us."

The laboured wording of this gloss is typical of the bog invariably created when one attempts to simplify the already elementary. But it was essential, Synge felt, if Meyerfeld was to catch the kern of his speech.

This intense insistence on exactness indicates how deliberately he selected every word and sentence, weighing their implications in the context, and how determined he was that they should be reproduced with the intention he had in writing them. The following dialogue would not be too ready of solution :

Timmy : You've got good ears, God bless you, if you're a liar itself, for I'm after walking up in great haste from the hearing of wonders at the fair.

Martin : You're always hearing queer wonderful things, and the lot of them nothing at all, but I'm thinking this is a strange thing surely, this time you'd be walking up before the turn of day

Timmy : (huffed) I was coming to tell you it's in this place ther'd be a bigger wonder done in a short while than was ever done on the green of Clash, but you are thinking, maybe, that you're too cute a fellow to be minding me at all.

Martin : There'll be wonders in this place, is it?

Timmy : Here at the crossing of the roads.

Martin : Are they putting up a still behind the rocks?
It'd be a grand thing if I'd a sup handy the way I wouldn't be destroying myself groping across the bogs in the rain falling.

Timmy : It's not a still, or the like of it either.

Martin : Maybe they're hanging a thief above at the bit of a tree ? I'm told it is a great sight to see a man hanging by his neck, but what joy would that be to us and we not seeing a thing at all ?

Timmy : They're hanging no one this day, and yet with the help of God, you'll see a poer of men hanging before you die.

Mary : Well, you've a queer humbugging talk.... What way would I see a power hanged and I a dark woman since the seventh year of my age ?

Timmy eventually manages to impart that a Saint is coming who has special water used for restoring sight to the blind. Naturally, they want to know all about him, in as short a time as humanly possible. But Timmy will tell it his way or not at all, till, in a frenzy of impatience, Martin roars:

"Can't you open the big slobbering mouth you have and say what it is to be done and not be making blather till the fall of night?"

The verbal peak of the piece is Martin's ecstasy on receiving his sight. It is dramatic; terrifying in its pathos, intense in its irony. He is in the Church with the friar who has prayed and anointed his eyes with the holy water. Martin cries out: "Oh, glory be to God, now I see

surely. I see the walls of the Church and the green bits of fern in them and there, the great width of the sky. That's Timmy the smith, I know by the black of his head... That's Mat Simon, I know Mat by the length of his legs.... That should be Patch Ruadh with the gamey eye in him and the fiery hair (He sees the lovely Molly and thinks it is his wife.) In a changed voice: Oh, it was no lie they told me, Mary Douli; Oh, glory be to God and the seven saints, I didn't die and not see you at all. The blessing of God on the water and on the feet carried it through the land.

The blessing of God on the day and them that brought me to the saint. For it's grand hair you have, and soft skin, and eyes would make the saints, if they were dark a while and seeing again, fall down out of the sky. (He goes nearer to her) Hold up your head, Mary, the way I'll see it's richer I am than the great Kings of the east. Hold up your head, I'm saying, for it's soon you will be seeing me and I not a bad one at all :

Molly : Let you keep away from me and not be soiling my chin.

Martin: (bewildered) It's Molly's voice you have

Molly : Why wouldn't I have my own voice ? Do you think I'm a ghost ?

Martin: Which of you at all is herself

Mercilessly, Synge tightens the tension as Martin goes round the group seeking his wife. One young girl after the other he asks, ever more pitifully: "Is it yourself it is?" the villagers jeering: "Try again, Martin, you'll find her yet," till, despairing, he cries:

"Where is it you have hidden her away? Isn't it a black

shame for a drove of pitiful beasts the like of you to be making game of me and putting a fool's head on me the grand day of my life ? Ah, you're thinking you're a fine lot, with your giggling, weeping eyes, a fine lot to be making a game of myself and the woman I've heard called the great wonder of the west

During this speech, Mary arrives. Tension mounts to snapping point as she begins the refrain : "Which of you is Martin Dougl ?" He, wheeling round, "It's her voice, surely." They stare at each other "blankly" says Synge in stage direction. No comment is recorded. Exquisite economy. Synge's insight is as delicate as it is sure. It is Molly who breaks the strain, thoughtless and uncouth. "Go up now, and take her under the chin, and speak to her as you spoke to myself." Martin struggles for a word, but she jumps in again, addressing Mary : "You're not saying a word, Mary. What is it you think of himself, with the fat legs on him and the little neck like a ram ?"

Throughout Act II, the dialogue between Timmy, Martin's new employer and his unwilling recruit, is one of abuse and coarseness - as is fitting to such a pair. It contains, however, a valuable item - Martin's impression of the world as he is now experiencing it: "It's a power of dirty days and dark mornings and shabby-looking fellows we do have to be looking on when we have our sight, God help us " In the same conversation his judgment on the seeing world is declared: "A black day when I was roused up and found I was the like of little children do be listening to the stories of an old woman and do be dreaming after in the

black night that it's in grand houses of gold they are, with speckled horses to ride, and do be waking again in a short time, and they destroyed with the cold, and the thatch dripping maybe, and the starved ass braying in the yard." This is Synge's near obsession - the immeasurable gulf between reality and dream; an abyss into which each thinking person must be plunged sooner or later - to flounder, emerge or sink according to that Fate which he sees following in dogged pursuit at the heels of all human misery.

Synge has now mastered the technique, not only of the Anglo-Irish dialect, but of a powerful realism, which shocked the audiences of Dublin into revolt until they learned to appreciate the genius behind the revelations it so ruthlessly made.

That he fully identified himself with the characters he created, is evident from Martin's dilemma as he complains: "I'm telling you, if she (his wife) walked off from me now, it wasn't because of seeing me, and I no more than I am, but because I was looking at her with my own two eyes, and she getting up, and eating her food, and combing her hair, and lying down for her sleep." This is an acute piece of insight, attainable only by a celibate or a blind person. To the former, accustomed as he is to privacy in the intimate moments of everyday life, the thought of sharing these with another, however dear, is intolerable. Likewise do the blind live in a private world and are unfitted for any other. It is eloquent too, of Synge's refinement and independence.

Among many instances of violent and angry speech, Synge

finds space for two passages of outstandingly beautiful imagery. As abuse and harshness are alien to his writings, it is to be expected that he will do this on the first pretext. He allows Martin his relief in expressing his disappointment with what the world did to his dreams, but Kolly is disgusted and appeals to the Saint: "He is not right. Let you speak up, holy father, and confound him now." The friar responds: "Did you never set eyes on the summer and the fine spring in the places where the holy men of Ireland have built churches to the Lord, that you wished to be closed up and seeing no sight of the glittering seas and the furze is opening above, will soon have the hills shining as if it was fine creels of gold they were, rising to the sky?" But Martin is impatient to answer: "Isn't it a finer sight ourselves had a while since and we sitting dark smelling the sweet beautiful smells do be rising in the warm nights and hearing the swift flying things racing in the air, till we'd be looking up in our own minds into a grand sky and seeing lakes, and broadening rivers, and hills are waiting for the spade and the plough." This speech of Martin's contains the keynote to THE WELL OF THE SAINTS, namely: "looking up into our own minds." It is the activity of the individual mind that matters, not the utterances of the frivolous, nor the pious clichés of the book-holy "Saints".....

"... and we sitting dark....." There is something inexpressibly tender about the euphemism "dark" for "blind", as also a suggestion of mystery, of hidden knowledge and experience enjoyed by the dark men and women of a closed and silent world. Mary understands her husband's reaction perfectly. "Putting an arm round Martin" according to Synge's stage direction, she announces: "I'd liefer be

living dark all times beside him than be seeing in new troubles now."

No further discussion is needed. Not from Kolly nor from Timmy. Nor from any other wisdom than that gleaned from "looking up in our own minds."

While engaged on this play, Synge told Frank Fay in a letter that he was "in agony and horror over my play with the blind people. It is exceedingly difficult to make it work out." (1) To Fay's criticism that the actors were in continual bad humour on the stage he replied that he wanted to write "like a monochrome painting all in shades of one colour." (2) Yeats found it "very curious, beautiful and I think exciting." George Moore wrote in the "Irish Times": "Mr. Synge's little play seems to me of a new growth. Its apparent orthodoxy reminds us of the painters who worked in the latter half of the fifteenth century..... In your paper I would call attention to the abundance of beauty in the dialogue, to the fact that one listens to music, charmed by the inevitableness of the words and the ease with which phrase is linked to phrase..." (3)

Yet it is a harsh play; the slight elements of comedy or laughter pass almost unnoticed in the overall seriousness and pathos of the theme. Yeats's assertion that the language invests the speaker with a kind of innocence applies perhaps to the lesser rages, but hardly to Martin's

(1) Ann Saddlemyer: COLLECTED WORKS. PLAYS Vol II.
Notes accompanying Text.

(2) Carswell: PLAYS OF THE ABBEY THEATRE. pp 167 - 8.

(3) Gerard Fay: THE ABBEY THEATRE. VI p.96.

wishes for Timmy and Molly: "Yet if I've no strength in me, I've a voice left for my prayers, and may God blight them this day and my own soul the same hour with them, the way I'll see them after, the two on a high bed, and they screeching in hell.... It'll be a grand thing that time to look on the two of them, and they twisting and roaring out and twisting and roaring again, one day and the next day, and each day always and for ever. It's not blind I'll be that day and it won't be hell to me, I'm thinking, but the like of Heaven itself, and it's fine care I'll be taking that the Lord Almighty doesn't know." It is possible to find humour in this, but it is too wry a kind to be at all enjoyable. Synge intended to prove one point irrefutably - namely that one glimpse at the world was enough for the blind people, and no bait would lure them from their happier darkness. He certainly proved this and though they set off "walking with a slough of wet on the one side and a slough of wet on the other and you going a stony path with a north wind blowing behind" the path was hard and clean even as the thrusts of his pen are forthright and undeniably accurate in their pertinent observation and unforgettable expression. That the major theme of this play was missed by early audiences is clear from the worried reviewers who feared that the long dialogues made the play "too literary without anything to give distraction to the long speeches"(1) and to those whose perspicacity suggested the remedy: "Why not have a few good songs or instrumental pieces to vary the evening's art pabulum?" (2) Perhaps the masterpiece among suggestions was contained in the ingenuous query: "Why is it not

(1) & (2) Gerard Fay: THE ABBEY THEATRE. Chap. VI p-96.

possible to construct an Irish drama in which all the characters have the regulation number of senses?" (1) Unfortunately, Synge's reply is not recorded.

Could it then be tossed aside as improbably savage, cynical, cruel or wild? Perhaps. Yet such tales are found in many folklores, even as far removed from the Abbey Theatre as Chaucer's *THE MERCHANT'S TALE*. Lord Lytton's *THE MAID OF MALINES* is a possible course particularly as the hero, Armand, is blinded, nursed back to sight by a maiden whose face is scarred by smallpox, and marries, on his recovery the pretty nurse who was also in attendance convinced that only a lovely face could partner the kind treatment he had experienced during his affliction. But Synge assured Yeats he had never read *THE MAID*, and indeed if he had an already completed tale to use, why should he be in "agony and horror" over it? Actually, the universality of Synge's types renders a tracing of sources superfluous. *THE WELL OF THE SAINTS* is not amusing; it is not entertaining in the recreational sense of the word, but it is as terrifying on its level as Shakespeare's *KING LEAR*, and no less chastening.

(1) Gerard Fay: *THE ABBEY THEATRE*. Chap VI p.96.

THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD.

"That's a grand story. "He tells it lovely."

Christy slides the compliment down his throat, relishing it all the way, till his imagination, thus potently nourished, heads for the grand climax of this "lovely story": "He gave a drive with the scythe and I gave a leg to the east; then I turned round with my back to the north and I hit a blow on the ridge of his skull laid him stretched out and he split to the knob of his gullet." This masterly description cleaves a path for him straight to the roots of their admiration, and Sara dives to the counter for a stiff glass of porter which she offers with deferential awe - Sara, who had just brought her gift of the "real, rich sort" of duck's egg

THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD is Synge's last completed play and his most controversial. The story is simple enough at first glance, and is centred round a young man very timid, very hesitant, who enters a well-patronized pub, orders a drink, slips off with it to a shaded corner, inquiring softly on the way: "Is it often the polis do be coming to this place?" Soft as his voice is, the weight of the question buries all the noise of the bar, and with remarkable speed the tipplers edge the rest of the story out of him. "I killed my father, Tuesday was a week." The audience is stunned. This is a statement indeed, and it immediately entitles him to considerable respect. They draw him on, and with each added detail their wonder grows. Soon Christy, for this is the stranger's name, they

discover, becomes a hero. Their worship enlarges him to himself with such rapidity that when eventually his father turns up, bruised, bandaged, but far from "killed", Christy is quite prepared to murder him again, even a third time if required. He does give his father a resounding crack in the backyard - but the "dirty deed" is as far from a "gallous story" as a murderer from a Crusader, and Christy is banished. He goes, but driving a delighted father in front of him; delighted, because he is not killed yet, in the first place, and secondly, because his son is a chip off the old block after all, and a fine upstanding young man ready to take over when Dad should pass on. That seems to be the message conveyed in the "broad smile" with which the half-killed father accepts his son's generalship. They march off stage in perfect amity, the "gallous captain" with his "heathen slave", but behind them rises a wail, shrill and penetrating, from a woman bereft of her dream, one who had "lost the only playboy of the Western World".

Within this outline, Synge has interwoven his convictions and observations into a coherence using strands, durable, powerful and uniquely his own. In the Preface of this play is one such strand, in the assertion that "all art is a collaboration". By this statement Synge meant that the artist expresses the life and manners of the time and place

in which he lives, or in which his characters live. Consequently, without people living in a particular locality at a certain time in a certain manner, and the revelations they give of themselves, there could be no possibility of writing a credible account of any period. The playwright then collaborates directly with his living material. In *THE PLAYBOY* Synge is just such an artist, observing and retelling a story he had heard on the Aran Islands, and acknowledging that because the language of Ireland is "rich and living", it was possible for him, the writer, to be "rich and copius" in his words. In this Preface he reveals too, unintentionally perhaps, why he was obliged to seek the Wicklow hills of the Kerry mountains for inspiration and the tranquility essential for the adequate expression thereof. He claims that the modern literature of towns "has cut itself away from the profound and common interests of life" and is therefore "joyless and pallid". He insists that theatre should provide a "rich joy found only in what is wild and superb in reality". What exactly did Synge understand by "joy"? Apart from the hobbies of childhood, the *AUTOBIOGRAPHY* does not mention any notable sources of joy which Synge employed as a boy; and his adolescence was marked by doubts and anxieties rather than by any of the follies and escapades that characterize the lives of most young men. A study of his tastes and habits, however, points to one major joy - life itself. But in the

sense of motion, activity, vicissitudes, achievement, development, constant renewal. To recognise these, to experience them, to find there an outlet for the mental energies that pressed for fulfilment - this was Synge's "joy". Should the events he handled be entirely spontaneous and unstudied, then they were for him "wild and superb" and his powers of observation, trained by many a bird-stalking, could now turn to human beings and detect with immense satisfaction the "wide development of each individual" (in the Aran Islands) "where each man can speak two languages, is a skilled fisherman, can manage a curagh with ease, nerve and dexterity, can farm, burn kelp, cut out pampooties, mend nets, build and thatch a house, make a cradle or a coffin and spend long nights fishing with the alertness of a primitive hunter." Synge's "joy" then, seems to mean vitality, self-expression, fulfilment; to describe which a vibrant and meaningful language is indispensable. To procure this language Synge utilises the imagination of the people of whom he is writing, an imagination which he finds to be "fiery, magnificent and tender".

In brief, Synge uses the Preface to assure the reader that his play is authentic, that it is a narration of truth expressed in the language of the original agents.

Throughout THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD many minor themes may be recognised, but the dominant issue is Christy's realisation of the new self that emerges under pressure of circumstances. Christy is the central figure. He is on stage most of the time, and when, during the Sports he is not directly visible, he is present through the conversation and dialogue of the play. Those acting then, speak of him, and only of him. They spur his mule on, and no one else's gets a single cheer. The audience waits for his name to be announced as the winner, and of course, is gratified. The other actors in THE PLAYBOY, and each one is drawn with a Rembrandt particularity, are there to highlight Christy, and all they do or say refers to him. Yet with all this concentration on one figure, there is no dullness. On the contrary, the excitement is increased by watching the metamorphosis which so thoroughly transforms the hero, Christy, a metamorphosis ensured in no small measure by the alertness of the gallant young man to note and take his cue.

He strikes the first blow for himself in the potato field on his father's farm. It is a literal blow and the old man suffers much pain. It is also a much more effectual blow than Christy is aware. He is as yet only a country yokel, a "quiet, simple poor fellow with no man giving me heed," but one who chafes under parental authority, and his action is motivated by primitive anger. His father had suggested a

monstrous thing, namely, that Christy should marry a woman who had tended him in infancy. This revolted him, naturally, and he rebelled - in terms of hitting his father with a potato spade. It was an instinctive reaction, yet it was a man's answer to an unmanly proposition, and proved that Christy had within him the promise of normal virility but that the exercise of this natural right was denied him by the tyranny of Old Mahon. On realising what he had done, Christy ran away - the little boy had returned after the abortive assertion of budding manhood. When he arrives at the pub of Michael James Flaherty, he is very much the frightened child whose chief talent heretofore was to dodge his father's stick, an accomplishment which he would now divert into dodging the "polis".

Then he tells his tale. To several men, drinking, listening. Shrewd men who have seen life and know what is in man. And a lovely girl is there, pouring out porter for the customers. She too listens, and all receive his story with thrilled admiration. Then they begin to speak of the deed, with bated breath almost, and the barmaid, Pegeen, is altogether spellbound. Slowly recognition dawns on Christy. This 'adoration' is for him, the men like him, they praise his action for its bravery and courage. He begins to see his image unfolding, expanding, acquiring a completely new appearance. He realises that the mirror at home was deceiving him, "it was

the devil's own mirror we had beyond, would twist a squint across an angel's brow" anyhow. Now the men are calling him "mister honey" and offering him the job of pot-boy with becomingly apologetic promise of the largest salary possible - if he will be satisfied. His superiority is further enhanced by his prudence. Michael James, with sudden bluntness, demands: "And where was it, mister honey, that you did the deed?" The astute Christy, eyeing him 'with suspicion' (stage direction), replies: "Oh, a distant place, master of the house, a windy corner of high, distant hills." Philly nods his approval of this close fellow, and Pegeen utters the verdict: "That'd be a lad with the sense of Solomon to have for a pot-boy, and if I'd that lad in the house, I wouldn't be fearing the loosed, khaki cut-throats or the walking dead." "Well, Glory be to God!" exclaims Christy. But this is only the beginning.

With the departure of the men for the wake - Pegeen is safe now, and a wake is too rich in entertainment to be lightly missed - "the mirror we had over beyond" becomes more and more inaccurate. Christy learns from fair lips that he has "little small feet" - hence "great people in the family"; "a kind of quality name", comparable with that of great "powers and potentates of France and Spain."

He can handle these observations with ease: "We were great, surely, with wide and windy acres of rich Munster land". It is to be hoped that his assertion is not equally wide and windy. Pegeen goes on to: "a fine handsome young fellow with a noble brow" - and Christy is overwhelmed. Is it me?" he asks 'with a flush of delighted surprise'.(stage direction).

This is a weighty moment; his moment of identity; the farm labourer is dead, Christy the gallant and invincible is born. While he considers the import of this emergence of a new self, Pegeen continues filling the straw sack for his bed, just as she fills in the details of his second image. Pegeen uses straw - a precious commodity in the country. It is the stalk supporting the oat which is the staple food of the people, and the straw itself is the food and bedding of the animals. It is fitting that only a valuable substance should contribute to the bodily refreshment of this monarch among men. Accordingly, Christy's deed becomes more glorious with each recounting. It has grown from "letting fall the loy on the edge of his skull" to "I did up on Tuesday and halve his skull." Later, flattered by a visit from the mountain girls and a glance at himself in Pegeen's mirror which reveals a "handsome" face with no trace of a squint, he finds himself transformed into a poet as he recounts the events of

that memorable day. "The sun came out between the cloud and the hill, and it shining green on my face. 'God have mercy on your soul, says he. (Christy's father)

'Or on your own' says I, raising the loy I hit a blow on the ridge of his skull laid him stretched out, and he split to the knob of his gullet." Then, under Widow Quin's open admiration at his "natty appearance" in Shawn's clothes, Christy's eloquence surpasses itself: "..... all sorts is bringing me their food and clothing the way they'd set their eyes on a gallant orphan cleft his father with one blow to the breeches belt."

In proportion to this increase of glory is his father's degeneration from "my poor father" to "an old weasel tracing a rat," a comparison, incidentally, derived from Synge's boyhood wanderings "at dawn of night with every nerve stiff and strained with expectation." for then he would have noted the labyrinthine route chosen by the weasels as they weave in and out in pursuit of their always luckless prey. Christy felt fully justified in his revolt. But rebellion only, even when supported by an ever enlarging lie in the description of his opposition, does not guarantee manhood. To assert his virility Christy will have to dethrone his father irrevocably and publicly, and follow this by crowning himself in

power and authority. When, therefore, his father reappears, this is Christy's chance. Though momentarily shaken by the apparition in the doorway, his new self quickly apprehends the situation. NOW he can do in reality and finality what has hitherto been only imagination. Running at Mahon he chases him offstage and into the backyard. While the crowd in and near the pub wait for a result of the noise and scuffling sounds that reach them, there is suddenly a deep silence. Christy comes back alone, and sits down at the fire. He has done it again. No botched work this time. Pegeen will now see him for what he is. He is in all truth, incontrovertibly and triumphantly, the man who "murdered his da". She will praise him "the same as in the hours gone by" for this clean, straight, competent blow. The others will perhaps fail to understand the heroism of this second deed - Pegeen will rise to it.

CHRISTY: And what will you say to me now and I after doing it this time in the face of all?

PEGEEN : There's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed. Take him (Chr.) on from this.

Christy's world collapses. Pegeen, its Atlas, was only a child craving fairy-tales. He, Christy, had been a new form of Jack the Giant Killer, and Pegeen would have such heroes remain in the "gallous story".

She did not welcome reality. It was not the fringe onlookers who had failed him. While he had developed from dream-greatness to great performance, she had remained unchanged, an immature person seeking only novelty, not truth and life and the glow of accomplishment. In the brief exchange between Christy and Pegeen, he saw the abyss that separated them, and that he was alone in the face of a hostile society. Yet, human-wise, he looks to her for help in his extremity, her words still warm in his ears and heart: "Bless us now, for I swear to God I'll wed him and I'll not renege." He begs now that she should cut the ropes the men have tied round him, but instead she lights a sod to burn his shine away from the table legs. Her dastardly action is the catalyst his courage needs to loose it from its cowardly moorings. Sara had commented previously: "Her like often change" referring to Pegeen. Now Christy would show that his like could also change, but for the better. He condemns her with: "That's your kind, is it?" and thereafter ignores her as if there had never been a Pegeen who had "the light of seven heavens in (her) heart alone." Speech after speech of bragging and soaring imagination pours out of his mouth as he wriggles around on the floor where they have thrown him, trying to free himself from the tightening rope. Shawn unwisely attempts to go near and is rewarded for foolhardiness by a neat bite in the leg. Helpless and baffled, the men stand around him, their awkwardness a sharp contrast to the adulation with which they

hailed him a short time ago. Their likes also often change..... How long this scene might go on, no one can foresee, for Christy has cowed them all, and none dares to approach him.

This scene is the climax of the play. Physically Christy is conquered; yet he is in command of the situation. No man will move from the spot till he is disposed of; no one can shake off the responsibility incurred through him. It was their acceptance of him that drew him out of his nonentity, their stimulation that encouraged him to discover his latent strength, their urgings that brought to light his skill and forcefulness. But now they expect him to crawl meekly to the gallows. His biting of Shawn is not an act of childish spitefulness. It is the only weapon they have left him, and Shawn is a most gratifying victim. Shawn's consistent cowardice is a pointed reminder of his own former condition, and must be subjected to every possible indignity. Let Shawn remain in it if he will, Christy has done with it forever.

The men have a case against Christy. He forces them to acknowledge that they are gullible; as eager for sensation as any woman; easily inflamed to emotion and foolishly inclined to hasty decisions; basically irresponsible and deeply committed to their ethos because their imagination is not equal to

forming a new one. Michael's "we'll have peace now for our drinks" at the end, may be interpreted as "Now we can go on exactly as before, for which we are truly thankful....." Similarly, Pegeen's failure to accept the consequences of manliness and self-assertion when they are presented realistically, with no poetic distancing to high and windy hills, is Synge's sardonic observation on man's fundamental untruthfulness. Pegeen revelled in the fairy lights round that hill on that illustrious Tuesday when the mortal murdered the ogre, but she objected to a blood-mess in her backyard, even though it was caused deliberately for her approval. Christy's recognition of this pains and puzzles him at first. But then he sees his own progress in self-definition and self-literation in strong relief against the greyness of her outlook and the future she must now embrace - Shawn Keogh and Widow Quin bargaining in her kitchen over "a mountainy ram and a red cow and a load of dung at Michaelmas".

As the group in the pub stands guard over its prisoner on the floor, distracted from their painful thoughts by his ravings and exultations, Pegeen sneaks across with the burning sod to prise him away from his hold on the table legs. Tension strains exhaustingly as she advances till Christy screams: "Oh, glory be to God !" and kicks loose from the support. They surge forward to drag him off, but Jimmy arrests the proceedings with a shout to the

rafters: "Will you look what's come in?" Old Mahon, back from his second death - Philly had felt "the last gasps quitting his heart" - had entered on all fours. And in this inglorious position he finds his son also, and it is so that they glare at each other for a moment. But only a moment. Christy and hesitation have parted company for ever now, and he demands: "Are you coming to be killed a third time?" His metamorphosis is complete.

His father has done some thinking too. The laws of nature are for all, fathers as well as children, and a son is not a child all his life. Christy, his son, has a right to choose a wife and leave his father's house; he himself has a duty to resign when his time has come and let the new "master of the house" see himself as such. By seeking to deny Christy the privileges that are common to all mankind, Mahon violated nature, and that could not go unpunished. He had attained to this knowledge on his own, during his wanderings with a "mortified scalp" as grim reminder of his parental shortcomings. And now, here was his son; indeed he had proved himself; his calibre was worthy of his parentage. He was ready to be taken into the partnership. "My son and myself will be going our own way, and we'll have great times from this out telling stories of the villainy of Mayo, and the fools is here. Come on now."

There is another surprise for Old Mahon and for Synge's audience. The comedy must be heightened to the last pitch on the scale and Christy speaks: "Go with you, is it? I will then like a gallant captain with his heathen slave, for I am master of all fights from now."

OLD MAHON: IS IT ME? Ah, now it is his turn. Christy's recognition of his new self has come and atayed, and is eminently successful. But to be certain of lasting efficacy it must be accompanied by the father's vision and acceptance of his new status. Christy does not deign a reply direct, but merely the first motion of the captain - slave relationship: "Not a word out of you. Go on from this."

Almost broken with delight in the splendour of this creature whom he has fathered, the servant precedes his general, looking back once over his shoulder to smile broadly: "Glory be to God! I am crazy again." These four short words, incidentally, are most significant. They arrest a near-tragedy and transform it in the radiance of Mahon's smile into a relieved and satisfied laugh. It is recalled how Widow Quin manoeuvred to keep Christy out of his father's reach:

Mahon : It's Christy, by the stars of God!

Widow : Stay quiet, will you? That's not your son..... That's a man going to make a marriage with the daughter of this house, a place with a fine trade, with a licence, and with poteen too.

Mahon : That man marrying a decent and a moneyed girl ? Is it mad you are ? Is it in a crazy-house for females that I'm landed now ? (Widow sees her opportunity).

Widow : It's mad yourself is with the blow upon your head. That lad is the wonder of the western world.

Mahon : I see it's my son.

Widow : You see that you're mad. Do you hear them cheering in the

Mahon : (getting distressed) It's maybe out of reason that that man's himself. There's none surely that would go cheering him. Oh, I'm raving with a madness that would fright the world. (He sits down with his hand to his head).

Old Mahon now recalls delirious moments and times of acute illness when he had fearsome hallucinations and nightmarish images in front of his mind's eye. The pictures he shows are not pretty, nor is the sight of his misery, doubt and bafflement pleasant either. It is near - tragedy, for he could easily lose his mental balance situated as he is, in deep physical and spiritual torment. Moreover, the love-torn Widow Quin acts on the theme with acute and reasoned intensity, till she has got him to the point of accepting that he is "a sniggering maniac, a child could see."

This is severely trying to the audience as human nature revolts against mental imbalance more strongly than to any other kind of ailment. Even Mahon's cheerful recollections of previous experiences in "a straightened waistcoat with seven doctors writing out my sayings in a printed book" raises only a small rather guilty laugh, and it is with relief that his "slipping off down the boreen" is received.

Now, in the moment of his son's genuine triumph, and of his own dethronement to which his cogitations have made him perfectly resigned, he realises that the incredible reversal has indeed taken place, he remembers the former anguish, but now with delight as he almost banteringly jokes: "I am crazy again!" This time all are in on his joy and rejoice with him.

Christy has yet another surprise for the gentlemen in the pub for Synge will leave no avenue unexplored. All dramatic possibilities will be used to the limit of their value. Not only has Christy assumed leadership in his own immediate family, he has expanded his image to a sort of patriarchate over all his friends and foes alike. He pauses in his triumphal exit to impart a pontifical blessing over the astounded men in their huddle of amazement and perplexity. "Ten thousand blessings on all that's here, for you've turned me a likely gaffer in the end of all".....

Michael seeks his lost equilibrium in a glass of porter; Shawn exults in the vanishing of his major opposition and the prospects thereby reopened; Pegeen snaps his strand of rejoicing with a venomous box on the ear and her immortal cry wails out of the doorway in the wake of her lost opportunity. Unlike Nora in *THE SHADOW* Pegeen decides that the solidity of ryelands and turbary rights is preferable to "poets' talking and bravery of heart."

Today *THE PLAYBOY* is universally accepted and regarded by most critics as Synge's major work. Why was it then the most controversial of Synge's plays? The course of the infamous "Playboy Riots" is patiently given by Greene and Stephens in the *Biography*, Chap. XIII and ends with an optimistic description of the play's reception in England after some temperamental treatment in America. In a letter to Molly, quoted in the *Biography*, Synge tells her: "I am sick of being shut away from you like this, and I fear it will get worse as the week goes on, as I am being asked to go to all sorts of teas and things." (1) Both author and players were being fêted, and though he might have preferred Molly's society, it was comforting to be appreciated after the ostracism to which Dublin had subjected him. The objections were various, ranging from political overtones to

moral implications and verbal indelicacies. As if Synge cared much about the last grumble, any more than Shakespeare did. Nationalist Irishmen found satirical connections between Christy's patricide and the agrarian troubles of the early 19th century "where peasant and secret societies existed to protect the tenant against the landlord and in particular to combat the landlord's power of eviction. The main weapon of these societies was terror and assassination," and also to the Phoenix Park murders, where Lord Cavendish and Burke, the under-secretary were assassinated by members of a gang calling themselves "The Invincibles". Irishmen regarded these assassins as national heroes, and here was Synge loading Christy's speeches with wild bragging and empty boasting, and allowing his grand reputation to rest on a lie. Moreover, Synge claimed to have heard the original story of THE PLAYBOY from an old man on the Aran Islands, and he emphasises that it is an "anecdote" and not a folk tale.

"He (the old man) often tells me about a Connaught man who killed his father with a blow of a spade when he was in a passion, and then fled to this island and threw himself on the mercy of some of the natives which whom he was said to be related. They hid him in a hole - which the old man has shown me - and kept him safe for weeks, though the police came and searched for him and he heard their boots grinding on

the stones over his head. In spite of the reward which was offered, the island was incorruptible, and after much trouble the man was safely shipped to America." (1) To this account Synge adds one of his valuable comments, though so detached that one can only surmise on what side his sympathy lay. He writes: "The impulse to protect the criminal is universal in the west. It seems partly due to the association between justice and the hated English jurisdiction, but more directly to the primitive feeling of these people - who are never criminals yet always capable of crime - that a man will not do wrong unless he is under the influence of a passion which is as irresponsible as a storm at sea. If a man has killed his father, and is already sick and broken with remorse, they can see no reason why he should be dragged away and killed by the law." (2) However kindly this opinion is phrased, it was interpreted as an underhand device for exposing Irish law-breaking and law-defiance and the audiences took it as more fuel for the fires of their indignation.

The irreverence in the use of "Almighty God" and similar expressions was another source of unease. It is not, however, a perspicacious criticism. Men, drunk or partly so, invariably swear and use strong terms they would not use in less exciting moments, and the Irish people are celebrated for the ease with which they approach the Deity in prayer and petition. There is no conventional "Good Morning"

in Ireland, for instance, but "God's blessing on you" to which the person addressed responds: "God and Mary bless you." This is not indicative of extreme piety, it is to be feared, but a remnant of times when men's faith was more simple and their attitude to God less formal. Phrases like: "God willing", "if God spares us", "with the help of God" are as frequent in daily conversation as the shuffling of feet in a nursery school.

At the words "bloody fools" (Christy to Peggan: "And to think it's long years I'm hearing women talk that talk, to all bloody fools....") hisses and catcalls drowned the speaker's voice, and when the "females in their shifts" were suggested a roar of dissension arose, inarticulate at first then shaking loose into: "Lower the bloody curtain, and give us something we bloody well want," - surely a little inconsistent. The crowing outrage was Lady Gregory's desperate move in calling for police protection. Martyn's comment on that was to the effect that a "nationalist Irishman never, just never, calls for English police. Yet this appeal had wholesome and amusing results. Stolidly lining the walls of the theatre, the police on guard were obliged to hear the play on the stage,

(1) & (2) Everyman's Library. THE ARAN ISLANDS. p.270.

and it is not unreasonable to think that they were probably delighted to have the opportunity. It is the scene in which Michael is persuading Christy to accept his hospitality and the job of pot-boy. Knowing Christy's terror of police, Michael reassures him: "The peelers in this place is decent, drouthy, poor fellows wouldn't touch a cur dog and not give warning in the dead of night," at which the dignity of the guard collapsed into laughter at this ingenuous picture of themselves.

By and large, these objections were futile and insignificant. What really upset the audience was something deeper, less tangible, more subtly penetrating. It was the tantalising ambivalence of Synge's presentation of the Irish people, their customs, their character, their inconsistencies. While obviously understanding them from the inside - which can be achieved only through love - he is unmistakably mocking them in their insulated ideas especially in the face of anything new or challenging; he points up their inveterate curiosity and uncontrolled imagination, their violence and fierce loyalties, justified or not; their furies and maledictions, their constant restlessness and hankering after Tír na n-Og, where laughter is easily evoked and no one has to work, worry or struggle to survive.

This mocking attitude is revealed in incongruities that occur on every page. The men are drawing Christy out to tell them the details of the murder, each according to his own make-up.

Jimmy : He's a wicked looking young fellow.
Maybe he followed after a young woman on a lonesome night.

Christy : (Shocked) Oh, the saints forbid, mister; I was at all times a decent lad.

Later when the nature of the deed which the police are after is revealed, they would like to taste the whole menu of that delightful feast of fighting, blood and victory.

Peggen : And you shot him dead ?

Christy : I never used weapons, I've no licence, and I'm a law-fearing man.

Michael : It was with a hilted knife maybe? I'm told in the big world, it's bloody knives they use.

Christy : (Loudly, scandalised) Do you take me for a slaughter-boy ?

More hurtful is the implication in: "Go to the foreshore if it's fighting you want where the rising tide will wash all traces from the memory of man," and revolting is the sickly sheepishness of Shawn, who eventually does marry Peggen: "I'd liefer be simmering in passions to the end of time than face

a lepping savage the like of him has descended from the Lord knows where. " To readers acquainted with Irish exaggerations and mercurial temperament these extravagant expressions are only comical. They are overdone here, Shawn's "like" does not exist even in the most remote parts of Ireland. Neither his cringing terror of Father Reilly nor his excessive prudery has a foundation in fact, but they serve Synge's purpose to underline the father - image of tyranny and lack of contact with the young. However, the men who despise Shawn for his scruples are natural and authentic, so also is their strange readiness to leave a murderer in charge of Pegeen rather than miss the best drink at the wake. The choice of KEOGH for Shawn's surname proves not only Synge's acquaintance with Irish history, but also his genius for association when it suited his dramatic purposes. The name Keogh appears in 1850, connected with the Tenant Right League, and the efforts of Charles Gavan Duffy to reanimate the national spirit of the Irish people which was then in profound doldrums. The aim of the Tenant Right League was the "three F's" - fair rent, fixity of tenure, and freedom for the tenant to sell his interest in his holding - to be achieved through an independent Irish party in parliament. Such a party seemed to have emerged when about forty professing supporters of tenant

right were returned to parliament out of a total representation of one hundred and three. But the party quickly disintegrated, for various reasons. The reason that most struck the public was the conduct of some of its Catholic members in advancing their own careers through the championship of catholic interests disregarding the interests and principles of the Tenant League. Nicknamed "the Irish Brigade" they are better known in Irish history as "the Pope's brass band" - and foremost among them was a Mr. MCCGH.

The roots of Shawn's "Father Reilly and the scarlet-coated Bishops" complex are thus seen to be embedded in the facts of history, and if so, exonerate him from the shame of poltroon-hood. It gives one permission to say : "Poor fellow, he couldn't help himself, he didn't choose his ancestry - nor select his genes." Is there any extenuating circumstance available for the villain who "murdered his da" ? History is mute on any father-slaughtering tendencies in the Mahon line. Is there any archtypal story into which the situation may be sunk, and thence drawn up again into the stream of errors common to mankind ?..... One thinks of Oedipus. Although with the act of murder the similarity ends, to that extent at least it may be traced. There is indeed one link only: Oedipus stood in the way of his son's desire, and Old Mahon stood in the way of his son's desire. And there is one obvious solution for such an impasse - remove the obstacle. They did this,

and in the same way, by killing. But all the rest is dissimilar. Looking further back into history, one comes upon an archetypal desire, not unlike that which tortured the two young men just mentioned. It raged within the Prodigal Son till he cried: "Give me my portion, and LET ME GO !" It underlay Cain's insolent answer in the supreme moment of his life: "Am I my brother's keeper?" which permits the wide interpretation: "Do I have to be where he is, do what he does, serve you as he serves?" It was first uttered according to angelic media when Lucifer made his position clear: "Non serviam". That was a reply which Christopher Marlowe understood very well. Perhaps Christy's rebellion goes back to the roots, not of a story, but of man's original being which is fundamentally the same as his being today, and a century ago, when John Synge created what promises to be a ^{literarily} immortal Christy - the being that has a will to self-assertion, demands the right to an identity, insists on exercising his talents and developing his personality on lines determined by himself. As far as the dramatic purpose of Synge was concerned, it was not a case of a wilful son killing his father rather than disobey him; it was the instinctive rebellion of rational people against repression, particularly if they see the repression as a denigration of themselves and their intrinsic value as human beings. The instruments of such

injustice in *THE PLAYBOY* may well have been the Catholic Church which seems to lay grave burdens on her members - one recalls the priest versus tinker farce in *THE TINKERS' WEDDING* with the tinkers as victors - and perhaps also the English Government which always had something of tyrannical in her image for the Irish people. Or it may be the age-old conflict of youth and age. Synge exploits this theme in many aspects; Norah and her aged husband; Martin and Mary over against Timmy and Molly; King Conchubor ready to do violence to his royal dignity - and curb his royal patience! - for the love of a girl who was still at the nut-and-twig gathering stage. And perhaps, remotely, he saw his mother's uncomprehending adulthood as a looming obstacle in his own slow and painful process of maturation.

The magic of the play, however, is much more important than a few carping Mother Grundies, and it is to be found in the style. No phrase goes unadorned, but has an association that enriches and expands it - not always to the extent that one has to seek in history textbooks for the origin of the connection, but as simple as in the introductory speech of Pegeen where she is ordering items for her wedding tousseau. Had she been ordering the week's groceries, and that she also did, what a tame and

uninspiring opening it would have been, but a wedding outfit sets the pulses racing a little right at the outset. Then the things themselves - yellow 'stuff', the implicit trust of the uninitiated in the wisdom of the sophisticated; surely the shop-keeper will know exactly what to send The lace boots with lengthy heels suggest already the trim ankle and the gay stepping-out on the eventful morning. The most important for the last - a hat "cutted for a wedding day" - there as elsewhere, the hat or the hair is the eternal concern of the smart and irreproachably dressed woman. Págeen then, is a girl who knows her way around, and will be worth watching. Christy's entry brings in the mystery of the night in this desolate place, where the only noise is "the cows breathing and sighing in the stillness of the air, and not a step moving..." By this description the bottle store becomes the centre of the district from which light and life will emanate, just as it will be the centre of the action of the play.

Synge has laid aside all doubts, self-mistrust, fear of criticism, indeed all anxieties in the speech of THE PLAYBOY. Like his hero, he revels in "poets talking and bravery of speech" even though at times it is a little far-fetched. Whether of lovely things such as "you and me packing Neifin in the dews of night, the times sweet smells

do be rising and you'd see a little, shiny new moon, maybe sinking on the hills," or of sensations as disagreeable as "the dusts of August making mudstains in the gullet of my throat" or merely of the wild, rollicking things that young men enjoy repeating: "Ah, you'll have a gallous jaunt, I'm saying, coaching out through limbo with my father's ghost," or if he wants to show that he is not afraid to be "brutal" according to his tenets - in all cases he is swift and sure and relevant. Whether it is Pegeen who rises from the price of porter and high-heeled shoes to "I've heard all times it's the great poets were your like - fine fiery fellows with great rages when their temper's roused" or Christy who is "mounted on the spring-tide of the stars of luck" it sounds genuine and acceptable, and gives the impression of Synge's abandonment to the ecstacy of lacing words in magnificent necklaces like the one Pegeen will be wearing when "gaming in a gap of sunshine" with her doughty knight. Occasionally the imagery becomes a little florid as when Christy blames himself for "crawling forward to scorch my understanding at her flaming brow" or Widow Quin's fear of a "mortified scalp with that wound in the splendour of the sun". It is not easy to see the justification of Christy's accusation in any part of the text, nor is there any advantage in the insertion of the word "splendour" in the widow's speech. But when Jimmy, eager to get along to the

good drink while it is still available, lauds Christy's valour with: "I'm thinking he would face a foxy divil with a pitchpike on the flags of hell" the vivid picture wants nothing in either the spectacular or the entertaining. Perhaps one of the sweetest - and sharpest ! - comments is that of Widow Quin on seeing Christy for the first time, the hero whose name has awakened the countryside: "Well, aren't you a little smiling fellow !" - the whole of Christy's fear and insecurity wrapped up in his silly, simpering, ingratiating smile..... If this is accurate, and from a shrewd woman of the world, as Widow Quin incontestably is, one may assume that it is absolutely correct, then - what a metamorphosis takes place till he is "a likely gaffer, romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of Judgement Day."

This sentence sums up what Synge has done in **THE PLAYBOY**. He has compressed a "romping lifetime" for the countryfolk into two days, and though Michael James turns immediately to the counter, the people will never be quite the same again. They will be secretly peeping round the corners of their narrow streets to see if perhaps the swaggering person of another Playboy is holding up the passing mules and donkeys by the splendour of his "mighty spirit and gaming heart."

DEIRDRE OF THE SORROWS.

Surprise at finding Synge, in his last play, committed to myth is comprehensible but can easily be dispelled. His reasons for choosing to produce a rendering of one of the greatest love stories in the Saga of Cuchulain were solid and consonant with his attitude towards life and its dramatic presentation. Pretty suggestions as to why he did this were in circulation, arising from innocent sources, such as a simple wish expressed in a letter from Synge to Molly as he was writing the play: "I've pretty nearly gone on to the end of DEIRDRE and cut it down a little. It is delicate work - a scene is so easily spoiled, I am anxious to hear you read it to me." (1) From the last sentence arose an image of Molly performing the play, act by act, for Synge as he lay in death-agony in the hospital, and a suggested reason for writing at all - to give Molly a leading and striking role in a famous tragedy. Again, there was a chance remark of his own to the effect that he had had enough of peasant plays and would like to try another type - which is acceptable in its perfect reasonableness. Pique at the reception of THE PLAYBOY coupled with a natural hesitancy to exposing himself again to a similar experience was also suggested, and this is likewise a human and normal reaction. Yet, although there may be some germs of truth in these alleged reasons, there are deeper

(1) Greene & Stephens: J.M. SYNGE: Chap. XIV

motives, traceable from the rendering of DEIRDRE which Synge eventually presented, and from those already written by Yeats and AE (George Russell).

AE's DEIRDRE was performed in 1904 with Synge's RIDERS TO THE SEA and was not successful as drama. It was judged adversely by the Abbey company themselves, and suffered even further by contrast with the effective RIDERS. Yeats thereupon decided to write his own version and did so in 1906, concentrating on the return of the lovers and their death, which meant of necessity that the full drama was not adequately treated. The way was clear for Synge to supply the deficiencies left by both AE. and Yeats, and he felt he was capable, linguistically and mentally, -if only he were as secure physically, for at this time his health had degenerated from delicacy to danger of death. He actually did die before his DEIRDRE satisfied his perfectionist judgement, but he had done enough to allow of production. However, it is surprising to find Synge writing of a myth as he had frequently condemned the idea of making present-day drama out of legendary material. "No drama can grow out of anything other than the fundamental realities of life," was his opinion and the poem QUEENS, treated in the relevant section of this work, bears out Synge's conviction very strongly in spite of the jocular tone employed. It is noteworthy, too, that listed among the Queens is the name of Deirdre, with the epithet "golden" symbolic of the magnificence of the gifts which it was in her power to bestow with her "tender hand". He would now

deal with Deirdre's history, but emphasize all that was most human in his characters rather than what was legendary, and shrouded in myth and pertaining to antiquity.

The play is based on material provided by historians Hull and O'Grady; by Lady Gregory whose study of legendary Ireland was intensive and reliable, and of de Jubainville, who conducted lessons in Ancient Irish Civilization at the Sorbonne which Synge attended during his stay in Paris. Though he adhered largely to the original story, he made several departures of significance. To appreciate these alterations fully, a brief recounting of the myth would be valuable.

Traditionally the story goes that King Conchubor (pronounced Conor) was invited by Fedlimid, his raconteur at court, to a banquet in the latter's house. During the feast a child was born to Fedlimid and his wife and the happy event was immediately proclaimed to the assembled guests. At the same instant, the arrival of Cathbad the Druid, was announced. On hearing the news, the Druid fell into a prophetic ecstasy and spoke of the newborn child. She would be of exceptional beauty, would cause much harm in the kingdom, heroes would die for her and kings neglect their duties to go seeking for her, she

would be known to succeeding generations as DEIRDRE OF THE SORROWS. Awestruck by the appearance of the prophet and by his words, the guests sat stunned for a time, till the impact of his prophecy made itself felt. Then, with one accord, they decided to have the infant killed there and then. But the king was aghast at their proposal and made his own plans. Sending for two trustworthy woman-servants he placed them in charge of the child in a secluded place, where she was to grow up away from society, and when old enough she was to be his bride. And so it was done. Deirdre, with Lavarchan as nurse and protector and another old woman as companion for Lavarchan, set forth, and remained in a quiet wood till Deirdre was twenty years old. She was all the prophet had foretold, and the King could hardly wait for the day when he would introduce her to her throne and place the crown on her lovely head. But he reckoned without either Lavarchan or the bride-to-be. The nurse manoeuvred the coming of Naisi, a courtier and soldier of Conchubor's court, to meet Deirdre in the woods, and the meeting had the result the old nurse had foreseen. Miranda-like, Deirdre asked Naisi to deliver her from Conchubor and the dreary prospect of queenship. He agreed after some deliberations, and with his two brothers, about 150 warriors and their wives set out with Deirdre

for Alban to establish another kingdom there. He was most successful and King Conchubor decided his best course was to conceal his chagrin and bide his time. But his love continued its fierce demands, and he was forced to make many efforts to contact Deirdre. All were in vain, for she was safely ensconced in Etive under Naisi's vigilant protection.

Seven years passed. Eventually Conchubor's spies managed to get through to Naisi and his friends, seduced them with false promises and lured them back to the kingdom of Conchubor, where they were treacherously put to death. Deirdre was captured by the king and placed on a chariot between him and the murderer of Naisi. Enraptured at having her beside him, he could not resist a sneer: "Deirdre, that glance you gave me was like that of a ewe between two rams." Infuriated by his coarseness, she leapt from the sea and dashed her brains out among the rocks.

In his rendering of this story, Synge rejected the Druidic prophecy; a scene also in which Naisi and Deirdre are playing chess when a spy interrupts them and Naisi pierces his eye with a chessman; and all the intrigues of Conchubor in his attempts to win Deirdre cak to Emain. Instead, Synge invents another character, OWEN, a "grotesque" who introduces a peasant element in the first Act, is a spy of

Conchubor's and loves Deirdre passionately. When his love is not returned, he commits suicide. Owen is a vague figure, "not yet woven into Act I" as Synge told Yeats before he died, and would certainly have received more distinct personality and duty to perform, had Synge found time to give them.

Three themes are traceable, and recognisable as Synge's own. The dominant theme, the loveless marriage of youth to age, resembles that of *THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN*. To emphasise the wrongness of such a union, Synge presents Deirdre as a child of nature, revelling in the thunderstorm, "at all times straying around picking flowers or nuts or sticks itself," and so lovely that "the lightning itself wouldn't let down its flame to singe the beauty of her like." Lavarchas regards her marriage to the King as unthinkable and says so forthrightly to Conchubor himself: "I'll tell you this night, Conchubor, she's little call to mind an old woman when she has the birds to school her, and the pools in the rivers where she goes bathing in the sun, I'll tell you if you seen her that time, with her white skin, and red lips, and the blue water and the ferns about her, you'd know maybe, and you greedy itself, it wasn't for the like of you she was born at all."

The second theme arises out of Deirdre's life in seclusion, - Synge's delight in Nature and the countryside. The seven years in Alban "when beech trees were silver and copper and ash trees were fine gold and the stars were our friends only" are pictures recalled from the Wicklow woods and the hills of Kerry as he himself rejoiced and found strength in them.

Still another theme emerges from Owen's blunt words to Deirdre as he persuades her to return to Emain and the home Conchubor has prepared for her. His pleading is echoed by Fergus. Owen reminds Deirdre that her nurse, Lavarcham, "used to be in the broom and heather kissing my (Owen's) father with a little bird chirping out over their heads", but "now she'd scare a raven from a carcass on a hill," for "Queens get old, Deirdre, with their white and long arms going from them and their backs hooping." Fergus's counsel has not even the shine of poetry to disguise its honest commonsense appeal as he says: "There are your sureties with Conchubor's seal. You'll not be young always, and it's time you were making yourselves ready for the years will come, building a homely dun beside the seas of Ireland, and getting in your children from the princes' wives. To Naisi he speaks with equal plainness: "You'd do well to come back to men and women are

your match and comrades, and not be lingering till the day that you'll grow weary and hurt Deirdre showing her the hardness in your eyes. You've been here years and plenty to know it's truth I'm saying." This is the concept of old age destroying the charm of youth, and the question that emanates therefrom: Will love stand up to the test? Will it endure the onset of ugliness and the degeneration of senility and the enfeebled senses? Will love always enjoy priority among the lover's preferences, or might patriotism, allegiance to a king, fraternal affection, outdo its claim?

These three themes penetrate the play and are frequent theories from Synge's mind and pen. Doubtless they were inherent in the original too, but were less distinct. There, the emphasis rested on the King's devouring love for Deirdre and his continuous efforts to regain her. Here, the King and Deirdre have only two conversations, both emotionally charged, it is true, but swift to terseness. Actually, Conchubor is lightly sketched throughout. Naisi's brothers are mere numbers, and Naisi himself has one great moment only - that of his decision between his love for Deirdre or that for his brothers. The anger that this emotional strain causes is the sole stress he undergoes on stage. Lavarcham is

given an interesting strain of wiliness, coupled with a most unservant-like attitude towards the king. She addresses him on at least one occasion as "my lad" and offers him advice at once maternal and admonitory. In the original myth she adroitly arranged the meeting of the two young people, but Synge prefers to let this occur through Fate - unaided by humans. People are not the carvers of their own destinies, he maintains.

As Yeats had done, not too successfully, before him, Synge has concentrated on the main figure, Deirdre. She grows from an airy girlhood chasing sunbeams round the trees to a monumental image, defying a king, burying her lover and her friends, refusing to move from the corpse till the moment arrives for her to take her place beside Naisi, killed by her own hand. Her beauty, like Cleopatra's beggars all description, and "she's turning a woman that was meant to be a queen." Synge delights in multiplying tributes to her loveliness. Naisi's first sentence: "And it is you who go around in the woods making the thrushes bear a grudge against the heavens for the sweetness of you voice?" is eloquent of the impression made on him by his meeting with her. Lavarcham comforts herself that "I'll be sailing back and forward on the seas to be looking on your face, and the little

ways you have that none can equal." Owen, rude to uncouthness, yet conveys his homage when he says: "I tell you I'd liefer be bleaching in a bog-hole than living on without a touch of kindness from your eyes or voice."

Deirdre is not a queen of beauty only. She speaks and commands with regal assurance. Pointedly she describes to Conchubor the type of husband she is prepared to accept, and the description leaves very meagre hopes for himself. The colours she indicates were suggested by the sight of a slaughtered calf in the snow: "a man with his hair like the raven, maybe, and his skin like snow and his lips like blood spilt on it." To the king's impassioned anticipation she replies: "I will not be queen nor your mate in Emain."

Too much of this hauteur, however, would impair the image of a perfectly natural girl which Synge desired to preserve, consequently the real Deirdre emerges in the next speech, her reaction to the King's quite surprisingly laconic: "What we all need is a place is safe and splendid, and it's that you'll get in Emain in two days or three."

Deirdre : (aghast) Two days?

King : I've the rooms ready and in a little while you'll be brought down there to be my queen and queen of the five parts of Ireland.

Deirdre : (standing up and frightened) I'd
 liefer stay in this place, Conchubor
 Leave me this place where I'm
 well used to the tracks and pathways
 and the people of the glans.....
 It's for this life I'm born, surely.
 It's my pleasure to be having my
 freedom on the edges of the hills."

This is authentic Synge - have my pleasure in the
 freedom of the hills

This is an interesting reversal of roles among
 Synge's women characters. Norah of THE SHADOW
 and Sarah of THE TINKERS' WEDDING were dissatisfied
 with their condition and longed to better it.
 Deirdre is so contented that she refuses the hand
 of a king, rather than lose her present way of life.
 The old king thinks that with "a place safe and
 splendid" happiness is inevitable and cannot
 understand the mind of a woman who would prefer
 "freedom on the edges of the hills"

On the departure of Conchubor his unpredictable
 protégée takes out all the finery and gifts he has
 bestowed on her, and all the hangings and tapestries
 and orders the amazed servants to decorate the house
 like a palace. Bewildered, they obey, noting only:
LAVARCHAN. : When all's said it's her like that will
 be the master till the ends of time.

On the entrance of Naisi and his brothers whom she has expected, Deirdre assumes complete command: "Take Ainnle and Ardan these two princes, and serve them in the little hut where we eat, with what is best and sweetest. I have many things for Naisi only." At the sound of her voice, Lavarcham becomes "overawed by her tone" - Stage Direction - and replies with a new meekness: "I will do it and ask their pardon for following them here."

Deirdre's awareness of her power enables her to unfold to Naisi, whom she has met once and that briefly in the forest, the daring plans she has devised. Drugged by her beauty and persuasive eloquence he listens, interjecting occasionally a comment born of his native prudence. She sweeps all objections aside and hears him whisper: "The stars are out, Deirdre, and let you come with me quickly, for it is the stars will be our lamps many nights and we abroad in Alban, and taking our journeys among the little islands in the sea."

The queen has conquered. The woman will now enjoy the sense of masculine protectiveness: "And yet I'm in dread of leaving this place where I have lived always. Won't I be lonesome and I thinking on the little hill beyond and the apple trees do be budding in the springtime by the post of the door ?....."

Naisi is equal to the challenge: "Are you thinking I'd go on living after this night, Deirdre, and you with Conchubar in Emain ? Are you thinking I'd go

out after hares on the hillside when I've had your lips in my sight?"

During the idyll of Alban, she remains a "happy and a sleepy queen" "stretched in the sunshine" as Ainnle and Ardan "step lightly by". Doubtless, these situations are not unusual, but it is the magic of Synge's melodic speech that weaves a veil of fascination and mysterious power about them that transforms commonplace experiences to ecstatic imaginings.

The motives that prompted Deirdre to return to Conchubor in the face of almost universal opposition are revealing. She is the heroine of a Druidic prophecy, and must needs play to the full her tragic part. Queen of beauty, of youth, of love, she would also be queen of tragedy, as immortal as Helen and as captivating.

Moreover, an early death will protect her from the humiliation of old age, from "grey hairs and loosening of the teeth".... She will die in the radiance of youth - "a woman will be young for ever." Her conversation with Naisi before the denouement not only accentuates the abyssmal difference between them - he, the practical man of common sense and rationality, planning for the future of his wife; she, the fated figure, dogged by tragedy, building up to her tremendous moment of renunciation. But before her disappearance from the world of men and

affairs, she would leave testimony of her sovereign dominion over the greatest of men, Naisi. She forces him to choose between having her by staying with her now during the sounds of fight from outside, or saving them by leaving her and going to their aid. This is Synge's invention - this conflict between patriotic duty and the claim of love. And Naisi chooses to save his brothers. A soldier's choice which allows no alternative in the name of honour.

Naisi : I cannot leave my brothers when it is I who have defied the king.

Deirdre : Do not leave me, Naisi, Do not leave me, broken and alone. I will go with you.

Naisi : You cannot come Do not hold me from the fight (He throws her aside almost roughly)

Deirdre : (with restraint) Go to your brothers. For seven years you have been kindly, but the hardness of death has come between us.

Naisi : (looking at her aghast) And you'll have me meet death with a hard word from your lips in my ear ?

Deirdre : We've had a dream, but this night has waked us surely. In a little while we have lived too long, Naisi, and isn't it a poor thing we should miss the safety of the grave, and we trampling its edge.

Here is what Yeats called the "tragic reverie", and poignantly effective it is.

Mercilessly she continues : "Let you go where they are calling ! Have you no shame to be loitering and talking and a cruel death waiting Ainnle and Ardán in the woods ?

Goaded into a stinging reply, Naisi further loads it with a curse : "They'll not get a death that's cruel and they with men only. It's women that have loved are cruel only, and if I sent on living from this day I'd be putting a curse on the lot of them I'd meet walking in the east of west, putting a curse on the sun that gave them beauty, and on the madder and the stone-crop that put red on their cloaks."

His death by stabbing follows immediately, and Deirdre sinks into a paroxysm of regret and despair, so intense that she is unaware that Conchubor and her friends have gathered round her and hear her magnificent farewell to earth and all that inhabit it. In this long speech that begins : "Draw back a little with the squabbling of fools when I am broken up with misery I see the flames of Emain starting upward in the dark night" Synge abandons her to the passionate lyricism that has been pent up in her soul during the altercations with Naisi and the scenes of carnage that took place

while he and his followers were being killed and Owen was setting the King's palace in flames. Before this moment, her words were mostly elegiac, melancholy, regretful of spent loveliness and joy; now it is the queen of tragedy in her own right, and the waterfall of desolation and verbal perfection is pure word-magic..... "It was sorrows were foretold, but great joys were my share always, yet it is a cold place I must go to be with you, Naisi, and it's cold your arms will be this night that were warm about my neck always. It's a pitiful thing to be talking out when your ears are shut to me. It's a pitiful thing you have done this night in Emain, Conchubor, and yet a thing will be a joy and triumph to the ends of life and time." Upon which she presses the knife to her heart - the "little key to unlock the prison of Naisi" - and sinks into the grave beside him.

"A woman will be young for ever" - this was her dream, and it will now endure for eternity.

It is usual for people to shun death and seek to escape its inexorable arrival. Not so the queen of the hearts of Naisi and Conchubor and Owen and Fergus and all the noble men of Ireland. She advances to her doom, wide-eyed and regal, walking fearless into a death for love. The occasional touches of sentimentality that flaw the pages of this play are pardonable when one recalls the youth of the heroine and her vast inexperience of many things that would harden and mellow her had she known them.

The passage: DEIRDRE. "Woods of Cuan, woods of Cuan, it's seven years we've had a life as joy only....."

savours of sentimentality in the repetition of the "woods of Cuan" and Synge's direction that she should be "clasping her hands." But it is immediately obliterated by the image that follows :

"... 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."

Similarly in the address to the moon : "Little moon, little moon of Alban, it's lonesome you'll be this night" there is the suggestion of slight mawkishness but it too is dispelled by the subsequent lines:

"... its lonesome you'll be pacing the woods beyond Glen Iaci, looking every place for Deirdre and Naisi, the two lovers that slept so sweetly with each other."

True to its title, there is no humour or any touch of comedy in this play. Nor was there any lighter side to RIDERS OF THE SEA. While Synge's tragedies are unrelieved by comedy, there is always the proximity of tragedy in his comedies. This is to be expected from a man of his sensitivity, who lived in the shadow of his own always imminent death and whose seeming failures far outnumbered any appearance of success, in his writings as well as in his personal dealings with other people,

especially with Molly, whom he loved as intensely as his too intense nature was capable of doing. And she never satisfied his questionings with a definite reply - neither affirmative nor the opposite. Yet DEIRDRE OF THE SORROWS is not morbid. It is sweetened by the presence of nature in her most yielding and co-operative mood, comforting and inspiring the fugitives even as she strengthened the flagging spirits of Syngo himself in his flights from the talk and activity at Coole Park to seek recollection in the mountains of Wicklow. It is further rendered serene by the implication that death is not sadness, not a closing of a door behind which there is vacuity and silence. This death is a relief after the going of Naisi who "has left the whole world scorched and desolate, with no light in the heavens and no flower in the earth under them, but is saying to me: 'Naisi is gone for ever.' "This strange idea of joy in the deepest form of sorrow known to man - the separation of body and mind in the mysterious state of death - is brought out forcefully at the close of Deirdre's life, as she takes a last farewell of all that remains now that Naisi is gone. She says: "It is not a small thing to be chosen by Conchubor, who was wise, and Naisi who had no match for bravery. It was sorrows were foretold, but great

joys were my share always, yet it is a pitiful thing to be talking out, Naisi, when your ears are shut to me. It's a pitiful thing - yet a thing will be a joy and triumph to the ends of life and time." With which she presses the knife into her heart. "A joy and triumph" ? One recalls Maurya: "There is nothing more the sea can do to me now." She was the victress, beyond the machinations of her most inveterate enemy, and therefore experienced joy and a sense of triumph. It is the same with Deirdre now - death is no monster when it kindly releases the lonely heart from stretches of lonely years.....

In this concept Synge is true to his canon: "... rich joy to be found only in what is wild and superb in reality." This is wild and it is superb. A life for a life in the most dramatic form possible. Showing Naisi's knife, Deirdre speaks: "I have a little key that will unlock the prison of Naisi you'd shut upon his youth for ever" and stabs herself, sinking into the open grave. Tragedy and joy - together forming the "tragic joy" which Yeats understood so well (See "Lapis Lazuli" by Yeats). Nietzsche wishes that all human beings who are of any concern to him should have their share of suffering, desolation, sickness, ill-treatment and indignities. He even wishes them the wretchedness of self-mistrust and of being beaten, so that they may prove their value by being able to endure. Such as can bear these afflictions and yet remain captain of their

Deirdre's knowledge that she is fated for some particular purpose, causes her to regard herself slightly as a person apart, but Synge mercilessly reduces her to the mortality that is unsure, that can doubt, that can seek escape from pain and shame, even, to the type of mortal who can quarrel and hurt a loved one to the brink of madness, or the brink of the grave. Deirdre, the heroine, is indeed in all respects what he intended to make her - one subject to the pitiful conditions under which man works out his life on earth. But this view is rather one-sided, and the genius of Synge would never sink to create such a character. Moments of heroism come, are recognised and accepted. "I have a little key"

In the light of this desire on the part of Synge, the reason of his omitting the scene in which the two, Naisi and Deirdre, play a game of chess while they wait for death, becomes most enlightening. The symbol of the chess game - Yeats's idea - was to show that man was merely a pawn in the hands of the gods, captive and helpless. Synge was too realistic for such a facile elucidation of man's mistakes. He would show that in true tragedy the error is on the inside; it is man's inherent weaknesses that bring him to his knees and not the schemes of some ancient goddess balancing a pair of scales. Naisi and Deirdre fear with an almost incredible dread, the impotence of growing old, ugly, weak, no longer able to hold each other's

love, forced to see one another lose that mystery and loveliness which had entranced them for so many happy years in their idyllic background. Even the number of years is important - seven, a Christian symbol. Deirdre learns very surely that the circumstances of her birth and the magical pronouncements that attended it have not invested her with any magical method of overcoming the harshness of her destiny - and not even the king, the mighty Conchubor, could stay the force of the fatal prophecy.

He too, had to be shown that kingship weighs very lightly in the balance of reality and truth. As a king, he was accustomed to command, and see his order immediately accomplished. On hearing the prophecy regarding the newborn daughter of his story-teller, he decided, as he afterwards declared to Deirdre: "It is I will be your comrade and will stand between you and the great troubles are foretold." He was not stupidly arrogant - only true to his training as king, but he would learn that man cannot shape either his own destiny or that of another. Deirdre herself would oppose him - a possibility which he never dreamt of considering, for where is the poor girl will reject elevation to the rank of a queen? - and he would have opposition from the natural right of a person to be himself, the right to "Oneself-ness" as Buddhism expresses this seldom attained state. In contrast to his assumption that he has a kingly right to dispose of events and people according to his judgement, is the readiness on Deirdre's part to accept her

fate as part of the price of life itself.

Melancholy permeates the story of Deirdre, and is felt even in the lovely life in the woods when she was "a happy and a sleepy queen". For the ravages of winter are severe; so are the ravages of time. Flowers and fruits can wither and fade; so can love, even a love like that of "the flame and bright crown of the earth and the stars over it." Deirdre overhears with horror the conversation between Naisi and Fergus in which her beloved says, very thoughtfully (Stage direction) "There have been days.... that I've a dread upon me a day'd come and I would weary of her voice (very slowly) and Deirdre's see I'd wearied." This is the sentence that ultimately decides for her. She will return to Main Macha with a heavy and disillusioned heart. Naisi's ardent pleading is in vain because she is certain: "There's no safe place, Naisi, on the ridge of the world.... And in the quiet woods I've seen them digging our grave, throwing out the clay on leaves are bright and withered." Having realised that the world treats its tenants so, she decides that it is "a better thing to be following on to a near death, than to be bending the head down, and dragging with the feet, and seeing one day a blight showing upon love."

Most of the last act takes place by the edge of the open grave prepared for the lovers, and the grave, like Michael's presence which was so markedly felt in *RIDERS*, makes an uncanny background

for the scene, which could have been majestic had it not been spoiled by the smallness of the two protagonists in their squabble a short time previously. Now in very truth, death has lost any dignity it might have claimed, and Deirdre finds her prophecy was only too accurate:.

".... death is a poor untidy thing though it's a queen that dies." Death of the body is a tremendous issue - but when it is the death of love between two such lovers as these - then indeed, does further living seem pointless, and death, the crown and climax of life, becomes a low and shameful exit.

One less prominent symbol, in this his last play, may perhaps be mentioned as relating back to the very first play Synge ever completed: WHEN THE MOON IS SET. In that short interchange between Eileen and Cola, which Synge did not offer for publication, he mentioned the moon in all her symbolic interpretations, among which the idea of fertility is given much emphasis. Here, in DEIRDRE, as the loveliest of women makes her threnodial farewell speech, she addresses the moon as: "LITTLE moon, little moon of Alban," While this may be discounted as sentimentality only, it may also be seen as an implied indictment that the moon over their life in Alban had allowed the lovely years to go by, unfruitfully. All that

remains now is an open grave, which, engulfing both Naisi and Deirdre will obliterate their memory for ever.

When Synge decided to attempt DEIRDRE he confided his intention to his nephew, who replied: "Won't you be accused of copying George Russell and Yeats? Haven't they written plays about Deirdre?" Synge was quick to answer: "Oh no, there will be no danger of that. People are entitled to use those old stories in any way they wish. My treatment of the story wouldn't be like with of theirs!" This (1) simple statement was justified. Synge opened his play with a heavy storm indicating immediately that the passage of Deirdre through the short years of her life will be one of stress and difficulty. The "dark clouds" which trouble Lavarcham will also trouble Deirdre, especially as it is under their guidance, as it were, that the sons of Usneach come to seek shelter in the small cottage of the three women. It is because of this same storm that Conchubor leaves sooner than intended to go back to the "safety" of Emain Macha, a safety which Deirdre scorns and which will one day be aflame before his eyes - the deed of an unfaithful follower.

Synge did not, obviously, perfect the second act, for Deirdre seems to have lost some of her fire and vitality and to be surprisingly ready to go back

(1) Greene & Stephens: Chap. XIII. p.277

to the palace which she had previously so strongly repudiated. The part played by Owen takes place in Act II, and it is he who forces Deirdre to her fatal decision. His is an ambivalent position, not through ingenuity on either his creator's side or his own; rather through lack of completion. His message is one of warning that the end of their immediate form of existence is approaching and that of all life for all living things. He is the harbinger of doom, but his suicide seems both unnecessary and purposeless. Lavarcham is likewise a minor character who is more fully developed than her companion, the brothers of Naisi, or Fergus. She is more than merely the woman appointed to manage the household for the growing girl; she is her oracle and guardian, and the champion of the rights of Deirdre and Naisi to live as they consider best. Her motherliness is in strange but pleasant contrast to the royal atmosphere that prevails among the other characters, and is humanely evident at the close of the play as she implores the old and now quite broken king to take shelter in her hut, seeing his splendid palace is no more. Her final murmur about the grief of nature for the tragedy that has just been enacted, is slightly artificial and could perhaps be omitted. In fact, if the drama ended with the strong sentence of Fergus: "This is the fate of Deirdre and the children of Usneach and for this night, Conchubor, our war is ended," the audience would be dramatically-speaking better satisfied.

THE POEMS.

Synge's merits as a poet were overshadowed by his fame as a playwright and the charm of his folk-prose. Yet, much of the man behind the writings, the lone voice, the rootless seeker and wanderer, appears in his slender volume of verse, and rewards analysis of the various facets of his character revealed in the lines.

It is significant that the greater part of his boyhood was spent in the country. In LETTERS TO MY DAUGHTER, Dr. Samuel Synge, the missionary brother in the family, shows how strong and unremitting was John's interest in bird lore, moth lore, habits of bee and squirrel and rabbit, and how all was solidified and even made lucrative by the homely study of the domestic hen. Both Sam and John had investments in their mother's poultry yard, and could judge unerringly just when the broody hen was ready to "sit". This detail is not only amusing, it is almost incredible at least as far as the playwright is concerned, for "Synge was very helpless in the actual affairs of life" (1) as his friend, Best discovered when he helped him to furnish his room in Paris. To this brother, Sam, we are indebted for what is surely Synge's earliest attempt at poetry, A POEM ON MY AUNT, in which John allows himself some philosophical reflections on the good lady, Aunt Jane Synge, who

(1) George Moore: HAIL & FAREWELL. p.185.

often spent a few weeks in the Synge household. It happened that at one of these visits, John upset a gravy boat at dinner. Aunt Jane, forgetting temporarily that she was a guest, gave free rein to her housewifely reactions to brown gravy on white tablecloths, and electrified the company by a loud: "John, you greasy pig !" The poet-to-be found in this fitting material for a verse or two, and forthwith set his reflections down for posterity.... The doggerel he perpetrated to immortalize the slip of decorum on Aunt Jane's part is as comical as it is indicative of his already well established observational power, and his ability to assess people according to their unconscious revelations of self. Here is the second verse:

"She got in a wax
 I yelled out 'pax'
 But she'd give me no quarter -
 So I stood up and fought her."

The peace-loving man goaded into violence in self-defence ... AND - a glimpse of the future playwright who would defend his dramatic theories in the teeth of an infuriated Dublin.

The poem goes on :

"She called me a greasy pig
 And over her greasy wig
 She put on her Sunday cap
 And hit me an awful rap."

The ceremonial vesting in preparation for the assault took his youthful fancy in its ludicrous incongruity. One may be pardoned for a remote association with the exchange of clothing in THE PLAYBOY. Shawn Keogh let his coat go into the hands of the teasing men, thereby admitting his willingness to forego his manly privileges in regard to Pegeen; later he forfeits them entirely by relinquishing a whole suit to Christy, who dons it at once with delighted anticipation: "I'd like herself to see me in them tweeds and hat." In the present instance, Aunt Jane dons a cap - she assumes another role too, the role of the father-figure, for his is generally the duty of punishing youthful wrongdoers. Just as Synge sees the reversal of roles in this situation, so does he clearly rebel against the fact that in his home all authority is vested in the hands of women. This will have serious repercussions all through his life.

In the next stanza of the poem, John chuckles gleefully as he reports :

"One Sunday night
 She was near put to flight
 She saw some old men
 And fled like a wren."

His bird-study, long and devoted, has taught him that the wren is the most timid of the wild birds; hence the accurate comparison. He admits, however :

"She often argues and is right
 One night we nearly came to a fight
 As by the sea we were taking a walk -
 She argued away with a great deal of talk."

Notice that he does not add that he yielded to her. Neither would he yield in years to come when actors and producers would implore him to alter his speeches. Aunt Jane argues "with a great deal of talk", which probably John enjoyed to the full. Norah will sell her farm and mountain ewes for a "fine bit of talk" one day, and Christy will be perpetually remembered for his "poets talking and bravery of speech." Possibly he was making astute judgements on the speaker - for there are many gateways to the innermost sanctuary of a man besides a chink in the floor.... Now a chivalrous item in this lengthy story of "my ant":

"But I found I was wrong
 So I wrote this song
 To show my dear aunt my gratitude
 For giving my brain such wholesome food."

He manages to spell "Aunt" this time, and it seems as if he did enjoy the garrulous old lady as they strolled along the beach. Sam recalls that "the manuscript was carefully kept by our old Aunt Synge till her death in 1895, and when I went to China, it was in your grandmother's house in Kingston"(1) It was evidently a treasure^d remembrance. Some of the

(1) Samuel Synge: LETTERS TO MY DAUGHTER. p.13.

family wanted to spell "aunt" conventionally, but Samuel asserted: "John never had any trouble about Mathematics, but spelling was a difficulty to him, as it had been to all of us." (1) It remains therefore, a POEM ON MY ANT. In the Introduction to the Vol.I, POEMS of COLLECTED WORKS, Robin Skelton, the editor, writes: "Synge's handwriting, not to mention spelling and punctuation, was always erratic and the phrase 'decadent and symbolist schools' in this draft might well be read 'descendants of the symbolist schools' and 'unworldly' for 'unworthy'. In the notebook there is a note: 'I'm a good scholar at reading but a blotting kind of writer when you give me a pen - J.M.S.' It is appropriate that the reading of 'blotting' must be considered conjectural"(2)

Synge's first attempt at a poetic work of any pretensions appeared after the failure of his friendship with Cherry Matheson. He had hoped that their good fellowship would develop into love, but an irrevocable break took place in 1896, and its effects lay behind the production of VITA VECCHIA, a series of poems linked together by a prose narrative in which he retold in disguised form the pain he was enduring. He revised this later, omitted the prose and several of the poems, retouching those he retained till they gave back in scrupulous exactness the ideas he wished to convey. This was of a piece with the artist who would later call his friend MacKenna to rejoice with him over a good day's work done - one single sentence typed out on his faithful

(1) Samuel Synge: LETTERS TO
MY DAUGHTER. p.13.

(2) COLLECTED WORKS
I. POEMS. Notes
accompanying text.

"Blick" - one, but flawless. Ten of the VITA VECCHIA group remain today as published in COLLECTED WORKS - I - POEMS, and labelled "unpublished" as this was Synge's wish. But they are valuable to the modern reader as indicative of beginnings, and as the poems have not received as much intensive study as the plays and prose generally, it would be satisfying to devote some attention to them here.

Synge's 'themes' - to which he remained consistently committed - can be traced even in his early poetry. Wordsworth was his favourite poet, and it is understandable that Nature is a prominent feature in Synge's verses. GIENCULLEN, the first published verse from his pen, appeared in the college publication, KOTTABOS, for Hilary Term, 1893. An unpublished companion piece: A MOUNTAIN CREED dealt with the same subject - Nature. Both are inferior to the childhood verses ON MY ANT which have the virtue of vigour and truth, while the nature poems are cluttered with sickly sentimentality and unpardonable clichés. It is difficult to believe that the Synge who recognises a newcomer by his being a "big boast of a man with a long step on him and a trumpeting voice" could be responsible for:

" 'Fair flower' said I, 'thou all alone
 'Thy days up here art spending,
 'Now listening to the sad winds' moan
 'And now before them bending.

' Tell me the secret of thy life
 ' Thy very soul's religion,
 ' That I may know the hope and strife
 ' That fill this dreary region. ' "

ot for the flower's "softly made" reply :

" Yet cloud and storm can hurt me not,
 My joy it is not pleasure,
 But 'tis to be, no humble lot,
 One jewel 'mid God's treasure. "

He tries to touch Wordsworth's mystic apprehension of Nature in THE CREED, but with no success, and bogs in deep uncertainties in the second stanza :

" For my own soul I would a world create
 A Christless creed, incredulous, divine,
 With Earth's young majesty would yearning mate
 The arms of God around my breast entwine. "

The oxymoron of an 'incredulous creed' is highly unpalatable and there is a distinct confusion of identities in the repudiated Christ and the capitalized God.

The theme of love is also important to these early poems, and they too, are undistinguished. In HIS FATE Synge uses again all the clichés and softness that are relevant, and obviously is deeply concerned about rhyme - glee, me; way, away; leaving but one point in this poem's favour - it showed that Synge was in this respect a normal adolescent, a lovesick young man, hymning his agony.

Even less respectable is AT A FUNERAL MASS:

" I hear low music wail
 Woe wanton, wed to fear,
 Heard chords to cleave and quail
 Quelled by terror sheer. "

The artificiality of this stanza pervades the poem.
 Clumsy inversions such as

" Where shadow round did wend
 Won by face so fair "

indicate why Synge did not want it to be published.

IN REBELLION is closely linked to maternal nagging
 about God the Just Judge - all in capitals - and Hell
 and Devils and Eternal Punishment:

" Thrice cruel fell my fate
 Did I, death tortured see
 A God, inhuman, great,
 Sit weaving woes for me. "

Eventually, the sentimentality of the love poetry
 gives way to a vehement emotion that breathes some
 life into the lines:

" Toward God high taunts I hurled,
 With cursing parched my tongue."

This note of anger and rebellion is heard again in

EXECRATION, a short confession of infuriated youth. Here Synge, very angry and very determined, follows Sidney's excellent advice: "Fool, look in thy heart and write" - to his own great advantage, for these lines have fire and sincerity of feeling. Gone is the awkward inversion; gone the threadbare cliché; directness and honesty have taken their place and the result is satisfactory and promising. Is this the beginning of the "brutal" poetry which Synge declared must have prominence if poetry is to regain its dignity and value ?

OF THE VISITATION two versions are given by Skelton; one, which Synge apparently considered to be the better of the two, and an earlier version. The approved rendering is, however, a sort of floating idea, connected with nothing, founded on nothing, referring to something constantly nebulous.

"I saw among the cloude one woman white
 Star-like descend. When I her aim descried
 My temples reeled, I staggered, scarlet-dyed.
 Then sightless stood, heard, weeping, swift
 indite:

and the mysterious apparition queries how he can bear to "all lowness turn thee near" ?

It is all very enigmatic, till a glance at the discarded version makes all clear. The withheld

version is a much better poem beginning where the sense began, Synge's omission of which caused only obscurity and not the thought-provocation he probably intended:

" Through ways I went where waned a lurid
light
While round about lewd women wan did
glide...."

Ah - so that was it. No wonder the heavenly visitor asked her pertinent question.... Compared with Stephen Dedalus' reaction to such an environment, Synge's behaviour is exemplary.

His attitude to sex generally was wholesome, fresh and, typically, realistic. Replying to MacKenna's gentle suggestions that he should restrict the reality of his plays for which the Irish were 'blessedly unripe' and write innocent, graceful and archaic entertainments Synge revealed the good health of his ideas on the topic: "Heaven forbid that we should have sex-obsessed drama in Ireland, not because we have any peculiar sanctity, which I utterly deny, - blessed unripeness is sometimes akin to damned rottenness, - but because it is bad as drama and is played out. On the French stage you get sex without its balancing elements. On the Irish stage you get the other elements without sex. I restored sex and the people were so surprised that they saw the sex only..." (1) Note: "it is bad as drama and played out." In this Synge was a sure prophet as well as observer. His unusually long letter continues on a

(1) Greene & Stephens: BIOGRAPHY. Chap.IX p.157.

wider note and equally educative: "No drama can grow out of anything other than the fundamental realities of life which are never fantastic, are neither modern nor unmodern and, as I see them, rarely spring-dayish, or breezy or Cuchulainoid. Of course I feel the healthy piety of a great deal of Irish life. I will use it gladly in my work, and meanwhile it is perfectly safe from any fear of contamination from my evil words. " (1)

To return to the poem which is intimately concerned with this question - although it contains a plethora of "waning lights", "did glides", "sad moanings" and heavy alliterations "sightless stood, heard swift endite" - yet it is interesting, possesses strong atmosphere and by implying the identity of the "apparition" who, mercifully now, seems to be a figure substantiated by the force of his imagination and longing, introduces what will one day be an outstanding feature of Synge's writings, namely, an unexpected twist at the end. This heightens its emotional value and proves Synge's own point, that reality is a surer guarantee of excellence than any flights of fancy how airily beautiful soever. The theme of this poem is very personal, unlike the poet's sensitive reticence, his resistance to intense carnal desire and is - old-fashioned word in present day life - edifying. It shows Synge as a man of sound moral principle, and better still happy to proclaim the fact.

A four-lined verse called A DREAM is worded too intensely for the subject matter. A lovelorn youth

(1) IBID p.158

All poems treated so far were written before 1899 and are valuable principally as guides to Synge's future ideals in poetry and drama. Their intrinsic worth is slight. One two-stanza poem of this group may be taken as a transition piece : L'ECHANGE. Here the wry humour that will spangle his future work even as the lady of his poem spangles herself with his gifts, makes a début amid pearls, and gold and jewels, and a vast compliment as central gem: "You are my God and my Heaven" - even the capitals... There is Synge's other forte - brilliant contrasts - incipiently present here, and also his love for bright colour in kaleidoscopic abundance :

(Second Verse) " She gathered my gold and my jewels
 Spangled her breast and head,
 Yet I found when I sought my veau-
 biqué
 She had left me a franc of lead... "

preparing the way for:

CHRISTY : "Isn't there the light of seven heavens
 in your heart alone, the way you'll be an
 angel's lamp to me from this out, and I
 abroad in the darkness, spearing salmon in
 the Owen or the Carrowmore? "

From poems dealing in the main with the theme of unrequited love, Synge moves on to another salient interest - death. Dr. Alan Price finds two attitudes to death in Synge's approach: "that the dream of love alone can make life worthwhile, but that once

this dream is shattered, death is the only resort, and that for those who have not experienced deep love, nor been awakened to actuality, any sort of life is better than death," which imparts to love very grave powers, and to those who refuse love, very great responsibility. This implies that love and death are mingled in the poems of his riper writing, and so indeed it is.

QUEENS is the first poem offered after the 1899 group, and deserves more than passing mention. The transcendence of life's glory is loudly proclaimed, but in mock-serious style which is attractive and robs the poem of any heavy didacticism or preachiness. Mythologies and history of Greece, France, Ireland, Italy and heroines of Scripture and the incomparable Cleopatra, all are interwoven in a comprehensive list of "queens" whose fame seemed to entitle them to everlasting tribute.

"Yet, these are rotten -- I ask their pardon --
And we've the sun on rock and garden,
These are rotten, so you're the Queen
Of all the living, or have been. "

This is Synge's canon -- the present and its reality, let the dead bury their dead. The texture of this poem rewards analysis.

An exalted title QUEENS demands royal treatment, but Synge chooses a light, lilting, frivolous metre, as if he would explode the self-importance of thrones

and their occupants at the outset for - what are they now? "All the rare and royal names

Wormy sheepskin yet retains"...

Now degrading for "parchment" to be reduced to its elements - "sheepskin". Even in this single word Synge shows his preoccupation with reality, and his determination that truth will be elevated above fantasy. To underline the often forgotten fact of Queens' common humanity shared with the rest of the world, he does not hesitate to mention their inevitable destiny -

"Queens whose finger once did stir men

Queens were eaten of fleas and vermin..."

The poverty of the rhyme here is a comical emphasis of the slight value he places on outward show of pomp and ceremony, when it overlooks the often sordid but inescapable conditions of human existence.

The deliberate confusion of classical, Biblical, mediaeval and Irish names represents tellingly, the sameness of dead bodies - who can distinguish after a few centuries whether the corpse wore the "gaudy bonnet" of a "crown" for headgear during the lifetime which is now so completely obliterated by the decay of the grave. One could enlarge on this theme endlessly, for every line accentuates it.

"Rotten", deliberately repeated, is two-fold in meaning. He has just mentioned a celebrated queen - "who wasted the East by proxy" - in the same breath as "a tinker's doxy", and the association is immediately clear. Such queens, then, judged by Synge's high

moral standards, as deduced from previous poems, could indeed merit the harsh adjective. Now, they are likewise rotten in the corruption of the grave. This gives even more light and loveliness to the "sun on rock and garden" with a distinct Garden-of-Eden savour, and points up the otherwise commonplace compliment to his beloved: "So you're the Queen." A Queen of the Garden of Eden will have a better chance of eternal happiness than those he has just disposed of.

A similarity between this poem and a ballad by Villon exists, and as Synge read the French poets and authors extensively, it is not improbable that the theme of QUEENS came from the ballad. Dante Rossetti's translation of this Villon ballad links it with the past, but Synge refers to the lady beside him in the living, loving and active present, thus giving it the colouring of his ever recurring doctrine - the NOW of life matters, not what is irrevocably gone.

QUEENS is one of Synge's better poems. DANNY is perhaps quite the best in Syngean style, and had, like his best play, THE PLAYBOY, a struggle for the right to be heard. DANNY was looked at askance by Elizabeth Yeats, the then Director of the Guala Press publications, on the grounds that its meat and means of expression were too strong for her readers. She begged Synge's permission to omit it from the edition she was preparing, though, knowing the poet, she felt it incumbent on her to offer an apology with the request: "Dear Mr. Synge, Thank you very much for writing about the poems. The only two that I would like

to leave out are "The Curse" and "Danny". I hope you don't think it silly of me to want them taken out? " and when the proofs arrived in January, 1909, the two poems were indeed missing.

DANNY is a rousing ballad, true to form. It tells a gripping story with vigour, colour, speed and the ultimate in realism. And it contains one of Synge's great convictions: that human nature is prone to hatred and jealousy toward a fellowman whose superiority throws its own mediocrity into relief, even if the superiority consists principally of courage in doing wrong. Danny was a fine, hearty fellow, usually "whistling grand and gay", not above "playing hell on decent girls and beating man and boy" - not even baulking before "twice at Crosemolina fair, he's struck the parish priest", than which, in Ireland there could be no greater offence. Self-righteous and God-fearing citizens must show such a one the error of his ways.

"A score and nine" of them wait for the unsuspecting Danny, in a gap of hazel glen - "with not a hare in sight", the litotes creating scampering hares for the imagination as no description could ever do; and incidentally hinting that human "hares" had quit the heather that night too, carrying their still along - and out they jump, all at one leap, twenty nine to one, and that one totally unarmed. Synge spares no detail of the injuries on both sides and fully sympathises with his hero

when the mystic number :

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

So far, bad enough, and Miss Yeats's hesitation about publishing becomes reasonable. But there is more. Not only content with killing Danny, the pious Erris men mutilate his body in a manner primitive beyond savagery, then proceed to rob him of his "purse and his timber pipe"... The word "timber" here is most moving. In his acquaintance with the Irish peasant, Synge noticed that the majority used the traditional clay pipe. When one had the good fortune to acquire a "timber" or wooden pipe, that object would be treasured. It was dear to the dandy, Danny, in life, and he was to be deprived even of that in his hour of destruction. This touch of tenderness is genuine in Synge. Evidences of real affection between him and the people with whom he conversed in his many wanderings abound in the prose works. A crowning irony is still to come. When the men had wreaked their jealous spite on Danny, and stolen his possessions, they PRAY FOR HIS SOUL: Sanctimoniously, they find a tombstone - a ordinary stone of course, they will use his "purse" for other purposes - and inscribe on it a "flat cross". Synge mentions in THE ARAN ISLANDS the custom of "a line of stone pillars

with crosses above them and inscriptions asking a prayer for the soul of the person they commemorated." Now, the men ask all those who pass by, to note the cross and remember that "someone" lies buried beneath. The Cross, symbol of redemption and love is out of place as coming from them, yet, it implies Synge's trust in the omniscience of God to whom "the very hairs of your head are numbered".

Ballad-like, this poem gallops along at a swinging pace, and the choice of words is in keeping with the temperament of the speakers. "Gullet" is more than a facile rhyme for "Belmullet"; it is a virile, onomatopoeic word which renders not only visual the image of the strangling, but audible as well. Danny's vibrant personality is contrasted strongly with the loneliness of his last resting place: "..... the way

From Bangor to Belmullet ."

Again, the definiteness of locality is typical of Synge and adds to the contactual effect of his verse.

Of the same type, though not strictly in ballad form, is THE 'MERGENOY MAN. The origin of this poem dates back to Synge's childhood. When fourteen years old, he argued with his mother over the rights of tenants on her property, but she evaded the issue with: "What would become of us if our tenants stopped paying their rents?" To this he could make no reply, but his suffering was not alleviated. In 1887 he actually witnessed the eviction of a family by his own brother, Edward, and took cognisance of the premeditated manner in which it was so efficiently accomplished. Edward

first hired two "emergency men" whose occupation was to bar former evicted tenants from any attempt at returning. Their task was not a pleasant one. The following morning Edward proceeded with his accomplices to the doomed house, routed out the tenants before they quite realised what was taking place, and installed the emergency men immediately. If the house were worth preserving, the men continued to live there, till new tenants were found; if not, it was burnt. A few days after this eviction, Edward burned the miserable cottage to the ground... The spontaneous question is: If the house were worthless to him, why could he not permit the destitute tenant to go on occupying it? Such injustice embittered Synge against his family and their barbarous insistence on their so-called "rights". Now, in 1905, he recalls this episode and translates it into a vivid and considerable poem, with, however, a strict adherence to facts and no comment from himself. This is also a favourite device of his - merely to state his point and leave the reader to his own deductions, for "the drama does not teach or prove anything" and poetry is of the stuff of drama. Moreover, Synge's well-trained ear detected any departure from an approved form, as evidenced in his slight annoyance with the ballad-maker mentioned in the essays on WEST KERRY, who introduced politics and personal reflections as he proceeded with his entertainment:

"Where is the tyrant dare oppose it
 Our old customs we will hold up still,
 And I think we will have another
 That is, Home Rule and Purchase Bill."

Synge disapproved of using art for other ends than the pursuit and revelation of beauty, as it exists in reality, and also as it fires the imagination to enrich the inner life of the listeners or beholders.

Accordingly, his 'MERCENCY MAN has no digressions or annoying elucidations, only the racy language, accentuated by the equally dashing metre. By subtle implication Synge conveys details that might go unnoticed unless one knew Synge's method. This special 'Mergency man for example, "had half of the bailiff's room", for no one would give him lodging. If there is honour among thieves, there is greater honour among poor people suffering common injustice, and they will support one another. The emergency man is no cowardly hireling - he braves weather that would frighten even the denizens of the out-of-doors, again the hares - and is prepared to handle, unassisted, the "score" whom he hopes to find within. So torrential was the downpouring rain "A night of rains you'd swamp a star in" that even the policeman tried to hold the Mergency Man back from his raid. But he was game and on he strode. The picture of the fording place is strong, graphic, in contrasting black and white, with an implication of evil from the meaning of "black":

" The night was black at the fording place
 And the flood was up in a whitened race..."
 One gets the image of wild horses foaming at the mouth,
 and all their energy and strength are in the image.
 "But divil a bit would he turn his face."
 "horribly frightened now, the police take on the
 Erris men's attitude when "some washed off his blood",
 they too, shout above the roar of the storm: "We'll
 wash our hands of your bloody job" only to hear the
 insolent defiance; "Wash and welcome" says he "begob".

Then come the strikingly economical descriptions of
 the ensuing events:

" He made two leaps with a run and a dash
 Then the peelers heard a yell and a splash.

And the Mergency Man in two days and a bit
 Was found in the ebb tide, stuck in a net."

Although the point is of no literary importance, it
 is of human interest that Synge seems to leave the
 reader in doubt as to the position of his sympathies.
 It has been said that, like his hero, Yeats, Synge too
 had a few masks behind which he liked to shelter his
 real self from intrusions of unwanted intimacy. One
 of these was an affectation of indifference. When
 his PLAYBOY was being booed and hissed off the stage,
 he muttered repeatedly: "I don't care a rap," -
 more independence than truth....

One other "savage" poem is too good to be overlooked, and its "savagery" is of a different kind. The kind of cry emitted by a strong man in unbearable pain. It is strongly Syngean in straightforward statement and intensity of feeling, vastly different from the misty effusions of the earlier poems. The theme is - love in the shadow of death, and the source a conversation between Synge and his fiancée, Molly Allgood. Yeats wrote in THE DEATH OF SYNGE : "I asked Molly if any words of hers made Synge write (this poem) and she said 'he used often to joke about death with me and one day he said: 'Will you go to my funeral?' and I said 'No, for I could not bear to see you dead and the others living'" (1)

Written in 1908, when Synge knew that his death was imminent, the accusation of hypochondria must not be allowed into an analysis of this poem. True, Synge was extremely aware of his mortal illness, but equally prepared to accept Stephen MacKenna's advice: "Please don't say anything more about "guts"... I would rather think of you as a sort of Stevenson sick man in a velvet coat with long languid face and a winning smile such as grows in little girls' story books. And there's the tip - why not be a Stevenson ? Be sick to your heart's content, but make your books and jokes and kick at the devil. You have your brain back now, that you told me sat grinning at you from a distance on the bedpost at Elpis (Hospital). I feel very sure that, accommodating yourself to your iller health, you will do Playboys and Deirdres and other things galore for us" (2)

(1) AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS, Yeats.

The Death of Synge.

(2) GREENE & STEPHENS? Chap. XIV. p.297

On receiving the letter from which this extract was taken, Synge actually took up the drafts of DEIRDRE and drove himself to work on it. THE QUESTION shows how right MacKenna was when he concluded his letter : "Of course I see the weary worry of it all as regards your marriage, and for herself too, it must be tragic, tje doubt, the not-knowing what is to be." Seen against this background THE QUESTION is touching in the poignant loneliness and need for human comfort.

" 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 or
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. "

"My black funeral" - there goes the cortège. Streaming along behind the coffin, the thoughts of the mourners anywhere but on the deceased. A man so dedicated to truth could not be mistaken on that score. "Living idiots" seems unnecessarily strong to a reader in perfect health, but when one is ill, anything is a matter for irritation, and Synge was never one to suffer fools gladly. He would not even desire their condolences, and wonders if Molly could bear to be

among them. Synge so whips up one's emotions here that the answer of Molly is as important to the reader as it was to him. He achieves this primarily by the jagged, uneven rhythm which powerfully suggests the chaotic nature of his own emotions at this point, with death on one hand and marriage with a girl whom he has loved for so long, possible and within reach, if only..... "You'd rave and rend them with your teeth" - any weapon in extremity. Visions of Shawn Keogh's bitten leg arise - Christy had used his only tool. His suggestion implies a compliment to Molly - she would be one of the realists who would make full use of the immediate means of expression of their true reactions.

Yeats called this poem "magnificent", to Synge's delight, and although Yeats was often over generous in praise of others - by no means a fault- here his lauds are sung in the correct key and the resultant harmony awakened in Synge's grateful heart is a resonant response. If Molly in her suggested resourcefulness "I'd rend them with my teeth" - reminds the reader of the ingenious Christy, there is another poem DREAD which has even more distinct echoes of THE PLAYBOY, as they were written at about the same time. Dates for the poem are 1906 - 8, while PLAYBOY was published in 1907.

There is not any striking achievement in DREAD, but the last line is interesting from the point of view of comparison. It is written in conventional style, even flowing iambic pentameters, and emphasises

once again the poet's constant loneliness and understandable reaction.

" Beside a chapel I'd a room looked down
Where all the women from the farms and town,
On holy-days and Sundays used to pass
To marriages, to christenings and to Mass.

Then I sat lonely watching score and score
Till I turned jealous of the Lord next door....
Now by this window, where there's none to see
The Lord God's jealous of yourself and me. "

This is unobjectionable verse, of mediocre talent - if anything else, then a little less than mediocre. Compare and contrast the inevitable Christy, exuberant in the wonder of his world-shaking victories on the sports field, being now crowned with the homage of the QUEEN of the Western World, the much sough-after Pegeen, who "looking at him playfully" by stage direction, teases: "And is that the kind of a poacher's love you'd make, Christy Mahon, on the sides of Neifin, when the night is down?" He can hardly wait to pout it out: "It's little you'll think if my love's a poacher's, or an earl's itself, when you'll feel my two hands stretched around you, and I squeezing kisses on your puckered lips, till I'd feel a kind of pity for the Lord God is all ages sitting lonesome in his golden chair." Even unsophisticated Pegeen sees the shine on this and murmurs her appropriate sentiments.

It would be strange not to find some poems devoted solely to Nature, because Synge was indeed sensitive

to the recurring magic and miracle of natural phenomena. Two such flash into the mind at once. There is SAMHAIN, brief, colourful delicate and rising at the end to recognisably metaphysical qualities. It is Autumn, and Nature, feeling that she has done the prosaic part of her duty very well, in supplying crops and harvest, now supplies food for the eye and mind, in a splendid wealth of colour. Visual imagery is presented in the contrast as Synge is becoming proficient in creating:

"Though trees have many a flake
Of copper, gold and brass,
And fields are in a lake
Beneath the withered grass. "

Specially noteworthy here is the word "flake". Granted, it may be only a rhyme to "lake" but by this time Synge is no longer groping desperately for rhyming words. He means just FLAKE, the indescribably light brush of Autumn tints that transform the leaves into bodiless blendings of "copper and gold and brass", innumerable editions of which present a riot of colour to the eye, in sharp opposition to the "fields in a lake

Beneath the withered grass."

Anyone who has lived in the northern hemisphere in late Autumn will know how accurately the fields have been described.

"Though hedges show their hips (fruit of the
wild rose)
And leaves blow by the wall,
I taste upon your lips
The whole year's festival. "

The last two lines have something in common with the idiom of :

"When thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st not winde,
But sigh'st my soul away,
When thou weep'st, unkindly kinde,
My life's blood doth decay. "

of the Master of the Metaphysical, John Donne himself. This poem is very successful and could well have escaped his heavy-handed flail when he was winnowing the chaff from the grain.

One other Nature poem has the twist of genius in its concluding idea also. This is TO THE OAKS OF GLENCREE. Again, the subject matter is death, seen in the usual realistic setting of Synge's determined canon. The first stanza is conventional, pretty, and a little sentimental. It is couched in the accepted terms for such poetry and presents a useable scene to the artist with his palette and brush.

"My arms are round you, and I lean
Against you, while the lark
Sings over us, and golden lights and green
Shadows are on your bark. "

Is this a reversal to the poetaster productions of the early stages? Synge "holds it" for a moment, just long enough for the photographic image to fix itself soothingly on the mind; then his real voice speaks:

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

This is the fact-facing Synge who holds no veils up to reality but looks at it as at an approaching challenge. Much as he loves the wood of the tree, and even is willing to caress it as he would a loved person, even as he acknowledges its power to support his living self - he knows it is helpless to prevent its eventual use - the wood for his coffin; nor can it do that service for him which he would most desire and need - namely prevent the encroaching worm.

"Black" here is reminiscent of RIDERS where the colour black signified not only mourning, but ill luck, evil, insidious danger stalking unseen. The definite locality of "Mount Jerome" is again part of Synge's repertoire of approved things, and of course it is the actual name of the cemetery in Dublin where the Synge burial plot was situated.

TO THE OAKS can be seen as an implicit criticism of conventional forms of poetry where genuine feeling and worthwhile sentiment are submerged under terminology that is hackneyed and insincere. In the Preface with which he introduced his poems, Synge mentions "the poetic feeling for ordinary life" and claimed that when men no longer "write poetry of ordinary things, their exalted poetry is likely to lose its strength of exaltation, in the way men cease to build beautiful churches when they have lost happiness in building shops." He maintained that it is not the "flower of poetry that matters, because it perishes; it is the timber that wears most surely,

and there is no timber that has not strong roots in the clay and worms." In *TO THE OAK TREES* his oneness with the tree is Wordsworthian in appearance, but a genuine experience on the poet's part and is intimately linked with his acquaintance with and anticipation of the Mount Jerome cemetery.

The much-quoted : "Adieu, Sweet Angus, Maeve and Fand

Ye plumed yet skinny shee..."

is merely another expression of his intense conviction that the time of fairy tales and legends is past and that the present materialistic and energetic age of discovery and scientific progress wants strong food of incontrovertible truth, which alone is worthy of the deep study of man.

Another small group of verses deserves mention as expressions of varying emotions at the time of writing. *THE CURSE* which he introduces to Molly in a letter : "I have written a lovely curse on 'the flighty one' but I'm half afraid to send it to you," - and well he might be, for the person of whom he wrote was Molly's sister, Mrs. Callender, who had been foolish to declare her disapproval of *THE PLAYBOY*, which Synge had duly heard. It is a short poem and has to be quoted in its entirety to reveal the partly angry, partly mischievous Synge:

"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 eat her dinners
 In Mountjoy with seedy sinners:
 Lord, this judgement quickly bring,
 And I'm your servant, J.M. Synge. "

It is amusing to note that this is a "modified version", the original being even more medically terrifying. The first lines will indicate sufficiently:

"Lord, curse this female's fickle head
 With gripes and colic grace her bed.
 With corns and bunions cramp her toes.
 Deck with pimples brow and nose."...

Even for Synge this was a degree beyond his realistic temperature and he did not enrich Mrs. Callender's blue-ribboned packets with this pious prayer. A touching evidence may be drawn from this form of curse, however. In *THE WELL OF THE SAINTS*, Martin also felt urgent need to invoke punishments on various enemies of his peace and prosperity, and displayed considerable ingenuity and eloquence in the fulfilment of his desire. "The devil mend the old Saint for letting me see it was lies. The devil mend Timmy the smith for killing me with hard work, and keeping me with an empty, windy stomach in me, in the day and in the night. Ten thousand devils mend the soul of Molly Byrne - and the bad wicked souls is hidden in all the women of the world." This is good, plain talk and has distinct bearing on Timmy's present afflictions. The theme of Synge's "curse" is physical pain with the

crucial line in the middle of the poem : "In her guts a galling give her." Forgetting for a moment the crudeness of the description, one feels with Synge the discomfort to which he was constantly subjected, and which became almost insufferable before his death. The reference to Mountjoy is topical. This is the gaol for political prisoners and therefore one to which Synge would never be committed. It would be therefore, ideal for his arch-enemy.

His mischievous fancy not yet subdued, he sent her another poem the following day, one which he apparently liked as it had been revised and published in a form open to a more general application than the original. The revised version is as below:

"May seven tears in every week
 Touch the hollow of your cheek,
 That I, signed with such a dew,
 For a lion's share may sue
 Of the roses ever curled
 Round the May-pole of the world.

Heavy riddles lie in this,
 Sorrow's sauce for every kiss. "

this is a poem of confused images and blurred concepts - tears, emaciated cheeks, kisses (to procure transference of the dew :) banality (lion's share has innumerable associations, none with the refinements of love), gay young folk dancing round the May-pole of long dead centuries; moreover this is a cosmic May-pole with streamers dangling into every Continent. Granted -

heavy riddles lie in this, but the interpretation of kisses seems to be in the approved direction. To link this with an offended poet chastising a critic is no mean accomplishment. Much more successful is the discarded first attempt :

"May one sorrow every day
 Your festivity waylay.
 May seven tears in every week
 From your well of pleasure leak
 That I - signed with such a dew -
 May for my full pittance sue
 Of the Love forever curled
 Round the May-pole of the world.

Heavy riddles lie in this
 Sorrow's sauce for every kiss. "

Possibly the desire for reconciliation contained in the last line is a tribute to Molly, and a prudent desire to have irreproachable relations with prospective in-laws. "Full pittance" is excellent oxymoron in Syngean style, and justified Yeats's fear that sarcasm would one day coffin Synge's last hope of the good-will of his countrymen.

With a naughty,-schoolboy ballad in sturdy, marching rhythm, the section of surface-emotion verses may be closed. Molly was apparently a young woman of quick temper, and her lover was not exempted from its eruptions. He sent her the following antidote:

"Young Polly Poppum and her man went out one Autumn day
 When hips and haws and blackberries their millions did display.
 Then he and she did quarrel sore upon a mountain lane
 And first she swore, and then she bit, and then to ease
 her pain
 A black and bloody smudge she laid upon her lover's
 Cheek.
 Who stood upon the pathway there in patience mild and
 meek.
 And then in passion and in pride, she snivelled loud
 and long
 Till all her griefs he squeezed away upon his bosom
 strong. "

After such abundance of alliterated doggerel, Molly would be cured of all tendencies to "snivel loud and long" even supposing she could always command such a pleasant resting-place.

Donna Gerstenberger notes that Yeats, in compiling THE OXFORD BOOK OF MODERN VERSE gave Synge's poems "a disproportionately large representation." Yeats would defend his judgement, perhaps, by the just claim that "John Synge brought back masculinity to Irish verse with his harsh disillusionment." Be that as Yeats sees it, the fact remains that Synge's poetry is on the whole, of slight literary merit, but certainly contained some brilliant and forward-looking attitudes and opinions. Alan Price's summing up of Synge's poetic achievement is prudent enough to be amusing, yet it is accurate and fundamentally a compliment: "Synge may be no more than a minor poet, but he is one of those minors who have played in the major changes of poetry."

CONCLUSION.

"And so when all my little work is done
 They'll say I came in 1871,
 And died in Dublin,
 What date will they write
 For my poor passage to the stall of night,"

They wrote "1909" quickly enough, but very much more was written later, the volume and nature of which would have surprised and delighted Synge had he read it. Dr Alan Price supplies a list and commentary of criticisms that appeared in the years after Synge's death, much of it highly favourable. ^{1.} Critics appreciated the clearly formulated ideals of truth and observation which inspired him, the sincerity with which he presented his theory that reality and joy are the pillars of good drama and consequently essential, the dogged independence of his lonely journeys down unfrequented literary avenues — and alleys, from which ^{he} returned richer, deeper, surer of his art and mode of expression.

Notable among many, was, according to Dr Price, the approach of Maurice Bourgeois, whose work Dr Price assesses as "biographical and sociological rather than purely literary", but useful in demonstrating that the effect of Continental influences on Synge's manner of writing were negligible. Bourgeois attributes to Synge a "solid Irish substance" peculiarly valuable to his image because the

1. Alan Price: Synge and the Anglo Irish Drama: Introductory.

Irish people consistently regarded him as the foreigner whose unpredictable pen was as likely to wound and expose as to encourage and exalt. A.G. Van Hamel's study ON ANGIO-IRISH SYNTAX is of great interest to the philologist and provides a plausible explanation of the syntactical structures of Anglo-Irish dialect. It is quoted elsewhere in this work.

An important comment occurs in Cornelius Weygandt's IRISH PLAYS AND PLAYWRIGHTS, namely that Synge's characters are "all natively Irish" yet so human that they are prototypes of men and women the world over. John Masefield is also included among the percipients for his remark after a conversation with Synge: "His mind is perhaps a little like Shakespeare's". Lady Gregory, Padraic Colum, George Moore and E.A. Boyd who knew Synge personally have also expressed appreciation of the man and his work, Boyd writing in 1918 a CONTEMPORARY DRAMA OF IRELAND, and placing Synge's name "among the great dramatists of the world".

The following decade saw a slackening of interest in Synge and the Irish drama owing perhaps to a more conservative attitude towards all contemporary writing on the part of the Abbey directors. The year 1919, however, marked the Silver Jubilee of the founding of the Abbey, and inspired A.E. Malone to celebrate the occasion by a review of the Abbey's activities to date. He produced THE IRISH DRAMA,

which concerned itself with matters of organization, selection and number of plays performed, status in Dublin society and similar external affairs, more than with the merits or demerits of individual playwrights. Consequently, little of Synge's achievement is revealed there. Between 1919 and 1939, spurts of interest produced desultory booklets and articles, none adding conspicuously to the assessment of Synge's work, till Una Ellis-Fermor's *THE IRISH DRAMATIC MOVEMENT*, 1939, included him as one of the five writers whose contribution to the Irish Literary Renaissance she analyses with erudition and thoroughness. Dr Price comments on her treatment of Synge as: "Displaying his sanity, his grasp of fantasy and folk-myth and the distinctive balance in him of the nature-mystic and dramatic poet". The accuracy of his opinion is beyond question, yet there is discernible also a heavily marked emphasis on the part played by nature in his plays, so that the impression of Synge as a "nature-writer" emerges from Una Ellis-Fermor's chapter. This would be to limit his achievement unjustly. That he is highly sensitive to nature and responds deeply to her varying aspects whether on the mainland or on the storm-beaten islands, is always evident, and the influence of nature is felt in every play as Una Ellis-Fermor so convincingly proves, yet it is always a "prop" as it were, and never an end in itself. There is a great distance

between Wordsworth's "huge cliff (which) like a living thing, strode after me" (Prelude) and Synge's purely aesthetic appreciation of "Galway Bay, almost too blue to look at, on my right, the Atlantic on my left, a perpendicular cliff under my ankles, and over me innumerable gulls that chase each other in a white cirrus of wings".

1. This opinion is supported by the authority of Donna Gerstenberger in her study: JOHN M. SYNGE, Chap. IX, Part IV.

In 1941, Synge attained further recognition through the work of L.A.G. Strong in J.M. Synge where he drew attention to Synge's "clear vision of the state of poetry and the measures needed for its cure". An interesting task was that undertaken by JAN SETTERQUIST from the Swedish Uppsala Irish Studies to discover links between Synge and Ibsen, in view of Synge's repeated assertion that he did not share Ibsen's dramatic theories. Dr Price reports that Setterquish found similarities in theme only, none in treatment or technique. From Herbert Howarth in IRISH WRITERS 1880 - 1940 published in 1958, comes among other things, the history of the inflammatory "shift" which wrought such havoc in the orderliness of PLAYBOY audiences. Howarth relates that the "anti-Parnellites waved a shift in the villages in 1891 to stand for Kitty O'Shea, and to drive the Chief away". "Poor Parnell!" Mr. Casey cried loudly,

1. Collected Works: J.M. SYNGE: PROSE. THE ARAN IS. I. p.73.

'My dead King' Stephen, raising his terrorstricken face, saw that his father's eyes were full of tears".

2. No wonder that Synge's reference raised such a hurricane in Dublin.

Then 1959 appeared the first fully authorised biography by D.H. Greene and Edward Stephens. Stephens was Synge's nephew and Greene an American professor who had done a Harvard doctoral dissertation on Synge in Dublin, twenty years before the biography was published. The style used in this comprehensive reference work is objective and dispassionate, yet not that of a history textbook. Of particular value are the numerous quotations with which the points made are illustrated. To cite just one: "Johnen, friend of my heart,

A million blessings on you. It's a while ago since I thought of a small letter to write, and every day was going until it went too far and the time I was about to write to you, it happened that my brother's wife, Shawneen died. And she was visiting the last Sunday in December, and now isn't it a sad story to tell? But at the same time we have to be satisfied because a person cannot live always. But Shawneen is good, but he is very lonely. But if he is, he has to be satisfied. I am afraid you may be cross with me, but I say to you it was through no fault of my own. I got the letter and the postcard you sent me. And I am happy to know your health is good. Michael O'Hickey

2. James Joyce: Portrait of the Artist.

is good and myself, and small Michaelleen, and he makes tricks with his fingers as you did....." ¹.

This letter from Synge's host when on the islands, Michael MacDonough, is a testimony of the affection entertained for Synge by the people of Aran, and incidentally shows the source of a least one memorable saying in his plays - Maurya's resignation to the death of her children: "What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living for ever and we must be satisfied".

To facilitate the writing of this biography the total collection of Synge material was made available to Professor Greene, in which gesture Dr Price sees a symbol of the internationalisation of Synge's literary fame.

Of all critics, however, Yeats remains the most noteworthy and the most authentic. The two poet-playwrights were contemporaries and friends, and shared many literary ideals, especially a profound respect for living speech as it is spoken and heard by the majority of people in everyday usage. Both were convinced that the daily speech of ordinary people was the best medium for drama and if for a time they differed on the type of subject to be treated in drama and poetry, they succeeded in finding mutually accepted ground on that score also. Both attributed to truth, reality and genuineness sovereignty over popularity and propaganda. Yeats' acclaim of Synge's

1. Greene & Stephens: Chap. VI p.105.

unique and universal genius is generous and loyal. Dr Price quotes at length in a chapter entitled YEATS AND SYNGE in SYNGE AND THE IRISH DRAMA, from well-known poems and writings of Yeats to indicate the older poet's admiration for his protegee. A revealing sentence is the frank admission: "I did not see, until Synge began to write, that we must renounce the deliberate creation of a kind of Holy City in the imagination, and express the individual".² It is accepted now that Yeats' dissatisfaction with his mythologically embroidered coat and impassioned efforts to restore "Romantic Ireland" although he feared it was "dead and gone" dates from his meeting with Synge and reading his subsequent work. It is significant that Synge is among the few to whose literary opinion Yeats occasionally deferred, and for which he more frequently asked.

What, then, is Synge's achievement as seen from 1970? An obvious comment is that even as he held no predecessor - the role of Hyde and Lady Gregory has already been discussed - neither will he have any supremely successful follower. Why? Because the language forms which he used to such advantage are no longer heard on the mainland or on the islands; consequently no playwright can ever cull them direct from the source as Synge did, and imitations, as previously illustrated, are always second-best, always unconvincing. During the sixty years since Synge's death, sweeping material

2. W.B. Yeats: Autobiographies : P. 493.

changes have altered the face of Ireland. Masfield's grim prophecy of "tweeded beasts" invading the Aran Islands after their popularisation in Synge's book, has been verified, and commercialism in the name of progress has wiped away much of the unsophistication which, accompanied as it was with "mother wit" or innate shrewdness, Synge found so fascinating and which he exploited with delicacy, humour and absorbed interest. He has therefore arrested for succeeding generations a moment of history that would otherwise have passed unrecorded, and which can never be recaptured because the circumstances which created it no longer exist.

Synge has also demonstrated beyond argument that the living language is the ideal medium for present day drama. Through speech most people reveal themselves; many, through speech only. Any artificiality in speech will cloud the image of the speaker, as they know who have to communicate in an acquired language before they are fully proficient in its use. Even so, will an unaccustomed and elaborated language impede actors in the presentation of the parts they are performing. In the six plays published, Synge has achieved fully and unerringly, the identification of the speaker through his words, from the suave greetings of the tramp to Norah when he was hoping for a night's free board and lodgings:

NORAH : Is it walking on your feet, stranger?

TRAMP: On my two feet, lady of the house, and when I saw the light below I thought maybe if you'd a sup of new milk and a quiet, decent corner where a man could sleep..." Through to the exultant battle-cry of Christy as he shakes the dust of the pub off his feet and strides off to the "romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the Judgment Day". In DEIRDRE the exuberant virility of PLAYBOY is appropriately muted, owing to the subdued nature of the age-old story of the ill-fated sons of Usneach linked as it is to Troy and Tristan and to the tale of Diarmuid and Grania as revised by Lady Gregory. There the language is quiet, dignified, studied and deliberate. Time was generously bestowed on the lovers in the woods of Etain, and there was no need to rush hasty sentences to each other while all the hours of the day were at their disposal. "... the time I've been stretched in the sunshine, when I've heard Ainnie and Ardan stepping lightly, and saying: 'Was there ever the like of Deirdre for a happy and a sleepy queen?'. The language of DEIRDRE is neither that of the Aran Islands nor of the Wicklow peasants, nor of the kings and courtiers who walk through its scenes, but a subtle blending of all, as if to prove the sharing of the one humanity that exists between king and pauper, courtier and woodcutter. Deirdre, the daughter of the king's story-teller, the poor child favoured all her life by a dotting king, can assume regality

in the face of tragedy and speak with all the power and commanding force of one born with "rare and royal name".

".... Draw a little back with the squabbling of fools when I am broken up with misery. I see the flames of Emain rising up in the dark night, and because of me there will be weasels and wildcats crying on a lonely wall where there were queens and armies and red gold the way there will be a story told of a ruined city and a raving king and a woman will be young for ever"

Fergus, the king's trusted messenger, can find no more noble form of speech than the girl reared by Lavercham and taught by the wild creatures of the woods: "Four white bodies are laid down together; four clear lights are quenched in Ireland. There is my sword that could not shield you - my four friends that were the dearest always...."

On Deirdre's lips the depth of her emotion raises her speech to poetic intensity, with Fergus there is the measured solemnity of a funeral dirge, which is exactly what he is saying.

Synge's achievement may also be seen in the manner in which Yeats abandoned his till then cherished designs for the writing of the perfect Irish literature, when convinced of the superior wisdom of Synge's ideal. Dramatic material was nearer home than Cuchulain's castle, much nearer earth than the peephole of a tower. Nor did one attain to this treasure chest by way of a winding stair; one merely followed Sidney's advice to "look in thy heart and write",

having first looked attentively at the people and places in one's immediate neighbourhood. Synge dealt with the harshness of present reality where Yeats would have selected the "shadowy waters" of past glory - and Yeats who was far superior to Synge as a poet, gracefully acknowledged the more perspicacious judgment of Synge as a playwright.

Although Synge's plays deal with the peasantry of a small, isolated country, yet each presents a universally experienced aspect of life and his dominant theme, the conflict of wish and fulfilment, is as widespread as the sky itself. This openness may have helped his acceptance overseas, particularly in America and England. As early as 1908 an American publisher, John Quinn, who had protected the American copyrights of *THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN*, *THE WELL OF THE SAINTS* and *THE PLAYBOY* by printing them privately, now asked Synge's consent to an American edition. *THE PLAYBOY* and *RIDERS TO THE SEA* continue to be the most popular, but *THE WELL OF THE SAINTS* was just recently been successfully produced in England, in the summer of 1970. Moreover, the inclusion of one or more of his plays in every modern anthology, is a testimony of the esteem in which his work is held.

Stephen MacKenna, one of Synge's few close friends once complained affectionately that he had written no deliberately self-revealing prose adding: "I am horribly

practical and I wish Shakespeare, after or between the plays, had written something in his own person - attacking life directly so that my creeping wit would know him better".¹ He urged him to write a book or some essays, in which the personality of the author of the PLAYBOY and the strange other plays would be revealed. Here he touched on a feature of Synge's temperament that had remained unchanged all the years - his shyness. He could not become a professional musician because he could not endure a solo performance; just as little could he exhibit his interior self now in deliberate prose essays or books. Occasionally his poems are so revealing that the reader feels guilty of peeping into a private room:

I know the songs of the shower.
Of thrush and pipit and wren,
All the passionate flower
Of anguish in morbid men.

Yet sweeter the sighs of your sighing
Three sighs half-sighed for me,
With lips that wrecked and derided
The depth of my ecstasy.

Or again when his poverty - although unnecessary as his patrimony was always at his disposal - made him little better than a beggar - or a tramp.

There's snow in every street
Where I go up and down,
And there's no woman, man or dog
That knows me in the town.

1. Greene & Stephens: Biography : Chap. XIV p.274

I know each shop, and all
 These Jews and Russian Poles,
 For I go walking night and noon
 To spare my sack of coals.

But this shyness found relief in the plays that were often more revealing than any straight confession could ever be. When Shawn Keogh cowers, timid and frightened of the Father Reilly figures in his life, one can see Synge hidden in the wings while out of his dramas into which so much of his deep and real self had been infused was being offered to an unsympathetic and uncomprehending audience. When the brilliant Christy conquers the whole population of the village unaided and till then misunderstood and unappreciated, is it vain speculation to see Synge's mind leaping the immediate years to the time when the thinking world would see there was more in his work than mere sardonic cynicism or deliberate affront to his own countrymen? As Naisi's love for the wilful and beautiful Deirdre plunges with him into the hole dug and waiting, perhaps Synge saw his love for Molly being similarly swallowed into his own premature grave. It is even possible that in Conchubor's despised longing for Deirdre there is an echo of the rebuffs he endured from Chouska, the Scherma, Miss Harding - youth's thoughtless cruelty, more thoughtless than cruel.

To the adverse criticism that his plays were unduly coarse contained in a letter from an unnamed friend of

John Quinn's he replied: "When he (the writer of the complaint) blames the "coarseness" however, I don't think he sees that the romantic note and a Rabelaisian note are working to a climax through a great part of the play, and that the Rabelaisian note, the "gross" note, if you will, must have its climax no matter who may be shocked". 1. The discussion was over THE PLAYBOY, the grumble not shared at all by the publisher, John Quinn, who was actually then requesting permission to do an American edition of the controversial piece. Synge's defence shows that he was an artist, not a moralist or parson. He stood outside his play to a certain extent, and watched it grow as a builder contemplates the erection of an edifice. If that edifice required flagstones, a buttress or a dome it was Synge's duty to provide each although the stones were dug into the soil, while the dome pointed softly to the sky. His preface to the POEMS contains his complete attitude to this question. Having proved that it is the "timber" of poetry that remains even when the pretty flower is withered, he continues in the same strain: "Even if we grant that exalted poetry can be kept successful by itself, the strong things of life are needed in poetry also, to show that what is exalted or tender, is not made by feeble blood. It may almost be said that before verse can be human again, it must learn to be brutal". Even so must

drama be "brutal", if necessary for the achievement of reality. Synge, therefore, led the way to a drama of unvarnished truth, just as Joyce did in prose, though with more delicacy than his inhibitionless countryman.

Synge was continually being accused of misrepresenting Irish life, yet he is at pains to prove that all his works derive from purely Irish sources, usually direct from the lips of narrators. In a broader sense, he actually defended Irish life and was almost fanatic in insisting on its being preserved from foreign influences, in the theatre, where his word would have weight. It was he who strenuously opposed the suggestion of Yeats and Miss Horniman that the Abbey should perform foreign masterpieces so excellently that they would thereby become famous. He stated his opinions very clearly in a letter to Lady Gregory and Yeats on this point:

"I think we should be mistaken in taking the continental municipal theatre as the pattern of what we wish to attain..... I think Yeats' view that it would be a good thing for Irish audiences, OUR audiences, or young writers is mistaken ... I would rather go on trying our own people for the years than bring in this ready-made style that is so likely to destroy the sort of distinction everyone recognises in our own company".¹ Obviously Synge admired the Irish actors, and had full confidence in their dramatic ability.

1. Greene & Stephens: Biograph. Chapter XII. P.229.

True, he viewed the Gaelic League with something that bordered on loathing. But paradoxical though it may sound, this disgust was based on intense concern for all that was truly Irish. His sensitive ear detected a falseness in the Gaelic that the League was promoting; he found it tainted with commercialism and tending to journalese. His reply to Stephen MacKenna when the latter said that the League aimed at leading the youth of the time back to the "grand old Saga of Irish literature" was more vehement than literary; "That's a bloody lie. Long after they know modern Irish, they will still be miles and miles from any power over the Saga". His anxiety that Irish tradition should not be misrepresented to the detriment of Ireland is evident.

The insults which Ireland deduced from his plays were not aimed at the population of that or any other period. The weaknesses he satirizes are known in every country - Egypt might well have denounced Shakespeare! - and Synge believed he had an Aristotelian right to create what he thought should be, trusting the audience to distinguish between statement of fact and illustrative fancy. As in most cases he could prove the truth of his descriptions, there was little need to shelter behind any dramatic criterion(?)

He gave the country what he considered it needed, even though it was not exactly what it wanted, and presented it with such a glory of imagination that only by a planned

search could insult or affront be unearthed. Indeed THE PLAYBOY is usually played as a rollicking comedy — only on examination and intensive analysis are the tragic elements revealed. Again, ofcourse, it is the magic of the speech that accomplishes this veiling of the harshness: Widow Quin holds out her irresistible baits to Christy: "I've nice jobs you could be doing — gathering shells to make a whitewash for our hut within, building up a little goose-house, or stretching a new skin on an old curagh I have, and if my hut is far from all sides, it's there you'll meet the wisest old men, I tell you, at the corner of my wheel...." With such lavishness of realistic poetry is the penury of her mind and the poverty of her house clearly imprinted on the reader's sensibility, while the writer stands far away in the back-ground, even as he stood in the wings "rolling innumerable cigarettes for the actors" during the performance of his tingling plays.

The year 1971 will be the first anniversary of the birth of J.M.Synge. The American University, Lebanon, has promised a commemorative study of his life and works in honour of the occasion, to be published in April of 1971. For those interested in Irish literature and theatre, the New Year holds at least one area of pleasant anticipation, in the expectation of this volume for in spite of all allegations to the contrary, the final words of the Greene and Stephens Biography are indisputably true:

"Whether he (J.M.Synge) was dramatizing a tragic fact, or incident of violence in contemporary Irish life, exploring the applications of ancient folk tale or heroic myth, or merely describing in unpretentious language the daily life of the tinker, the farmer or the fisherman, he was interpreting the traditional life of Ireland. It is to him more than to any other Irishman writing in English that we go for an insight into this life."

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

- COLLECTED WORKS: Parts I,II,III,IV.....O.U.P.
- SYNGE'S PLAYS, POEMS and PROSE : Selections.....Everyman's Lib.
- Synge and the Anglo-Irish DramaAlan Price
- John Millington SyngeD.Gerstenberger
- Plays and Poems of J.M.SyngeT.H.Henn
- J.M.Synge - BiographyGreene & Stephen
- J.M.SyngeDennis Johnston
- The Drama of Chekhov, Synge
Yeats and PirandelloF.L. Lucas
- "Riders" and "Playboy"Alan Price
- Letters to my DaughterRev. S. Synge
- The Irish Dramatic MovementUna E& Fernor
- J.M.Synge and The Irish TheatreM. Bourgeois
- The Irish WritersHerbert Howarth
- The Irish DramaA.E. Malone
- Hail and FarewellGeorge Moore
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- Article contributed to
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