

THE CREATION OF THE ROLE OF CHRISTY  
IN JOHN M. SYNGE'S THE PLAYBOY OF THE  
WESTERN WORLD, AND AN ANALYSIS  
OF THE ACTING PROBLEMS INVOLVED

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.  
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WORLD, AND AN ANALYSIS OF THE ACTING PROBLEMS INVOLVED

By

William Daniel Simpson

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To my wife--the inspiration of whose understanding sacrifice and unselfish assistance is contained within these pages; and to my parents--who instilled in me the value of education.





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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

There are two important considerations to be met when choosing a play as the basis for an Acting Thesis. The first of these is, does the play have sufficient literary merit to warrant the time and energy spent on it. The second consideration that arises is, does the major role offer a sufficient challenge for the actor.

In choosing John Millington Synge's drama, The Playboy of the Western World, as a thesis problem to be offered by the Department of Speech, Dramatics, and Radio Education at Michigan State College, and by this actor, both of these criteria were met. Ever since the play was first offered by the Abbey Theatre in 1907,<sup>1</sup> the critical and literary world has recognized the artistry and literary acumen of the author.<sup>2</sup> Although the play had a stormy career in its earlier years,<sup>3</sup> the drama has now become one of the recognized "greats" in the theatre,<sup>4</sup> and its frequent revivals in recent years bears out the regard with which the play is held by the professional as well as by the community

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1 Maurice Bourgeois, John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre (Constable and Company Ltd., London, 1913) p. 193

2 John Gassner, Masters of the Drama (New York: Dover Publications, 1945) p. 555

3 Bourgeois, Loc. cit.

4 Gassner, Loc. cit.

and educational theatres.<sup>5</sup>

The major challenge to the actor who assays the role of Christy Mahon lies in adapting that actor's talents to the characteristics provided by Synge in such a way that the audience will be willing to accept what could easily be an unpleasant personality. The part calls for the demonstration of a wide range of abilities; the use of Irish dialect with its sound changes and melodic patterns; the development of changes in temperment from seriousness to gaiety, from reserved shyness to boisterous bragging, the inclusion of action which is both romantic and imaginative as well as brutal. Consequently, the choice of the play provides an ample test for the capabilities of any actor interested in playing the character.

The plan of this project was twofold. Section one involved the actual creating of the role for a public performance in the Studio Theater of Michigan State College. The play was done under the direction of Mr. John Jennings with a cast chosen from students in the Department. The four night run of the production gave an opportunity for the actor playing Christy to watch for audience reaction and to care for the growth of the character.

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel Blum, Theatre World (New York: Greenburg, Publisher, 1949) p. 206



Section two contained an analysis of the acting problems encountered. This portion provides a more careful consideration of the background material necessary in creating a role, a discussion of rehearsal problems, the script with all directions, and the general summary of the solving of the more important acting problems. The thesis will be organized as follows:

Chapter I. Introduction.

Chapter II. Synge, the Author, and His Influences.

Chapter III. The Western World of Ireland.

Chapter IV. The Acting Script.

Chapter V. The Actor's Analysis of the Play.

Chapter VI. The Acting Problems.

Chapter VII. Summary.

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## CHAPTER II

### SYNGE, THE AUTHOR, AND HIS INFLUENCES

In attempting to do an adequate job in the creation of the role of Christy in The Playboy of the Western World, this actor found that an examination of many areas outside of the play itself was first necessary. The information which was desired included material about the author's life, and the influences which have affected him. The reason for acquiring this type of information can be attributed to a psychological law which states that a person organizing a previously unorganized field tends to inject his own personality into his creation.<sup>1</sup> If writing a play may be considered as the organization of a previously unorganized field, the law just mentioned infers that the play contains the personality of its author. This does not mean to imply that an author reveals all of his personality in all of his plays, or that this projection is always noticeable. Rather, various aspects of an author may be seen in a series of plays, the portion of the personality seen depending on the subject treated in the play. The obviousness of this expression depends upon the strength of the factors in the author's personality. As will be shown later, John Synge's personality

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<sup>1</sup> Robert White, *The Abnormal Personality* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1948), p. 181



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was subjected to very definite influences, and in The Playboy of the Western World, he created a different kind of a play. Therefore, this author felt that a knowledge of the forces which were important in Synge's development as an author would give him a better understanding of the play, and the character of Christy. For that reason, the following sections of this chapter will be devoted to a discussion of that topic.

John Synge was born April 16, 1871 at Newton Little near Rathfarnham, a village in the outer suburbs of Dublin.<sup>2</sup> Since his family was Protestant, Synge was raised in that faith.<sup>3</sup> A well educated man, Synge was always in delicate health, a fact which required him to undergo surgery several times.<sup>4</sup> Synge traveled widely, spending extended periods of time in Germany, France, and the Aran Islands. The experience of this latter visit were communicated in his book, The Aran Islands.<sup>5</sup> While visiting in France, Synge decided to become a writer, and during his remaining years wrote six plays,

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Corkery, Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature (Cork and Dublin: Cork University Press, 1931), p. 29

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 30

<sup>4</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Maurice Bourgeois, John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1913) pp. 15-25

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the titles of which in the order of their creation are, In the Shadow of the Glen, Riders to the Sea, The Tinker's Wedding, The Well of the Saints, The Playboy of the Western World, and Deirdre of the Sorrows.<sup>6</sup> While Synge was working on Deirdre of the Sorrows, he was confined to the Elpis private hospital suffering from a malignant cancer. When death came to him on March 29, 1904 he had not completed writing and revising his last play.<sup>7</sup>

In order to consider the influences which made themselves felt in Synge's life, the discussion will be presented in terms of (1) influences resulting from his education and (2) influences resulting from his travel.

#### INFLUENCES DUE TO EDUCATION

One of the earliest and most formative influences which a man feels is the influence afforded by the school.<sup>8</sup> Corkery states that although Synge attended several schools, his poor health forced him to do much of his preparation for college at home.<sup>9</sup> However, in 1888 Synge's efforts were

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6 Ibid., p. 144

7 Ibid., p. 212

8 C.M. Fleming, The Social Psychology of Education (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 55

9 Corkery, op. cit., p. 68

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rewarded by his admission to Trinity College as a pensioner.<sup>10</sup> According to Bourgeois, he studied hard in college, and developed a variety of interests.<sup>11</sup> One of his chief interests, Natural History, however, was not developed in the school. The solitary rambles in the Dublin mountains which Synge frequently took were responsible for stimulating his curiosity and love for nature.<sup>12</sup> During these hikes he found an abundance of wild life and flora which, according to Corkery, "fascinated, delighted, and inspired him."<sup>13</sup> Possibly this love of Nature was responsible for the mention of "cows breathing and sighing in the night air," and "stony, scattered fields, and scribes of bog", which he described in the play under consideration.

At college Synge also became interested in music, and his aptitude for it is shown in the fact that he taught himself the flute, at the same time becoming an expert on piano and violin.<sup>14</sup> Bourgeois concludes that this interest and training in music had a favorable influence on Synge's

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10 Bourgeois, op. cit., p. 11

11 Loc. cit.

12 Corkery, op. cit., p. 25

13 Ibid., p. 33

14 Ibid., p. 29

abilities, both as a playwright, and a stylist.<sup>15</sup> The possibility of the influence of music on Synge's writing was strongly impressed upon this author in his creation of the role of Christy. First, the musical lilt and rhythm of the poet's lines made an Irish accent appear clearly. Second, the memorization of the lines had to be verbatim, because any improvisation was usually detrimental to the melody of the speech.

Synge also had a natural capacity for languages, as is evidenced by the prizes he won in Hebrew and Gaelic.<sup>16</sup> A knowledge of the latter idiom was valuable to Synge during his travels in the Aran Islands, an adventure which provided him with much of the language in his plays. Malone goes so far as to say that it was in these islands that Synge encountered and captured that rhythmic speech for which his plays later became so famous.<sup>17</sup> Some critics further trace his "biblical grandeur and simplicity of style" to his knowledge of Hebrew.<sup>18</sup>

Synge had a great love of the picturesque and highly

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15 Bourgeois, op. cit., p. 11

16 Loc. cit.

17 Andrew Malone, The Irish Drama (London: Constable and Company, 1929) p. 148

18 Jack Butler Yeats, Synge and the Ireland of His Time (Churchtown, Dundrum: The Guala Press, 1911) p. 35



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colored language used in his country, which as already mentioned included the idiomatic expression of these people of the Aran Islands. Synge was not too interested in the social propriety of these phrases, and he adopted the same attitude about his own language.<sup>19</sup> Hone says that Synge swore frequently, often shocking his friends.<sup>20</sup> This is exemplified by his first words which Synge uttered after coming out of an operation; "May God damn the English, they can't even swear without vulgarity." In Synge's defense, Mr. Hone points out that the poet really disliked vulgarity; he used profanity only because of its picturesqueness and descriptiveness.<sup>21</sup>

#### INFLUENCES DUE TO TRAVEL

The original impetus to travel was supplied by Synge's love of music. Desiring formal training in that field, he went to Germany to study. However, he did take time frequently to visit the Ludwig Anzeengrubber Theatre where many of the plays of Gerhardt Hauptmann were presented.<sup>22</sup> These visits to the theatre afforded Synge the greatest single inspiration of his trip to Germany. Bourgeois does not make

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19 Joseph Hone, W.B. Yeats (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1943) p. 235

20 Loc. cit.

21 Loc. cit.

22 Bourgeois, op. cit., p. 15

clear whether or not Synge was directly influenced by the Naturalism of Hauptmann's plays, but he does say that Synge's "fine sense of constructive technique" was probably effected by the "pleasant theatre of Ludwig Anzengrubber with its rural dialect, quaint imagery and loosely-knit intrigues."<sup>23</sup> This fact coincides with the material already presented concerning Synge's inclusion of the imaginative expressions of the Irish peasantry. Both the "rural dialect" and "quaint imagery" are seen in Act II of The Playboy of the Western World when Mahon describes the sight of "ten scarlet devils letting on they'd locked my spirit in a gallon can", and "rats as big as badgers sucking the life blood from the butt of my lug.

While living in France, Synge is reported to have visited many of the cafes, concerts and theatres.<sup>24</sup> Notre Dame and the art galleries were also sources of inspiration for Synge.<sup>25</sup> According to Bourgeois, he went there often to "drink in" their beauty, and to absorb the culture which they reflected.<sup>26</sup> Corkery says that Synge was a very emotional man who would often just sit and allow his spirit to be satiated with the beauty of his surroundings.<sup>27</sup> During

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 17

<sup>24</sup> Malone, op. cit., p. 62

<sup>25</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>26</sup> Loc. cit.

his stay in France, Synge also acquired a great liking for French literature. He read especially Medieval farces, which, according to Bourgeois may have been an influence in forming his own "bitter-sweet humor".<sup>28</sup> Synge also became interested in Seventeenth Century French writers, a fact revealed in the construction of his plays. Bourgeois felt that the influence of these plays is possibly seen in terms of Synge's compactness and finish of style.<sup>29</sup> A study of the script of The Playboy of the Western World will verify this "compactness". First, there are relatively few characters, six men, two women, and some village girls who are more or less characterized as a group. Second, the time lapse occurring within the play requires only one complete day. The plot itself is simple, and does not contain subplots. The story revolves around Christy Mahon as the central character, and with what happens to him. From this factor may be seen that Synge's travels in Europe did influence his work to better express Irish life so that his peasant characters are transported from their dreary environments, and elevated into a kind of universal and timeless dream world of fantasy. To this author, this makes them appear pleasantly representative

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<sup>28</sup> Bourgeois, op. cit., p. 53

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 54



of human nature everywhere.

Even though Synge felt continental influences, only the exterior or outward form of his writing was moulded by them. The inner matter which makes his plays evoke such a great warmth found its basis in Ireland.<sup>30</sup> Hence, the discussion will now turn to the period after his return to Ireland, in which a discussion of the man as a dramatist with specific references to The Playboy of the Western World will be presented.

#### SYNGE AS A DRAMATIST

After his return home, Synge met Lady Gregory. With her and W.B. Yeats, the man who had previously encouraged him to go to the Aran Islands and study its people,<sup>31</sup> Synge did much work in the Abbey Theatre which opened its doors on December 27, 1904.<sup>32</sup> Synge was one of that theatre's first producers and directors, and contributed towards its success. In his work he was a slow and painstaking laborer, often spending months at one sentence working for the same balance as the previous one.<sup>33</sup> In the light of Synge's fondness for picturesque language, his careful choice of adjectives was

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30 Ibid., p. 64

31 Malone, loc. cit.

32 Bourgeois, op. cit., p. 63

33 Loc. cit.

also understandable.<sup>34</sup> For these reasons, Synge was a very careful producer and before he allowed a production to be viewed, he was sure of all the effects, and that each word that he had written would be spoken as he had directed.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, this actor feels that the knowledge of the preceding facts made him more exacting in not only his oral interpretation of The Playboy of the Western World, but in all aspects of the play as well.

As a playwright, Synge was primarily a poet, and his pressing interest and study of languages was to show itself in his works.<sup>36</sup> The heartiness and imagery which have made his plays works of Art are evoked by the colloquial speech which he uses.<sup>37</sup> This author found that the language contained delicate combinations of fierce wildness, ecstatic passion, tender melancholy, and delightful humor. Therefore, one of the main goals in the interpretation of the role of Christy was to reveal these qualities through his speech. In the preface to The Playboy of the Western World Synge defends his use of "rich and copious" language. He writes,

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<sup>34</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 64

<sup>36</sup> Corkery, op. cit., p. 65

<sup>37</sup> Loc. cit.





"In countries where the imagination of the people and the language they use is rich and living, it is possible for a writer to be rich and copious in his words, and at the same time to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form."

Because there is hardly a word, phrase, or paragraph which does not reflect Synge's writing skill, the selection of a single example from The Playboy of the Western World to illustrate his manipulation of words is difficult. However, one of the speeches will be examined. When Christy's father reappeared in Act II, the boy became violently angry because the gallant story of his father-slaying was now disproved. As Old Mahon left, the Widow Quin reproached Christy for the way a man's "one son" had described his father. To this Christy replied, "His one son is it? May I meet him with one tooth and its aching, and one eye to be seeing seven and seventy devils in the twists of the road, and an old timber leg on him to go limping into the scalding grave." Here is language which not only expresses Christy's hatred for his father, but also exhibits Synge's skill in writing poetically rhythmic lines.

Turning from Synge's use of language to his use of realism in the theatre, John Gassner says that Synge himself

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wrote, "On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy."<sup>38</sup> The difference between Ibsen and Synge is epitomized in the last part of that quotation, "one must have joy." At the turn of the Twentieth Century in Ireland, poverty, parochialism, and political stagnation were pressing realities. However, according to Synge, the spirit of this corruption and unrest must be presented on the stage in such a manner as to evoke laughter rather than tears. Synge practised what he preached. As one critic points out, he transformed this Irish morbidness and sordidness into a thing of rare delicacy and beauty on the stage.<sup>39</sup> In his own writings, Synge expresses his feelings that Ibsen and Zola portrayed Realism in "joyless and pallid words."<sup>40</sup> That four word quotation emphasises Synge's idea that play situations should be vividly written in words which are just as alive as the actors who speak them.

An attempt has been made thus far to keep clear the distinction between writing about morbid events, and writing a morbid play. The impression should not be conveyed that Synge opposed writing on the subjects of doubtful social

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<sup>38</sup> John Gassner, Masters of the Drama (New York: Dover Publications, 1945) p. 553

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 554

<sup>40</sup> Malone, op. cit. p. 155

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acceptability or desirability. On the contrary, he seems to have delighted in choosing subjects of a rather delicate social nature, and presenting them in a completely charming fashion. Malone reveals that because of his own physical limitations, Synge liked things which were "fiery and magnificent".<sup>41</sup> The very word "fiery" or a suggestion of it is found in several instances in The Playboy of the Western World. For example, in Act I, Pegeen tells Christy that she has heard tales of men like him; men who were "fine, fiery fellows with great rages when their temper's roused." Again, in Act II, the Widow Quin describes how she often sits in front of her house watching the ships on the sea, and "thinking of the fine, hairy fellows is sailing them."

Bourgeois makes a comment about this question of morbidity. His observation was that there seems to be a general morbidity, or sordidness in one respect or another in most of Synge's plays.<sup>42</sup> In many of his dramas, Synge uses moral freaks or pathological persons of some sort as his characters. That is obvious in the play under consideration which concerns a young man believed to be a parricide. Even though Christy has not really killed his father, this fact

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<sup>41</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>42</sup> Bourgeois, op. cit.



was not brought out until the middle of Act II. Up to that time the audience was under the impression that they were watching a murderer. This makes his welcome and the praise of the bored townspeople somewhat surprising. Christy's supposed crime was grim and, if taken seriously, would leave a bad taste in the mouth of any audience. But although these characters may lack morals, scruples, and sincerity, they are made funny, even hilarious by Synge's skilled pen. Again, as an example, examine the Widow Quin. Act I disclosed that she has "Buried her children and destroyed her man", deeds of the most sordid type. However, the scene in which this line appeared was humorous in itself. When Pegeen asserted that the act was done by hitting the man "with a worn pick, and the rusted poison did corrode his blood the way he never overed it and died after," The audience forgot a world of grim reality, and turned to one of amusing fantasy. In the elaborate descriptions throughout the play. of his act of murder, Christy actually was on the verge of psychopathy and paranoia. However, in the context of the play, Christy becomes a hero instead of a homicidal maniac.

A summarization of the foregoing facts indicated to this author that Synge revelled in things that were pungent and savage. Bourgeois is of the opinion that this was due to a personal factor rather than any literary

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influences.<sup>43</sup> As was mentioned, Synge had delicate health and his physical life was restrained to what it might have been had he been more robust. That he was able to take his extended hikes was surprising.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, Bourgeois concludes that Synge's own incapacibilities as well as a slight bitterness made him reach for and portray those things that were "fiery and magnificent."<sup>45</sup>

Synge was a sensitive and emotional man.<sup>46</sup> This sensitivity made him acutely aware of the world around him and his thirst for knowledge made him go out of his way to study it. This is evidenced by his trips to Europe and the Aran Islands.<sup>47</sup> Synge knew of the deadly famine, heartless evictions, and corrupt politics which plagued Ireland. These things are mentioned in his plays, and they had their effect on making Synge's hand write in an unsavory vein.<sup>48</sup> According to Yeats, Synge's genius did not rise above its previous pessimism until he had been to the Blaskets and Innisman, portions of the Aran Islands where

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<sup>43</sup> Bourgeois, op. cit., p. 62

<sup>44</sup> Malone, op. cit., p. 62

<sup>45</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>46</sup> Corkery, op. cit., p. 62

<sup>47</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>48</sup> Yeats, op. cit., p. 18

there were no extremes in wealth and poverty nor corresponding social inequalities.<sup>49</sup> This transition may possibly be explained by Hone's observation that Synge had an almost instinctive ability to isolate himself from the contagious opinions of poorer minds, or from prevailing undesirable attitudes.<sup>50</sup> By the same token, he was able to absorb fresher and more enlightened ideas. Consequently, when Synge went to the Aran Islands, he caught the charm and simplicity of their people, and included that in his plays.<sup>51</sup> Even though Synge gathered so heavily and unerringly from the Aran people, previous discussion did not mean to imply that Synge was a social playwright. Yeats found Synge incapable of political thought, showing no interest in "men in the mass", or "any subject which is studied in abstractions or statistics".<sup>52</sup> Bourgeois states that Synge did not believe in plays with a message or social problem as did Ibsen; he was not interested in reforming any thing.<sup>53</sup> Aware of Synge's lack of social consciousness, this actor spent little time searching the play for a social message.

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49 Loc. cit.

50 Hone, op. cit., p. 244

51 Loc. cit.

52 Yeats, op. cit., p. 11

53 Ibid., P. 67

Synge objected violently to the opinion that only problem plays were serious plays. His artistic creed may be stated something like this; one must create a work of Art which is stimulating to the imagination; it must be the kind of a work to which audiences will go in anticipation of a joyous and exciting adventure.<sup>54</sup> This is not the kind of excitement aroused by the sight of a series of thrillingly boisterous events, but rather the emotional and intellectual stimulation received by seeing a creation which approaches perfection. Then, in order to give the exhilaration, the work must deal with the profound and common interests in life, thus rooting the play in reality.<sup>55</sup> In connection with "the profound and common interests", Synge specifically objected to the divorce of poetry from the ordinary life of men and women, an objection which caused this actor to pay special attention to the poetry which Synge has written into the lines of The Playboy of the Western World.

While working with the attitudes and interests of the people of Ireland, Synge had ideas about their description. He was a realist, and insisted on an authentic representation of the people, language, and country of which he was writing.<sup>56</sup>

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54 Corkery, op. cit., p. 68

55 Ibid., p. 67

56 Gassner, loc. cit.

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That the word "authentic" rather than "exact" was used in the description of Synge's writing should be noticed. This means that he might exaggerate or concentrate on certain aspects of a people, their language, or their country, but he used only authentic material. Whereas many other authors were prone to color their accounts of nature with their own particular conceptions or ideas, this was not true of Synge.<sup>57</sup> He tried his best to be at one with the people he was studying, and to be absorbed in their fashion of living. As a result, he was sincere in his depictions.<sup>58</sup> In The Playboy of the Western World he protested against Edward Martyn's dramatic visions of the Irish countryside.<sup>59</sup> That is, his objections were made by using the same general theme that Martyn used, but by developing it in the form of a joyously imaginative play rather than a conscientiously social one.<sup>60</sup> He rarely described the scenery for its own sake. Nearly all of his descriptions of Wicklow aim to give the feeling of "the shadow of the glen", or a sense of the "oppression of the hills".<sup>61</sup> This author is of the opinion

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57 Bourgeois, op. cit., p. 81

58 Loc. cit.

59 Corkery, op. cit., p. 68

60 Loc. cit.

61 Bourgeois, op. cit., p. 92

that Synge knew Nature so well that he could predict the predominant mood extended by a certain location or scene. The preceding facts stimulated this actor to try to create as authentically as possible an Irish peasant reacting in the situation which Synge provided.

Only to read a few of Synge's plays is to realize that he was a humorist. He himself wrote, "Of the things which nourish imagination, humor is one of the most needful, and it is dangerous to limit or destroy it."<sup>62</sup> He felt that this humor was not composed of an artificial elation, such as was experienced in musical comedy. He contended that it could only be maintained if a touch is kept with the very homely, earthly things in life. The common and even brutal actualities must serve as the basis for the writing, and the dramatic or poetic elements must be used to temper and mould these things to their desired levels.<sup>63</sup> Maxim Gorki expressed this idea when he wrote of The Playboy of the Western World, "the comical side passes quite naturally into the terrible, while the terrible becomes comical just as easily."<sup>64</sup>

This chapter has been written for the purpose of

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62 Malone, op. cit., p. 153

63 Bourgeois, op. cit., p. 138

64 Gassner, op. cit., p. 555



presenting the material which this actor felt was of importance concerning the influences felt in Synge's life, namely the result of his travels. The specific results of these influences include Synge's use of rhythmic language, his compactness of style, rural dialect, quaint imagery and humor.





### CHAPTER III

#### THE WESTERN WORLD OF IRELAND

After consideration of John Synge, his life and influences, the actor would be wise to study the country and the people pictured by the author. In this chapter the western coast of Ireland as well as the Aran Islands will be discussed, because Synge presented some of the peculiarities of both these places in The Playboy of the Western World. The "Western World" portion of the title according to Bourgeois was the Atlantic coast of Ireland, as distinguished from the Dublin side, the Eastern World.<sup>1</sup> The people of this portion of Ireland looked upon anyone beyond their immediate vicinity as belonging to the unknown "big world". A term used when Michael James remarked, "I hear tell in the big world it's bloody knives they use. Corkery points out further that the story which was used in the creation of the play was given to Synge during his travels in the Aran Islands.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, this author is of the opinion that Synge borrowed both from the Aran Islanders, and from the people on the west coast of Ireland, incorporating what he learned in the

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Bourgeois, John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1929), p. 194

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Corkery, Synge and the Anglo-Irish Literature (Cork and Dublin: Cork University Press, 1931, p. 191

creation of representative rather than actual characters.

The word "playboy" originally meant hoaxter, humbugger, or one who shammed things.<sup>3</sup> However, Mayden and Hartog, state that Synge meant the term as one who entertained or one who played like a player; that is, a comedian, or an athlete or champion.<sup>4</sup> This statement would tend to be verified by the comic nature and physical prowess of the character of Christy.

#### THE COUNTRYSIDE OF IRELAND

Certain names mentioned in The Playboy of the Western World tend to indicate the area in which the story took place. In Act II the Widow Quin stated the location of the play as being in Mayo County when she said, "It'd be a great pity to have your like sailing from Mayo". Also in Act II, Shawn offered to secure a piper from as far away as Ballina or Crossmilina, two towns in the northeastern portion of Mayo County. In Act I Michael asked, "Would you have me send the bellman screaming in the streets of Castlebar?", Castlebar being a town located a short distance from the shore of Clew Bay. The Widow referred to another small town around the Clew Bay when she called Shawn, "Shawn Keogh of Killakeen."

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<sup>3</sup> Bourgeois, op. cit. p. 193

<sup>4</sup> Loc. cit.

All through the play mention was made of the fact that the villages were located close to the sea. With this information in mind, this actor assumed that Michael's inn was located around the Clew Bay area. Therefore, the countryside of that vicinity was studied.

Creed described the Clew Bay as being in the shape of a natural amphitheatre bordered on the south by the mountainous Croagh Patrick whose misty peaks can be seen from North Mayo, and on the north by Nephin Beg, and the extremely high cliffs of Achill.<sup>5</sup> Freeman says that the coast line of all of Mayo varies greatly, displaying many long, winding channels, peat bogs, steep cliffs, shifting sand dunes, and a few woodlands.<sup>6</sup>

A short distance from the immediate shoreline in north Mayo an area known as "Dark Mayo" begins. As the name implies, the location is an expanse of "endless, lifeless, silent plain" dotted with moors and hills.<sup>7</sup> Freeman described this area as "over 400 square miles of uninterrupted bog, treeless, trackless, and extremely isolated" in which the

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5 Virginia Creed, All About Ireland (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1951) p. 182

6 T.W. Freeman, Ireland New York: E.P. Dutton and Company Inc., 1950) p. 427

7 Creed, op. cit.; p. 178

major vegetation is Blanket bog.<sup>8</sup>

Slightly to the south of "Dark Mayo" in an area located almost directly east of Clew Bay, the inland territory is also covered with bogs, marshes, and lakes.<sup>9</sup> Here are found glacial formed valleys with scattered woodlands.<sup>10</sup> Many species of grassy vegetation known as "heath" grow throughout these woodlands, the type called "Mediterranean heath" being the most prevalent around the scene of the play.<sup>11</sup>

#### VILLAGES

Physical Conditions. According to Tynan, there is no uglier place than a village or town in Mayo County, where the houses have the appearance of temporary shacks.<sup>12</sup> This is due to the present lack of the civic feeling that once made the medieval towns so beautiful.<sup>13</sup> Colum's description of one of these small towns mentions only a single street on which were located two churches, a few similar looking houses, and several public houses or inn.<sup>14</sup> Lynd

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8 Freeman, op. cit., p. 429

9 Loc. cit.

10 Loc. cit.

11 Loc. cit.

12 Katherine Tynan, The Years of the Shadow (New York: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1919), p. 161

13 Loc. cit.

14 Padraic Colum, The Road Round Ireland (New York: Mac Millan Company, 1926), p. 426



says that most of the smaller towns or villages are market towns, consisting largely of churches, draper's shops, public houses, a hotel or two, a post office, and a police barracks.<sup>15</sup>

Michael's "shebeen", a term which Synge defined as a public house or inn, was located on the top of a hill close to the sea. This fact was verified by the description of "the rocky crags below", and by the observation of the racing on the nearby seashore in Act III. Evidently, the inn was about four miles from a village because Pegeen remarked that the distance traveled by the girls was four miles "by the road", and because Michael remarked, "not another public house within four miles..." Thus, the shebeen seemed to be surrounded only by the dwellings of Jimmy, Philly, and Widow Quin and Shawn.

The Organization of the Town. The general management of these small western towns in Ireland seemed to be in the hands of many "minor officials" who belonged to the Congested Districts Board. There were so many of these officials that special industries such as golf-caddying, and lodging-house keeping had to be set up to keep them busy.<sup>16</sup> These

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Lynd, Home Life In Ireland (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1910), p. 189

<sup>16</sup> George A. Birmingham, Irishmen All (New York: Fredrick A. Stokes Company, 1913), p. 22

people collected taxes, registered decisions in the courts of law, filled lists of unemployed workmen, and worked at a number of other dull, but essential jobs.<sup>17</sup> They were, of course, responsible to the higher officials, men who, according to Birmingham, were mysteriously inconspicuous.<sup>18</sup>

On the ordinary week day, the Irish town was almost deserted.<sup>19</sup> The men and women who were not out working in the fields or tending their shops stood idly around, an activity which encouraged poverty and corruption.<sup>20</sup> Evidence of this corruption was seen even in the high offices, in the sale of public offices, and election bribery.<sup>21</sup>

Poverty was best illustrated on Friday afternoons when the old age pensions were being paid out by the post office. The old men and women thronged the streets until the towns looked as though no one under eighty inhabited them.<sup>22</sup>

Because some people in Ireland worked in the fields or in their businesses, while others did nothing, there were

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17 Ibid., p. 5

18 Loc. cit.

19 Lynd, op. cit.;, p. 190

20 Loc. cit.

21 Loc. cit.

22 Loc. cit.



different economic classes within the communities. However, there were no corresponding social castes. The children of the rich and poor played together, and the master and servant shared in conversation.<sup>23</sup> Sullivan reveals that the people were held in high esteem in the countryside not because of wealth or power, but rather because of ability or personality.<sup>24</sup> This observation is reflected in a situation in The Playboy of the Western World. Even though Shawn Keogh was the richest of all the characters in the play, he was the least popular. Christy, on the other hand, had no earthly possessions, but was looked up to because of his personal characteristics.

Law and Order. The task of controlling fell to the "peelers"<sup>25</sup> or the Irish police. Whereas the police of other countries seem to enforce a law merely because it is a law, the Irish policeman of 1907, was apparently more philosophic, thinking of the greatest good for the greatest number.<sup>26</sup> Realizing that no law was applicable all of the time, the Irish policeman took all aspects of a situation into con-

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 280

<sup>24</sup> A.M. Sullivan, Old Ireland (New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Company, Inc., 1928), p. 16

<sup>25</sup> W. Little, The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary Vol. II, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933) p. 1454

<sup>26</sup> Birmingham, op. cit., pp. 40-54



sideration before making legal recommendations.

Birmingham asserts that courtesy was also one of the virtues of most Irish policemen. This courtesy was extended to all, even those who voiced doubts about the skill or conscientiousness of the Royal Irish Constabulary. Furthermore, persons could usually feel free to make the bitterest complaints in this direction without fear of police retaliation in a future situation.

Birmingham further emphasizes their admirable qualities of understanding and kindness, by citing the case of the police who go to great ends to keep from arresting a drunkard, themselves aware of the pleasures men found in drinking. He pointed out too that realizing the love which boys have for stealing apples, the police flatly refused to try to enforce the law which forbids that activity. This attitude was echoed by Michael James in Act I of The Play boy of the Western World when he said, "The peelers in this place is decent, draughty fellows wouldn't touch a cur dog in the dead of night and not give warning." However, there were times during the play when Synge placed the police in a ridiculous light. For example, Pegeen described a situation in which Jimmy Farrel hung his dog, and had it "wriggling and screeching three hours at the butt end of a rope, and he swearing it was a dead dog, and the peelers swearing it had life." Bourgeois feels that these derogatory

references are the result of an unpleasant experience Synge had with the police in which he accidentally received a clout on the head.<sup>27</sup>

The Place of Religion. Since the year 1871, there has been no State Church in Ireland.<sup>28</sup> However, about seventy-four percent of the population belongs to the Roman Catholic Church, the remainder being Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Methodist.<sup>29</sup>

According to Lynd, Irish religion "is an essential part of the life of the house every day of the week."<sup>30</sup> All Catholic homes displayed the crucifix in a conspicuous place, and the Protestant homes had their Bibles.<sup>31</sup> In both Catholic and Protestant homes, family prayer hours consisting of psalm-reading, singing, and praying were held.<sup>32</sup>

However, Lynd feels that there was an over emphasis on the penal side of religion.<sup>33</sup> An examination of the script of The Playboy of the Western World revealed

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27 Bourgeois, op. cit., p. 25

28 "The Story of Ireland", the World Book Encyclopedia IX, 3517-31

29 Loc. cit.

30 Lynd, op. cit., p. 216

31 Loc. cit.

32 Ibid., p. 217

33 Loc. cit.



religious references in which the more frightening aspects of the faith were pointed out. For example, Jimmy described the place reserved for sinners where they could expect to encounter "a foxy divil with a pitchpike on the flags of hell". Also, in an attempt to enlist the pity of the villagers, Christy described the terror of facing "hell's gap gaping below".

The existence of the rivalry between the Catholic and Protestant faiths was also shown. The Protestants had a reputation for trying to convert the Catholics to the Protestant religion, pointing out the virtues of the latter.<sup>34</sup> In Act I of The Playboy of the Western World, Jimmy Farrell appeared to be scorning the Protestants when he remarked, "Did you marry three wives maybe? I'm told a sprinkling have done that among the holy Luthers of the preaching north." Again, Jimmy appeared to be caustic when he described Christy's arrival more exciting than "the holy missionaries making sermons on the villainy of man."

The Priests. Father Reilly, the priest was frequently mentioned in this script. According to Lynd, the attitude of the Irishman toward the priest was likely to be a combination of satirization and idealization.<sup>35</sup> One of the most

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<sup>34</sup> Lynd, op. cit., p. 221

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 124

frequently satirized characteristics was his thriftiness, especially of his fees for marriages. However, even though many people believed that the priest would not perform the ceremony unless the groom could pay a large sum, poor people were often not only married free of charge, but also had their rings furnished by the priest.<sup>36</sup> After their love of money, the fault most often condemned the priests' love of power. Lynd feels, however, that the priest loved power no more than any other clergyman either Catholic or Protestant, and that the power which they had was not abused.<sup>37</sup> Colum points out that even though the priest had tremendous powers the people were not reduced to servility.<sup>38</sup> At any rate, the fear of the power of the clergy explained Shawn's hesitation at spending the night at the inn with Pegeen before they were married.

Marriage. In The Playboy of the Western World, mention was made of the approaching marriage of Pegeen and Shawn, a marriage presumably arranged and sanctioned by Michael James. At the time that this play was written, match-making was practised in Ireland, but the young people

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 126

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 135

<sup>38</sup> Colum, op. cit., p. 31

were beginning to revolt against it.<sup>39</sup> Although the opinion may prevail that girls were forced to marry in accordance with their father's wishes, Lynd states that Irish girls were "not forced into marriage against their will very often", and even though they might not have been at liberty to choose their own husbands, they could refuse the father's choice.<sup>40</sup> Thus in order to make a happy arrangement for the daughter, the affectionate father made his selection according to his daughter's desires.<sup>41</sup>

The latter attitude towards marriage was illustrated for though Michael James wanted Pegeen to marry Shawn instead of Christy whom he considered a "louty schemer" and a "little frisky rascal", his objections to the choice of the "Playboy" were overcome by Pegeen's determination.

Frequent reference was made in the play to the "banns", and the "holy dispensation". The custom of the banns was explained by Canon Law as a protective device. Since marriage was a sacrament, persons desiring to partake of that sacrament had to be proven worthy. Therefore, banns were posted, a procedure involving the publication of the

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39 Ibid., p. 41

40 Ibid., p. 44

41 Loc. cit.





names of both parties wishing to be married. This was done on three successive Sundays before the ceremony was to occur, thus giving time for any person knowing a reason why the two should not be wedded, to fulfill his duty and report it.<sup>42</sup>

A dispensation was the granting of an exception to the rules. If the bishop could be given a valid reason why the three week waiting period could not be observed, he might grant dispensation to disregard the rule and the people could be married at once.<sup>43</sup> The reason for the dispensation was not given in the play. Perhaps Michael James did not wish to wait for three weeks and risk losing a profitable son-in-law like the wealthy Shawn. If Shawn had asked for the dispensation, perhaps he wanted to get married quickly before losing a prize like Pegeen.

Death. In the more isolated corners of the west portion of Ireland, the death of an individual was observed by the old Catholic custom of holding a "wake". The religious connection with wakes was a negative one since the Church regarded them as relics of paganism, and it advised the relatives of the deceased to send the body to the

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<sup>42</sup> Codex Juris Canonici, (P.J. Kennedy and Son: New York, 1910)

<sup>43</sup> Catholic Encyclopedia, VIII, 147



chapel to await burial.<sup>44</sup>

Morton gives the following account of a wake which he attended. A young person had died and the entire village discontinued work until after the funeral. The people took turns watching over the body for two days and two nights. As the people entered the house containing the body, they knelt making the sign of the cross, then arose, shook hands with the nearest of kin, and received their clay pipes filled with tobacco. All the villagers merely sat on benches along the wall smoking and silently contemplating the corpse. After a considerable length of time, the people left. The entire scene was one of silence broken only by occasional whispers, rather than one of dancing and drinking. The absence of these activities in this case was due primarily to the fact that the dead person was young. Had his age been more advanced, there would have been no cause for sadness, and the scene would have been much gayer.<sup>45</sup>

According to Synge's own description, the wakes were occasions for wild grief, despair, and poteen drinking by all.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> H.U. Morton, In Search of Ireland (Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1946), p. 272

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 273-278

<sup>46</sup> John M. Synge, The Aran Islands (Boston: John W. Luce and Company, 1911) p. 66

A knowledge of other types of wakes gave the author a broader basis for understanding the custom. Waking ceremonies were held for those who were emigrating from Ireland and leaving their elders behind.<sup>47</sup> The ceremony was also held for the people who had been converted from the Catholic to the Protestant religion. Since the act was not forgiven, the converts were waked just as though they had died.<sup>48</sup>

The Villagers. Practically all the references consulted described the Irish peasantry in similar terms. Sullivan says that the Irish were noted for their kindness, courtesy, hospitality, and joy of life.<sup>49</sup> Bourgeois described the Western Seaboard Celt as the people in whom Synge found the qualities of "dreaminess, imaginative exhuberance, and puzzling combination of mysticism and practicality."<sup>50</sup> Katherine Tynan found that the people of Mayo County enjoyed themselves, having much gaiety including dances, concerts, and plays.<sup>51</sup> She is further of the opinion that the people were extraordinarily gifted with beautiful

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47 Lynd, op. cit., p. 120

48 Loc. cit.

49 Sullivan, op. cit., p. 16

50 Bourgeois, 66. cit., p. 74

51 Tynan, op. cit., p. 163



voices, dramatic and musical talent.<sup>52</sup> In a discussion concerning the manner in which the Irish people reacted to hardship, Malloy pointed out that the joys of life were unstifled by hardship, life was a thing to love, and the people were easily impressed by the spirit of romance and adventure.<sup>53</sup>

That last statement makes understandable the fact that Christy, a professed parricide, was so readily accepted by the people at the inn. This seemed even more feasible when considering the likeable character of Christy Mahon, and the fact that the Irish people were prone to forgive the sins of a man who had a "spice of deviltry, when tempered by liberality, humor, and courtesy."<sup>54</sup>

Games and dances. The opening scene of Act III was devoted to a description of Christy's progress in the game and dance competition staged in the village. Because he fared so well in his endeavor that he was elevated to a high position in the group, this actor needed to know the games, and the importance which was assigned to them.

Widow Quin remarked to Christy in Act II that she had

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52 Loc. cit.

53 J. Fitzgerald Malloy, The Romance of the Irish stage (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1897), p. 26

54 Loc. cit.





entered him in the "racing, lepping, dancing and the Lord knows what" indicated that quite a number of sports were being presented. Because Christy won all the prizes, this author assumed that the competition did not include team sports such as Gaelic football, hurling, and lacrosse which were prevalent in Ireland. Rather, Synge seemed to be referring to the sports in which the person competed as an individual.

According to Lynd, the "racing" and "lepping" referred to sports requiring good horsemanship, because he stated that "racing, steeplechasing and jumping are plentiful in many parts of Ireland".<sup>55</sup> That Christy was racing was made clear in Act III, when Mahon exclaimed, "Look at the mule he has kicking the stars...", and also by the actual description of the race given by the villagers. Dancing, an integral part of Irish social life, was composed of the various sorts of jigs and reels.<sup>56</sup> During their execution the dancers kept the top portion of their bodies still, and "the men in their thick-soled, heavy-nailed boots perform wonderful feats of agility."<sup>57</sup>

There were also the very popular group dances which

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<sup>55</sup> Lynd, op. cit., p. 201

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 202

<sup>57</sup> Loc. cit.

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might be described as picture dances. A certain title, such as The Walls of Limerick, or Waves of Troy, was named, and the dancers had to create a series of movements which conveyed the impression of that title.<sup>58</sup>

Hospitality Towards Strangers. Irish manners appeared at their best in connection with hospitality.<sup>59</sup> Even though peasants were poor, they had a reputation for giving a visitor anything which they possessed; and since they would take no money, the situation was sometimes made awkward for the person who did not wish to take from the needy.<sup>60</sup> Synge revealed that the Aran people had an unusual lack of shyness in front of strangers.<sup>61</sup> These two facts may partially explain the welcome which Christy received when he appeared at the inn.

Not all strangers were given a hearty welcome, since the many tinkers who roamed Ireland were refused hospitality, and were shunned. These tinkers were believed to be under a curse because they traveled widely, and activity considered unnatural by the Irish.<sup>62</sup> The disdain with which

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58 Ibid., p. 203

59 Bourgeois, op. cit., p. 25

60 Lynd, op. cit., p. 275

61 Synge, op. cit., p. 110

62 Lynd, op. cit., p. 151

they were viewed was seen in the play when Pegeen spoke fearfully of "the ten tinkers is camped beyond in the east glen."

Food and Drink. When considering the hospitality of the Irish people, this author was curious about Michael and Pegeen who gave Christy only a piece of bread and a cup of milk for his "supper". Research revealed that Pegeen and Michael were probably not neglecting their custom of hospitality in the slightest since the people "eat strangely little", and use no animal food at all except occasional pieces of bacon and salt fish.<sup>63</sup>

Lynd also revealed that meat was rarely eaten, even by those who could afford it.<sup>64</sup> Many varieties of bread were served, accompanied by excellent tea, butter milk, or sweet milk.<sup>65</sup> Potato foods of various sorts were also eaten, one such food consisting of potatoes and heated milk taken from cows recently calved.<sup>66</sup>

Alcoholic drinks were not taken with meals, but were found in the many public houses, or inns.<sup>67</sup> According to Creed, these drinks included scotch, Irish whiskey, porter,

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63 Synge, op. cit., p. 50

64 Lynd, op. cit., p. 206

65 Ibid., p. 207

66 Loc. cit.

67 Loc. cit.



and the most common, Guinness or Beamish stout.<sup>68</sup> The favorite drink of the farm population, however, was porter.<sup>69</sup>

The drink, "poteen" was mentioned by Synge in connection with the wakes, and in The Playboy of the Western World. Morton, having tasted poteen during a visit to Ireland, presented a comprehensive description of it in his book.

The word "poteen" had mysterious connotations in the country places of Ireland, and it was usually whispered rather than spoken aloud.<sup>70</sup> In many places, even mention of the word was forbidden, and poteen was furtively referred to as "the stuff".<sup>71</sup>

Poteen was made in the hills of Ireland either at night or on very foggy days,<sup>72</sup> so that the smoke of the stills couldn't be seen by the many Civic Guards pledged to stamp out the manufacture of poteen.<sup>73</sup> The reason for this pressing concern was probably the nature of the drink, which Norton described as "fool and stupifying," white in

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68 Creed, op. cit., p. 19

69 Loc. cit.

70 Norton, op. cit., p. 113

71 Ibid., p. 114

72 Loc. cit.

73 Loc. cit.

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color, and productive of a violent burning in the throat.<sup>74</sup>  
The stuff could drive men mad, putting them into a stupor  
which lasted for weeks, and could render them capable of  
committing any crime.<sup>75</sup>

One mention of poteen occurred in Act III of The  
Playboy of the Western World. Jimmy, in response to Mahon's  
request for a drink pointed to the Widow Quin and said, "Ask  
herself beyond. She's the stuff hidden in her shawl." Here  
was seen not only the use of the expression "the stuff", but  
also the secretiveness associated with handling the drink.

According to Norton, poteen was rather hard to  
obtain, and was consequently viewed by its owner as a  
possession worthy of some pride.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps that explains  
the situation in Act III when Christy, who about to attack  
Shawn, was interrupted by Michael's wild screams of, "Is it  
mad you are? Would you go making murder in this place, and  
it piled with poteen for our drinks tonight?"

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74 Loc. cit.

75 Loc. cit.

76 Loc. cit.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE ACTING SCRIPT

### THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD

#### ACT ONE

Scene. Country public-house or shebeen, very rough and untidy. There is a sort of counter on the right with shelves, holding many bottles and jugs, just seen above it. Empty barrels stand near the counter. At back, a little to left of counter, there is a door into the open air, then, more to the left, there is a settle with shelves above it, with more jugs, and a table beneath a window. At the left there is a large open fireplace, with turf fire, and a small door into inner room. PEGEEN, a wild-looking but fine girl of about twenty, is writing at table. She is dressed in the usual peasant dress.

PEGEEN (slowly as she writes). Six yards of stuff for to make a yellow gown. A pair of lace boots and lengthy heels on them and brassy eyes. A hat is suited for a wedding-day. A fine tooth comb. To be sent with three barrels of porter in Jimmy Farrell's creel cart on the evening of the coming Fair to Mister Michael James Flaherty. With the best compliments of this season. Margaret Flaherty.

SHAWN KEOCH (a fat and fair young man comes in as she signs, looks round awkwardly, when he sees she is alone). Where's himself?

PEGEEN (without looking at him). He's coming. (She directs the letter.) To Master Sheamus Mulroy, Wine and Spirit Dealer, Castlebar.

SHAWN (uneasily). I didn't see him on the road.

PEGEEN. How would you see him (licks stamp and puts it on letter) and it dark night this half hour gone by?

SHAWN (turning towards the door again). I stood a while outside wondering would I have a right to pass on or to walk in and see you, Pegeen Mike (comes to fire), and I could hear the cows breathing, and sighing in the stillness of the air, and not a step moving any place from this gate to the bridge.

PEGEEN (putting letter in envelope). It's above at the cross-roads he is, meeting Philly Cullen; and a couple more are going along with him to Kate Cassidy's wake.

SHAWN (looking at her blankly). And he's going that length in the dark night?

PEGEEN (impatiently). He is surely, and leaving me lonesome on the scruff of the hill. (She gets up and puts envelope on dresser, then winds clock.) Isn't it long the nights are now, Shawn Keogh, to be leaving a poor girl with her own self counting the hours to the dawn of day?

SHAWN (with awkward humour). If

it is, when we're wedded in a short while you'll have no call to complain, for I've little will to be walking off to wakes or weddings in the darkness of the night.

PEGEEN (with rather scornful good humour). You're making mighty certain, Shaneen, that I'll wed you now.

SHAWN. Aren't we after making a good bargain, the way we're only waiting these days on Father Reilly's dispensation from the bishops, or the Court of Rome?

PEGEEN (looking at him teasingly, washing up at dresser). It's a wonder, Shaneen, the Holy Father'd be taking notice of the likes of you; for if I was him I wouldn't bother with this place where you'll meet none but Red Linahan, has a squint in his eye, and Patcheen is lame in his heel, or the mad Mulrannies were driven from California and they lost in their wits. We're a queer lot these times to go troubling the Holy Father on his sacred seat.

SHAWN (scandalized). If we are, we're as good this place as another, maybe, and as good these times as we were for ever.

PEGEEN (with scorn). As good, is it? Where now will you meet the like of Daneen Sullivan knocked the eye from a peeler, or Marcus Quin, God rest him, got six months for maiming ewes, and he a great warrant to tell stories of holy Ireland till he'd have the old women shedding

down tears about their feet.  
Where will you find the like  
of them, I'm saying?

SHAWN (timidly). If you don't,  
it's a good job, maybe; for  
(with peculiar emphasis on the  
words) Father Reilly has small  
conceit to have that kind  
walking around and talking to  
the girls.

PEGEEN (impatiently, throwing  
water from basin out of the  
door). Stop tormenting me with  
Father Reilly (imitating his  
voice) when I'm asking only  
what way I'll pass these twelve  
hours of dark, and not take my  
death with the fear. (Looking  
out of door.)

SHAWN (timidly). Would I fetch  
you the Widow Quin, maybe?

PEGEEN. Is it the like of that  
murderer? You'll not, surely.

SHAWN (going to her, soothingly).  
Then I'm thinking himself will  
stop along with you when he sees  
you taking on, for it'll be a  
long night-time with great dark-  
ness, and I'm after feeling a  
king of fellow above in the  
furzy ditch, groaning wicked like  
a maddening dog, the way it's  
good cause you have, maybe, to  
be fearing now.

PEGEEN (turning on him sharply).  
What's that? Is it a man you  
seen?

SHAWN (retreating). I couldn't  
see him at all; but I heard him  
groaning out, and breaking his  
heart. It should have been a  
young man from his words speaking.

PEGEEN (going after him). And you never went near to see was he hurted or what ailed him at all?

SHAWN. I did not, Pegeen Mike. It was a dark, lonesome place to be hearing the like of him.

PEGEEN. Well, you're a daring fellow, and if they find his corpse stretched above in the dews of dawn, what'll you say then to the peelers, or the Justice of the Peace?

SHAWN (thunderstruck). I wasn't thinking of that. For the love of God, Pegeen Mike, don't let on I was speaking of him. Don't tell your father and the men is coming above; for if they heard that story, they'd have great blabbing this night at the wake.

PEGEEN. I'll maybe tell them, and I'll maybe not.

SHAWN. They are coming at the door. Will you whisht, I'm saying?

PEGEEN. Whisht yourself. (She goes behind counter. MICHAEL JAMES, fat jovial publican, comes in followed by PHILLY CULLEN, who is thin and mistrusting, and JIMMY FARRELL, who is fat and amorous, about forty-five.)

MEN (together). God bless you. The blessing of God on this place.

PEGEEN. God bless you kindly.

MICHAEL (to men who go to the

counter). Sit down now, and take your rest. (Crosses to SHAWN at the fire) And how is it you are, Shawn Keogh? Are you coming over the sands to Kate Cassidy's wake?

SHAWN. I am not, Michael James. I'm going home the short cut to my bed.

PEGREEN (speaking across the counter). He's right too, and have you no shame, Michael James, to be quitting off for the whole night, and leaving myself lonesome in the shop?

MICHAEL (good-humouredly). Isn't it the same whether I go for the whole night or a part only? and I'm thinking it's a queer daughter you are if you'd have me crossing backward through the Stooks of the Dead Women, with a drop taken.

PEGREEN. If I am a queer daughter, it's a queer father'd be leaving me lonesome these twelve hours of dark, and I piling the turf with the dogs barking, and the calves mooing, and my own teeth rattling with the fear.

JIMMY (flatteringly). What is there to hurt you, and you a fine, hardy girl would knock the head of any two men in the place?

PEGREEN (working herself up). Isn't there the harvest boys with their tongues red for drink, and the ten tinkers is camped in the east glen, and the thousand militia--bad cess to them!--walking idle through the land. There's lots surely to hurt me, and I won't stop alone in it, let himself do what

he will.

MICHAEL. If you're that afeard, let Shawn Keogh stop along with you. It's the will of God, I'm thinking, himself should be seeing to you now.

(They all turn on SHAWN.)

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

MICHAEL (with contempt). God help you! Can't you sit in by the hearth with the light lit and herself beyond in the room? You'll do that surely, for I've heard tell there's a queer fellow above, going mad or getting his death, maybe, in the gripe of the ditch, so she'd be safer this night with a person here.

SHAWN (with plaintive despair). I'm afeard of Father Reilly, I'm saying. Let you not be tempting me, and we near married itself.

PHILLY (with cold contempt). Lock him in the west room. He'll stay then and have no sin to be telling to the priest.

MICHAEL (to SHAWN, getting between him and the door). Go up now.

SHAWN (at the top of his voice). Don't stop me, Michael James. Let me out of the door, I'm saying, for the love of the Almighty

God. Let me out (trying to dodge past him). Let me out of it, and may God grand you His indulgence in the hour of need.

MICHAEL (loudly). Stop your noising, and sit down by the hearth. (Gives him a push and goes to counter laughing.)

SHAWN (turning back, wringing his hands). Oh, Father Reilly and the saints of God, where will I hide myself to-day? Oh, St. Joseph and St. Patrick and St. Brigid, and St. James, have mercy on me now! (SHAWN turns round, sees door clear, and makes a rush for it.)

MICHAEL (catching him by the coat-tail). You'd be going, is it?

SHAWN (screaming). Leave me go, Michael James, leave me go, you old Pagan, leave me go, or I'll get the curse of the priests on you, and of the scarlet-coated bishops of the courts of Rome. (With a sudden movement he pulls himself out of his coat, and disappears out of the door, leaving his coat in MICHAEL'S hands.)

MICHAEL (turning round, and holding up coat). Well, there's the coat of a Christian man. Oh, there's sainted glory this day in the lonesome west; and by the will of God I've got you a decent man, Pegeen, you'll have no call to be spying after if you've a score of young girls, maybe, weeding in your fields.



FIGURE 1.

Act I  
"God save all here."



PEGEEN (taking up the defence of her property). What right have you to be making game of a poor fellow for minding the priest, when it's your own the fault is, not paying a penny pot-boy to stand along with me and give me courage in the doing of my work? (She snaps the coat away from him, and goes behind counter with it.)

MICHAEL (taken aback). Where would I get a pot-boy? Would you have me send the bellman screaming in the streets of Castlebar?

SHAWN (opening the door a chink and putting in his head, in a small voice). Michael James!

MICHAEL (imitating him). What ails you?

SHAWN. The queer dying fellow's beyond looking over the ditch. He's come up, I'm thinking, stealing your hens. (looks over his shoulder) God help me, he's following me now, (he runs into room), and if he's heard what I said, he'll be having my life, and I going home lonesome in the darkness of the night.

(For a perceptible moment they watch the door with curiosity. Some one coughs outside. Then CHRISTY MAHON, a slight young man, comes in very tired and frightened and dirty.)

CHRISTY (in a small voice). God save all here!

MEN. God save you kindly.

Stops in Doorway. Looks around. Body tense, Shoulders hunched, arms in. Smiles

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the coin.

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Crosses to counter.  
Gives coin.

CHRISTY (going to the counter).  
I'd trouble you for a glass of  
porter, woman of the house. (He  
puts down coin.)

PEGEEN (serving him). You're  
one of the tinkers, young  
fellow, is beyond camped in the  
glen?

Takes drink.

CHRISTY. I am not; but I'm  
destroyed walking.

MICHAEL (patronizingly). Let  
you come up then to the fire.  
You're looking famished with  
the cold.

Crosses to bench.  
Bends to speak. Looks  
furtively around.

CHRISTY. God reward you. (He  
takes up his glass and goes a  
little way across to the left,  
then stops and looks about  
him) Is it often the police  
do be coming into this place,  
master of the house?

CHRISTY watches Michaels  
hand indicate sign.

MICHAEL. If you'd come in better  
hours, you'd have seen "Licensed  
for the sale of Beer and Spirits,  
to be consumed on the premises."  
written in white letters above  
the door, and what would the  
polis want spying on me, and not  
a decent house within four miles,  
the way every living Christian  
is a bona fide, saving one widow  
alone?

Sits. Slowly takes  
turnip from shirt, and  
takes bite.

CHRISTY (with relief). It's a  
safe house, so. (He goes over  
to the fire, sighing and moan-  
ing. Then he sits down, putting  
his glass beside him and begins  
gnawing a turnip, too miserable  
to feel the others staring at  
him with curiosity.)

MICHAEL (going after him). Is it  
yourself is fearing the polis?  
You're wanting, maybe?

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ing. Then he sits down, putting  
his glass beside him and begins  
gnawing a turnip, too miserable  
to feel the others staring at  
him with curiosity.)

MICHAEL (going after him). Is it  
yourself is fearing the polis?  
You're wanting, maybe?





Stops eating. Hesitates.  
Looks at floor.

CHRISTY. There's many wanting.

MICHAEL. Many surely, with the broken harvest and the ended wars. (He picks up some stockings, etc., that are near the fire, and carries them away furtively) It should be larceny, I'm thinking.

Looks into space.

CHRISTY (dolefully). I had it in my mind it was a different word and a bigger.

PEGREEN. There's a queer lad. Were you never slapped in school, young fellow, that you don't know the name of your deed?

Turns to Pegeen. Cringes.  
Face registers discomfort.

CHRISTY (bashfully). I'm slow at learning, a middling scholar only.

MICHAEL. If you're a dunce itself, you'd have a right to know that larceny's robbing and stealing. Is it for the like of that you're wanting?

Sits upright. Turns face to Michael. Indicates house with arm.

CHRISTY (with a flash of family pride). And I the son of a strong farmer (with a sudden qualm), God rest his soul, could have bought up the whole of your old house awhile since, from the butt of his tailpocket, and not have missed the weight of it gone.

MICHAEL (impressed). If it's not stealing, it's maybe something big.

Relaxes slightly. Smiles

CHRISTY. (flattered). Aye; it's maybe something big.

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

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Turns sharply to Jimmy.  
Body stiffens. Eyes  
widen.

CHRISTY (shocked). Oh, the  
saints forbid, mister; I was  
all times a decent lad.

PHILLY (turning on JIMMY).  
You're a silly man, Jimmy  
Farrell. He said his father  
was a farmer a while since,  
and there's himself now in a  
poor state. Maybe the land  
was grabbed from him, and he  
did what any decent man would  
do.

MICHAEL (to CHRISTY, mysteriously).  
Was it bailiffs?

Turns back to Michael.  
Body slouches.

CHRISTY. The divil a one.

MICHAEL. Agents?

Shakes head slightly.  
Looks away. Shoulders  
hunched.

CHRISTY. The divil a one.

MICHAEL. Landlords?

Straightens body. Looks  
at Michael. Looks annoyed.  
Eyes narrow. Vocal rate  
slows.

CHRISTY (peevishly). Ah, not at  
all, I'm saying. You'd see the  
like of them stories on any  
little paper of a Munster town.  
But I'm not calling to mind  
any person, gentle, simple,  
judge or jury, did the like of  
me.

(They all draw nearer with  
delighted curiosity.)

PHILLY. Well, that lad's a  
puzzle-the-world.

JIMMY. He'd beat Dan Davies'  
circus, or the holy missionaries  
making sermons on the villainy  
of man. Try him again, Philly.

PHILLY. Did you strike golden  
guineas out of solder, young  
fellow, or shilling coins it-  
self?



Turns to Philly. Nods emphatically.

CHRISTY. I did not, mister, not sixpence nor a farthing coin.

JIMMY. Did you marry three wives maybe? I'm told there's a sprinkling have done that among the holy Luthers of the preaching north.

Turns from Jimmy. Puts foot on bench. Rests cheek on knee.

CHRISTY (shyly). I never married with one, let alone with a couple or three.

PHILLY. Maybe he went fighting for the Boers, the like of the man beyond, was judged to be hanged, quartered and drawn. Were you off east, young fellow, fighting bloody wars for Kruger and the freedom of the Boers?

Wraps arms around leg. Turns farther from Philly.

CHRISTY. I never left my own parish till Tuesday was a week.

CHRISTY turns slowly to Pegeen. Lowers foot. Leans forward on bench.

PEGEEN (coming from counter). He's done nothing, so. (To CHRISTY) If you didn't commit murder or a bad, nasty thing, or false coining, or robbery, or butchery, or the like of them, there isn't anything that would be worth your troubling for to run from now. You did nothing at all.

Edges to Pegeen. Points at floor indicating hell's gap.

CHRISTY (his feelings hurt). That's an unkindly thing to be saying to a poor orphaned traveller, has a prison behind him, and hanging before, and hell's gap gaping below.

CHRISTY frowns, mouth opens, body stiff.

PEGEEN (with a sign to the men to be quiet). You're only saying it. You did nothing at all. A soft lad the like of you wouldn't slit the windpipe of a screeching sow.

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Rises with one knee on bench. Faces Pegeen. Body tense, fists clenched.

Shoulders hunch. Arm covers head. Falls back on bench. Head under arms.

Rises quickly. Backs from Pegeen. Speaks softly. Stares at ceiling.

Turns to Michael. Looks disgusted. Nods head.

Turns to Pegeen. Steps to her. Shakes head. Looks innocent.

CHRISTY (offended). You're not speaking the truth.

PEGEEN (in mock rage). Not speaking the truth, is it? Would you have me knock the head off you with the butt of the broom?

CHRISTY (twisting round on her with a sharp cry of horror).<sup>1</sup> Don't strike me. I killed my poor father, Tuesday was a week, for doing the like of that.

PEGEEN (with blank amazement). Is it killed your father?

CHRISTY (subsiding). With the help of God I did surely, and that the Holy Immaculate Mother may intercede for his soul.

PHILLY (retreating with JIMMY). There's a daring fellow.

JIMMY. Oh, glory be to God!

MICHAEL (with great respect). That was a hanging crime, mister honey. You should have had good reason for doing the like of that.

CHRISTY (in a very reasonable tone). He was a dirty man, God forgive him, and he getting old and crusty, the way I couldn't put up with him at all.

PEGEEN. And you shot him dead?

CHRISTY (shaking his head). I never used weapons. I've no license, and I'm a law-fearing man.

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<sup>1</sup> — indicates omission of Synge's directions.

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

Turns to Michael. Arms hang down. Shoulders raised.

CHRISTY (loudly, scandalized). Do you take me for a slaughter-boy?

CHRISTY turns to Pegeen. Becomes impatient to continue story. Body leans. Arm begins to rise several times.

PEGEEN. You never hanged him, the way Jimmy Farrell hanged his dog from the license, and had it screeching and wriggling three hours at the butt of a string, and himself swearing it was a dead dog, and the peelers swearing it had life?

Interrupts laughter. Steps forward, swings arm supposedly holding loy. Smiles excitedly.

CHRISTY. I did not then. I just riz the loy and let fall the edge of it on the ridge of his skull, and he went down at my feet like an empty sack, and never let a grunt or groan from him at all.

MICHAEL (making a sign to Pegeen to fill CHRISTY'S glass). And what way weren't you hanged, mister? Did you bury him then?

Turns to Michael. Hesitates. Speaks emphatically. Narrows eyes, turns, fingers tap stick.

CHRISTY (considering). Aye. I buried him then. Wasn't I digging spuds in the field?

MICHAEL. And the peelers never followed after you the eleven days that you're out?

Crosses center. Eyes widen, vocal pitch rises, looking from side to side. Body tense.

CHRISTY (shaking his head). Never a one of them, and I walking forward facing hog, dog, or divil on the highway of the road.

CHRISTY notices reaction. Smiles. Resumes posture of first line.

PHILLY (nodding wisely). It's only with a common week-day kind of a murderer them lads would be trusting their carcass, and that man should be a great terror when his temper's roused.

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MICHAEL. He should then. (To CHRISTY) And where was it, mister honey, that you did the deed?

Turns from Michael. Eyes narrow, casts sidelong glances at Michael. Shows direction with swing of stick.

CHRISTY (looking at him with suspicion). Oh, a distant place, master of the house, a windy corner of high, distant hills.

PHILLY (nodding with approval). He's a close man, and he's right, surely.

CHRISTY crosses to bar. Slouches body but face smiling aware of triumph.

PEGEEN. That'd be a lad with the sense of Solomon to have for a pot-boy, Michael James, if it's the truth you're seeking one at all.

PHILLY. The peelers is fearing him, and if you'd that lad in the house there isn't one of them would come smelling around if the dogs itself were lapping poteen from the dung-pit of the yard.

JIMMY. Bravery's a treasure in a lonesome place, and a lad would kill his father, I'm thinking, would face a foxy divil with a pitchpike on the flags of hell.

PEGEEN. It's the truth they're saying, and if I'd that lad in the house, I wouldn't be fearing the looséd kharki cut-throats, or the walking dead.

Straightens shoulders, looks around grinning.

CHRISTY (swelling with surprise and triumph). Well, glory be to God!

MICHAEL (with deference). Would you think well to stop here and be pot-boy, mister honey, if we

gave you good wages, and didn't destroy you with the weight of work?

CHRISTY looks angrily at Shawn.

SHAWN (coming forward uneasily). That'd be a queer kind to bring into a decent quiet household, with the like of Pegeen Mike.

CHRISTY sees Pegeen defending him. Smiles at her gratefully. Looks proudly around.

PEGEEN (very sharply). Will you whisht? Who's speaking to you?

SHAWN (retreating). A bloody-handed murderer the like of...

PEGEEN (snapping at him). Whisht I am saying; we'll take no fooling from your like at all. (To CHRISTY with a honeyed voice) And you, young fellow, you'd have a right to stop, I'm thinking, for we'd do our all and utmost to content your needs.

Eyebrows raised with wonder.

CHRISTY (overcome with wonder). And I'd be safe in this place from the searching law?

MICHAEL. You would, surely. If they're not fearing you, itself, the peelers in this place is decent doughty poor fellows, wouldn't touch a cur dog and not give warning in the dead of night.

CHRISTY steps back, hangs head smiling.

PEGEEN (very kindly and persuasively). Let you stop a short while anyhow. Aren't you destroyed walking with your feet in bleeding blisters, and your whole skin needing washing like a Wicklow sheep?

Turns away. Looks around room. Pauses, allowing suspense to build.

CHRISTY (looking round with satisfaction). It's a nice room, and if it's not humbugging me you are, I'm thinking that I'll surely stay.

Mr. Brile

Mr. Have  
Mr. Go. The  
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JIMMY (jumps up). Now, by the grace of God, herself will be safe this night, with a man killed his father holding danger from the door, and let you come on, Michael James, or they'll have the best stuff drunk at the wake.

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

Turns. Smiles at Michael.

CHRISTY. Christopher Mahon.

MICHAEL. Well, God bless you, Christy, and a good rest till we meet again when the sun'll be rising to the noon of day.

Laughs. Waves to men as they go. Turns. Frowns at Shawn.

CHRISTY. God bless you all.

MEN. God bless you.

(The go out except Shawn, who lingers at door.)

SHAWN (to PEGEEN). Are you wanting me to stop along with you and keep you from harm?

CHRISTY stands by bar smiling as Pegeen scorns Shawn.

PEGREEN. (gruffly). Didn't you say you were fearing Father Reilly?

SHAWN. There'd be no harm staying now, I'm thinking, and himself in it too.

PEGREEN. You wouldn't stay when there was need for you, and let you step off nimble this time when there's none.

SHAWN. Didn't I say it was Father Reilly...

PEGEEN. Go on, then, to Father Reilly (in a jeering tone), and let him put you in the holy brotherhoods, and leave that lad to me.

SHAWN. If I meet the Widow Quin...

PEGEEN. Go on, I'm saying, and don't be waking this place with your noise. (She hustles him out and bolts the door) That lad would wear the spirits from the saints of peace. (Bustles about, then takes off her apron and pins it up in the window as a blind. CHRISTY watching her timidly. Then she comes to him and speaks with bland good-humour) Let you stretch out now by the fire, young fellow. You should be destroyed travelling.

CHRISTY (shyly again, drawing off his boots). I'm tired, surely, walking wild eleven days, and waking fearful in the night. (He holds up one of his feet, feeling his blisters, and looking at them with compassion.)

PEGEEN (standing beside him, watching him with delight). You should have had great people in your family, I'm thinking, with the little, small feet you have, and you with a kind of a quality name, the like of what you'd find on the great powers and potentates of France and Spain.

CHRISTY (with pride). We were great surely, with wide and windy acres of rich Munster land.

CHRISTY laughs at Shawn being pushed out. Still smiling crosses, sits on bench. Removes shoes. Rubs feet. Wiggles toes.

Breathy vocal quality to show fatigue. Last portion spoken emphatically.

Looks at Pegeen. Eyes widen, grins and speaks emphatically. Wide sweep of arm shows Munster Lands. Inflection for lying.

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PEGEEN. Wasn't I telling you, and you a fine, handsome young fellow with a noble brow?

Turns. Grins at Pegeen. Shoulders rise. Hand on chest.

CHRISTY (with a flash of delighted surprise). Is it me?

PEGEEN. Aye. Did you never hear that from the young girls where you come from in the west or south?

Turns away. Frowns. Looks at audience.

CHRISTY (with venom). I did not then. Oh, they're bloody liars in the naked parish where I grew a man.

PEGEEN. If they are itself, you've heard it these days, I'm thinking, and you walking the world telling out your story to young girls or old.

Turns to Pegeen. Leans forward on bench. Vocal inflection for persuasion.

CHRISTY. I've told my story no place till this night, Pegeen Mike, and it's foolish I was here, maybe, to be talking free, but you're decent people, I'm thinking, and yourself a kindly woman, the way I wasn't fearing you at all.

PEGEEN (filling a sack with straw). You've said the like of that maybe, in every cot and cabin where you've met a young girl on your way.

Rises. Crosses to Pegeen at bar. Speaks earnestly.

CHRISTY (going over to her, gradually raising his voice). I've said it nowhere till this night, I'm telling you, for I've seen none the like of you the eleven long days I am walking the world, looking over a low ditch or a high ditch on my north or my south, into stony scattered fields, or scribes of



bog, where you'd see young, limber girls, and fine prancing women making laughter with men.

PEGEEN. If you weren't destroyed travelling, you'd have as much talk and streeleen, I'm thinking, as Owen Roe O'Sullivan or the poets of the Dingle Bay, and I've heard all times it's the poets are your like, fine fiery fellows with great rages when their temper's roused.

Looks into face. Extends hand to touch hers. She draws away.

CHRISTY (drawing a little nearer to her). You've a power of rings, God bless you, and would there be any offence if I was asking are you single now?

PEGEEN. What would I want wedding so young?

Sighs. Smiles.

CHRISTY (with relief). We're alike, so.

Turns. Hangs head. Crosses to door Center. Stands back to Pegeen.

PEGEEN (she puts sack on settle and beats it up). I never killed my father. I'd be afeard to do that, except I was the like of yourself with blind rages tearing me within, for I'm thinking you should have had great tussling when the end was come.

Turns back. Crosses to bar. Speaks angrily at thought of father's delinquency.

CHRISTY (expanding with delight ~~at the first confidential talk he has ever had with a woman~~). We had not then. It was a hard woman was come over the hill, and if he was always a crusty kind when he'd a hard woman setting him on, not the divil himself or his four fathers could put up with him at all.



PEGEEN (with curiosity). And isn't it a great wonder that one wasn't fearing you?

Leans forward on bar.  
Nods slightly.

CHRISTY (very confidentially). Up to the day I killed my father, there wasn't a person in Ireland knew the kind I was, and I there drinking, waking, eating, sleeping, a quiet, simple poor fellow with no man giving me heed.

PEGEEN (getting a quilt out of the cupboard and putting it on the sack). It was the girls were giving you heed maybe, and I'm thinking it's most conceit you'd have to be gaming with their like.

Frowns slightly.

CHRISTY (shaking his head, with simplicity). Not the girls it-self, and I won't tell you a lie. There wasn't anyone heeding me in that place saving only the dumb beasts of the field. (He sits down at fire.)

PEGEEN (with disappointment). And I thinking you should have been living the like of a king of Norway or the Eastern world, (She comes and sits beside him after placing bread and mug of milk on the table.)

Body tense. Leans forward.  
Speaks bitterly.  
Remembers happy moment of former life. Laughs.  
Crosses to bench. Sits.

CHRISTY (laughing piteously). The like of a king, is it? And I after toiling, molling, digging, dodging from the dawn till dusk with never a sight of joy or sport saving only when I'd be abroad in the dark night poaching rabbits on hills, for I was a divil to poach, God forgive me, (very naively) and I near got six months for going with a dung fork and stabbing a fish.



FIGURE 1

Act I  
"God save all here."

FIGURE 2

Act I  
"Shying up clods against  
the visage of the stars..."





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Looks into sapce. Eyes widen. Smiles. Turns to her becoming angry at thought of Mahon. Body tense. Volume, pitch rise.

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

CHRISTY. I did, God help me, and there I'd be as happy as the sunshine of St. Martin's Day, watching the light passing the north or the patches of fog, till I'd hear a rabbit starting to screech and I'd go running in the furze. Then when I'd my full share I'd come walking down where you'd see the ducks and geese stretched sleeping on the highway of the road, and before I'd pass the dunghill, I'd hear himself snoring out, a loud sonesome snore he'd be making all times, the while he was sleeping, and he a man'd be raging all times, the while he was waking, like a gaudy officer you'd hear cursing and damning and swearing oaths.

PEGEEN. Providence and Mercy, spare us all!

Rises abruptly. Crosses center. Becomes more excited. Quick but smooth movements. Pantomime throwing at stars.

CHRISTY. It's that you'd say surely if you seen him and he after drinking for weeks, rising up in the red dawn, or before it maybe, and going out into the yard as naked as an ash tree in the moon of May, and shying clods against the visage of the stars till he'd put the fear of death into the banbhs and the screeching sows.

PEGEEN. I'd be well-nigh afeard of that lad myself, I'm thinking. And there was no one in it but the two of you alone?



Walks emphatically down right. Crosses to Pegeen. Talks into her face with arm pointing behind him at corner of stage.

Follows Pegeen center. Speaks emphatically. Stops. Crosses to bench. Pantomimes action of splitting the skull with edge of hand. Sits.

Smiles. Shows Pegeen muscle.

Jumps up. Stands with shoulders hunched. Hands clasped, with back to door. Face registers terror.

CHRISTY. The divil a one, though he'd sons and daughters walking all great states and territories of the world, and not a one of them, to this day, but would say their seven curses on him, and they rousing up to let a cough or sneeze, maybe, in the deadness of the night.

PEGEEN (nodding her head). Well, you should have been a queer lot. I never cursed my father the like of that, though I'm twenty and more years of age.

CHRISTY. Then you'd have cursed mine, I'm telling you, and he a man never gave peace to any, saving when he'd get two months or three, or be locked in the asylums for battering peelers or assaulting men (with depression) the way it was a bitter life he led me till I did up a Tuesday and halve his skull.

PEGEEN (putting her hand on his shoulder). Well, you'll have peace in this place, Christy Mahon, and none to trouble you, and it's near time a fine lad like you should have your good share of the earth.

CHRISTY. It's time surely, and I a seemly fellow with great strength in me and bravery of ...

(Someone knocks.)

CHRISTY (clinging to PEGEEN). Oh, glory! it's late for knocking, and this last while I'm in terror of the peelers, and the walking dead.

(Knocking again.)

PEGEEN. Who's there?

VOICE (outside). Me.

PEGEEN. Who's me?

VOICE. The Widow Quin.

CHRISTY crosses quickly to bench. Reclines on elbow back to door. Munches bread.

PEGEEN (jumping up and giving him the bread and milk). Go on now with your supper, and let on to be sleepy, for if she found you were such a warrant to talk, she'd be stringing gabble till the dawn of day. (He takes bread and sits shyly with his back to the door.)

PEGEEN (opening door, with temper). What ails you, or what is it you're wanting at this hour of the night?

WIDOW QUIN (coming in a step and peering at CHRISTY.) I'm after meeting Shawn Keogh and Father Reilly below, who told me of your curiosity man, and they fearing by this time he was maybe roaring, romping on your hands with drink.

PEGEEN (pointing to CHRISTY). Look now is he roaring, and he stretched away drowsy with his supper and his mug of milk. Walk down and tell that to Father Reilly and to Shaneen Keogh.

CHRISTY looks sharply up. Face shows apprehension and fear.

WIDOW QUIN (coming forward). I'll not see them again, for I've their word to lead that lad forward for to lodge with me.

PEGEEN (in blank amazement). This night, is it?



WIDOW QUIN (going over). This night. "It isn't fitting," says the priesteen, "to have his likeness lodging with an orphaned girl." (To CHRISTY) God save you, mister!

Looks up over shoulder.

CHRISTY (shyly). God save you kindly.

CHRISTY frowns at Widow's description.

WIDOW QUIN (looking at him with half-amazed curiosity). Well, aren't you a little smiling fellow? It should have been great and bitter torments did rouse your spirits to a deed of blood.

Frowns. Nods emphatically.

CHRISTY (doubtfully). It should, maybe.

WIDOW QUIN. It's more than "maybe" I'm saying, and it'd soften my heart to see you sitting so simple with your cup and cake, and you fitter to be saying your catechism than slaying your da.

PEGREEN (at counter, washing glasses). There's talking when any'd see he's fit to be holding his head high with the wonders of the world. Walk on from this, for I'll not have him tormented and he destroyed travelling since Tuesday was a week.

WIDOW QUIN (peaceable). We'll be walking surely when his supper's done, and you'll find we're great company, young fellow, when it's of the like of you and me you'd hear the penny poets singing in an August Fair.

Raises face to Widow. Face assumes expression of interest.

CHRISTY (innocently). Did you kill your father?



CHRISTY watches Pegeen, smiling.

PEGEEN (contemptuously). She did not. She hit himself with a worn pick, and the rusted poison did corrode his blood the way he never overed it, and died after. That was a sneaky kind of murder did win small glory with the boys itself. (She crosses to CHRISTY'S left.)

WIDOW QUIN (with good-humour). If it didn't, maybe all knows a widow woman has buried her children and destroyed her man is a wiser comrade for a young lad than a girl, the like of you, who'd go helter-skeltering after any man would let you a wink upon the road.

PEGEEN (breaking out into wild rage). And you'll say that, Widow Quin, and you gasping with the rage you had racing the hill beyond to look on his face.

WIDOW QUIN (laughing derisively). Me, is it? Well, Father Reilly has cuteness to divide you now. (She pulls CHRISTY up) There's great temptation in a man did slay his da, and we'd best be going, young fellow; so rise up and come with me.

PEGEEN (seizing his arm). He'll not stir. He's pot-boy in this place, and I'll not have him stolen off and kidnaped while himself's abroad.

CHRISTY registers broad grin. Puts foot on bench. Cups chin in hand with elbow resting on knee. Shifts to watch argument.

WIDOW QUIN. It'd be a crazy pot-boy'd lodge him in the shebeen where he works by day, so you'd have a right to come on, young fellow, till you see my little houseen, a perch off on the rising hill.

PEGEEN. Wait till morning, Christy Mahon. Wait till you lay eyes on her leaky thatch is growing more pasture for her buck goat than her square of fields, and she without a tramp itself to keep in order her place at all.

WIDOW QUIN. When you see me contriving in my little gardens, Christy Mahon, you'll swear the Lord God formed me to be living lone, and that there isn't my match in Mayo for thatching, or mowing, or shearing a sheep.

PEGEEN (with noisy scorn). It's true the Lord God formed you to contrive indeed. Doesn't the world know you reared a black lamb at your own breast, so that the Lord Bishop of Connaught felt the elements of a Christian, and he eating it arter in a kidney stew? Doesn't the world know you've been seen shaving the roxy skipper from France for a threepenny bit and a sop of grass tobacco would wring the liver from a mountain goat you'd meet leaping the hills?

WIDOW QUIN (with amusement). Do you hear her now, young fellow? Do you hear the way she'll be rating at your own self when a week is by?

PEGEEN(to CHRISTY). Don't heed her. Tell her to go into her pigsty and not plague us here.

WIDOW QUIN. I'm going; but he'll come with me.

CHRISTY lets foot slip.  
Looses balance. Face  
registers surprise.  
Turns to Widow. Forces  
smile.

PEGEEN (shaking him). Are you  
dumb, young fellow?

CHRISTY (timidly, to WIDOW QUIN).  
God increase you; but I'm pot-  
boy in this place, and it's here  
I'd liefer stay.

PEGEEN (triumphantly). Now you  
have heard him, and go on from  
this.

WIDOW QUIN (looking round the  
room). It's lonesome this hour  
crossing the hill, and if he  
won't come along with me, I'd  
have a right maybe to stop this  
night with yourselves. Let me  
stretch out on the settle,  
Pegeen Mike; and himself can  
lie by the hearth.

PEGEEN (short and fiercely).  
Faith, I won't. Quit off or I  
will send you now.

CHRISTY's body tenses.  
Turns to Widow as she  
mentions Shawn.

WIDOW QUIN (gathering her  
shawl up.) Well, it's a terror  
to be aged a score. (To CHRISTY)  
God bless you now, young  
fellow, and let you be wary, or  
there's right torment will  
await you here if you go ro-  
mancing with her like, and she  
waiting only, as they bade me  
say, on a sheepskin parchment  
to be wed with Shawn Keogh of  
Killakeen.

Rises abruptly. Crosses  
to bar. Speaks accusingly.

CHRISTY (~~going to Pegeen as she~~  
~~bolts the door~~). What's that  
she's after saying?

PEGEEN. Lies and blather, you've  
no call to mind. Well, isn't  
Shawn Keogh an impudent fellow  
to send up spying on my? Wait  
till I lay hands on him. Let him  
wait, I'm saying.

CHRISTY. And you're not wedding him at all?

PEGEEN. I wouldn't wed him if a bishop came walking for to join us here.

CHRISTY. That God in glory may be thanked for that.

PEGEEN. There's your bed now. I've put a quilt upon you I'm after quilting a while since with my own two hands, and you'd best stretch out now for your sleep, and may God give you a good rest till I call you in the morning when the cocks will crow.

CHRISTY (as she goes to inner room). May God and Mary and St. Patrick bless you and reward you, for your kindly talk. (She shuts the door behind her. He settles his bed slowly, feeling the quilt with immense satisfaction) Well, it's a clean bed and soft with it, and it's great luck and company I've won me in the end of time - two fine women fighting for the likes of me - till I'm thinking this night wasn't I a foolish fellow not to kill my father on the years gone by.

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Scene, as before. Brilliant morning light. CHRISTY, looking bright and cheerful, is cleaning a girl's boots.

Body relaxes. Speaks with relief. As Pegeen fixes bed, stands at bar. Head lowered. Smiles, hunches shoulders. Arms at side. When bed is prepared, crosses, sits on it. Body tense, hand pulling nervously at shirt. As she goes, looks disappointed. Starts to call, stops.

Shines shoes. Hums happily. Indicates bar. Rise and crosses to bar. Sits on it. Eyes wide. Laughs. Gets down and crosses to bench. Swings shoulders, walks lightly. Stalks around. Chest out, shoulders back. Pantomimes drawing cork and wiping glass. Cross behind bar. Gets basin. Carries it to table. Sees mirror. Turns sideways looking in mirror. Grins. Cross left and gets mirror. Crosses, center looking in mirror. Laughing. Crosses to table. Begins to wash. Quickly dries face. Looks out window. Grins. Crosses hands over chest. Exits, right.

CHRISTY (to himself, counting jugs on dresser). Half a hundred beyond. Ten there. A score that's above. Eight jugs. Six cups and a broken one. Two plates. A power of glasses. Bottles, a school-master'd be hard set to count, and enough in them, I'm thinking, to drunken all the wealth and wisdom of the County Clare. There's her boots now, nice and decent for her evening use, and isn't it grand brushes she has? Well, this'd be a fine place to be my whole life talking out with swearing Christians, in place of my old dogs and cat, and I stalking around, smoking my pipe and drinking my fill, and never a day's work but drawing a cork an odd time, or wiping a glass, or rinsing out a shiny tumbler for a decent man. (~~He takes the looking-glass from the wall and puts it on the back of a chair; then sits down in front of it and begins washing his face~~) Didn't I know rightly I was handsome, though it was the devil's own mirror we had beyond, would twist a squint across an angel's brow; and I'll be growing fine from this day, the way I'll have a soft lovely skin on me and won't be the like of the clumsy young fellows do be ploughing all times in the earth and dung. Is she coming again? Stranger girls. God help me, where'll I hide myself away and my long neck naked to the world? I'd best go to the room maybe till I'm dressed again. (The door is pushed open, and SUSAN BRADY looks in, and knocks on door.)

SUSAN. There's nobody in it.  
(Knocks again.)

NELLY (pushing her in and following her, with HONOR BLAKE and SARA TANSEY). It'd be early for them both to be out walking the hill.

SUSAN. I'm thinking Shawn Keogh was making game of us and there's no such man in it at all.

HONOR (pointing to straw and quilt). Look at that. He's been sleeping there in the night. Well, it'll be a hard case of he's gone off now, the way we'll never set our eyes on a man killed his father, and we after rising early and destroying ourselves running fast on the hill.

NELLY. Are you thinking them's his boots?

SARA (taking them up). If they are, there should be his father's track on them. Did you never read in the paper the way murdered men do bleed and drip?

SUSAN. Is that blood there, Sara Tansey?

SARA (smelling it). That's bog water, I'm thinking, but it's his own they are surely, for I never seen the like of them for whity mud, and red mud, and turf on them, and the fine sands of the sea. That man's been walking, I'm telling you. (She goes down right, putting on one of his boots.)



SUSAN (going to window). Maybe he's stolen off to Belmullet with the boots of Michael James, and you'd have a right so to follow after him, Sara Tansey, and you the one yoked the ass cart and drove ten miles to set your eyes on the man bit the yellow lady's nostril on the northern shore. (She looks out.)

SARA (running to window with one boot on.) Don't be talking, and we fooled to-day. (Putting on other boot) There's a pair do fit me well, and I'll be keeping them for walking to the priest, when you'd be ashamed this place, going up winter and summer with nothing worth while to confess at all.

HONOR (who has been listening at the door). Whisht! there's someone inside the room. (She pushes door a chink open) It's a man.

(Sara kicks off boots and puts them where they were. The all stand in a line looking through chink.)

SARA. I'll call him. Mister! Mister! (He puts in his head) Is Pegeen within?

CHRISTY (coming in as meek as a mouse, with the looking-glass held behind his back). She's above on the cnuceen, seeking the nanny goats, the way she'd have a sup of goat's mild for to colour my tea.

SARA. And asking your pardon, is it you's the man killed his father?

Enters. Stops, hand behind back. Fidgets nervously.





Chuckling.

CHRISTY (sidling toward the nail where the glass was hanging).  
I am, God help me!

SARA (taking eggs she has brought).  
Then my thousand welcomes to you, and I've run up with a brace of duck's eggs for your food to-day. Pegeen's ducks is no use, but these are the real rich sort. Hold out your hand and you'll see it's no lie I'm telling you.

Extends hand. Nods agreeably.

CHRISTY (coming forward shyly, and holding out his left hand).  
They're a great and weighty size.

SUSAN. And I run up with a pat of butter, for it'd be a poor thing to have you eating your spuds dry, and you after running a great way since you did destroy your da.

Smiles. Backs away.

CHRISTY. That you kindly.

HONOR. And I brought you a little cut of cake, for you should have a thin stomach on you, and you that length walking the world.

NELLY. And I brought you a little laying pullet - boiled and all she is - was crushed at the fall of night by the curate's car. Feel the fat of that brest, mister.

Turns head. Looks embarrassed.

CHRISTY. It's bursting, surely. (He feels it with the back of his hand, in which he holds the presents.)

CHRISTY'S shoulders slouch, arms in, turns

SARA. Will you pinch it? Is your right hand too sacred for

away. Pulls mirror away and hides it in front of him.

to use at all? (She slips round behind him) It's a glass he has. Well, I never seen to this day a man with a looking-glass held to his back. Them that kills their fathers is a vain lot surely.

(Girls giggle.)

CHRISTY (smiling innocently and piling presents on glass.) I'm very thankful to you all to-day...

WIDOW QUIN (coming in quickly, at door). Sara Tansey, Susan Brady, Honor Blake! What in glory has you here at this hour of day?

GIRLS (giggling). That's the man killed his father.

WIDOW QUIN (coming to them). I know well it's the man; and I'm after putting him down in the sports below for racing, leaping, pitching, and the Lord know what.

SARA (exuberantly). That's right. Widow Quin. I'll bet my dowry that he'll lick the world.

Hands her mirror quickly. Smiles, wipes hands on pants.

WIDOW QUIN. If you will, you'd have a right to have him fresh and nourished in place of nursing a feast (Taking presents) Are you fasting or fed, young fellow?

Smiles, nods. Bends body slightly. CHRISTY crosses to bench smiling.

CHRISTY. Fasting, if you please.

WIDOW QUIN (loudly). Well, you're the lot. Stir up now and give him his breakfast. (To CHRISTY) Come here to me (she puts him



~~on bench beside her while the~~  
girls make tea and get his  
breakfast) and let you tell  
us your story before Pegeen  
will come, in place of grin-  
ning your ears off like the  
moon of May.

Turns away. Grins

CHRISTY (beginning to be  
pleased). It's a long story;  
you'd be destroyed listening.

CHRISTY lets her pull  
him on to bench.

WIDOW QUIN. Don't be letting  
on to be shy, a fine, gamey,  
treacherous lad the like of  
you. Was it in your house  
beyond you cracked his skull?

Shakes head.

CHRISTY (shy but flattered).  
It was not. We were digging  
spuds in his cold, sloping,  
stony, divil's patch of a  
field.

WIDOW QUIN. And you went ask-  
ing money of him, or making  
talk of getting a wife would  
drive him from his farm?

Shakes head. Imitates  
Mahon. Vocal pitch rises.

CHRISTY. I did not, then; but  
there I was, digging and dig-  
ging, and "You squinting idiot,"  
says he, "let you walk down  
now and tell the priest you'll  
wed the Widow Casey in a score  
of days."

WIDOW QUIN. And what kind was  
she?

Eyes widen. Closes one  
eye. Lifts leg. Laughs.

CHRISTY (with horror). A walk-  
ing terror from beyond the hills,  
and she two score and five years,  
and two hundredweights and five  
pounds in the weighing scales,  
with a limping leg on her, and  
a blinded eye, and she a woman  
of noted misbehavior with the  
old and young.



GIRLS (clustering round him, serving him). Glory be.

WIDOW QUIN. And what did he want driving you to wed with her? (She takes a bit of the chicken.)

Looks angry. Nods and speaks sarcastically.

CHRISTY (eating with growing satisfaction). He was letting on I was wanting a protector from the harshness of the world, and he without a thought the whole while but how he'd have her hut to live in and her gold to drink.

WIDOW QUIN. There's maybe worse than a dry hearth and a widow woman and your glass at night. So you hit him then?

Rises, crosses center. Imitates Mahon's voice. Eyes widen, body tense.

CHRISTY. (getting almost excited). I did not. "I won't wed her," says I, "when all know she did suckle me for six weeks when I came into the world, and she a hag this day with a tongue on her has the crows and seabirds scattered, the way they would cast a shadow on her garden with the dread of her curse."

WIDOW QUIN (teasingly). That one should be right company.

SARA (eagerly). Don't mind her. Did you kill him then?

Glances expectantly at girls. Vocal pitch and rate increases.

CHRISTY. "She's too good for the like of you," says he, "and go on now or I'll flatten you out like a crawling beast has passed under a dray." "You will not if I can help it," says I. "Go on," says he, "or I'll have the divil making garters

FIGURE 3

Act II  
"and he split to the  
knob of the gullet."





of your limbs tonight." "You will not if I can help it," says I. (He sits up, brandishing his mug.)

SARA. You were right surely.

As though seeing the scene, looks fierce, raises arm supposedly holding the loy.

CHRISTY (impressively). With that the sun came out between the cloud and the hill, and it shining green in my face. "God have mercy on your soul," says he, lifting a scythe; "or on your own," says I, raising the loy.

SUSAN. That's a grand story.

HONOR. He tells it lovely.

Imitates swinging scythe. Jumps back. Pantomimes hitting Mahon. Looks smiling and expectant at girls.

CHRISTY (flattered and confident, waving bone). He gave a drive with the scythe, and I gave a lep to the east. Then I turned around with my back to the north, and I hit a blow on the ridge of his skull, laid him stretched out, and he split to the knob of his gullet. (He raises the chicken bone to his Adam's apple.)

GIRLS (together). Well, you're a marvel! Oh, God bless you! You're a lad surely!

CHRISTY stands smiling.

SUSAN. I'm thinking the Lord God sent him this road to make a second husband to the Widow Quin, and she with a great yearning to be wedded, though all dread her here. Lift him on her knee, Sara Tansey.

WIDOW QUIN. Don't tease him.

CHRISTY follows Widow to bench. Sits.  
CHRISTY watches Sarah.  
Smiles at Widow.

SARA (going over to dresser and counter very quickly, and getting two glasses and porter).

You're heroes surely, and let  
 you drink a supeen with your  
 arms linked like the outlandish  
 lovers in the sailor's song.  
 (She links their arms and gives  
 them the glasses) There now.  
 Drink a health to the wonders  
 of the western world, the  
 pirates, preachers, poteen-  
 makers, with the jobbing  
 jockies; parching peelers,  
 and the juries fill their  
 stomachs selling judgments of  
 the English law. (Brandishing  
 the bottle.)

WIDOW QUIN. That's a right  
 toast, Sara Tansey. Now,  
 Christy.

CHRISTY turns to watch  
 Pegeen.

(They drink with their arms  
 linked, he drinking with his  
 left hand, she with her right.  
 As they are drinking, PEGEEN  
 MIKE comes in with a milk can  
 and stands aghast. They all  
 spring away from CHRISTY. ~~he~~  
~~goes down-left.~~ WIDOW QUIN  
~~remains seated.~~)

PEGEEN (angrily, to Sara).  
 What is it you're wanting?

SARA (twisting her apron). An  
 ounce of tobacco.

PEGEEN. Have you tuppence?

SARA. I've forgotten my purse.

PEGEEN. Then you'd best be get-  
 ting it and not fooling us here.  
 (To the WIDOW QUIN, with more  
 elaborate scorn) And what is  
 it you're wanting, Widow Quin?

WIDOW QUIN (insolently). A  
 penn'orth of starch.



PEGEEN (breaking out). And you without a white shift or a shirt in your whole family since the drying of the flood. I've no starch for the like of you, and let you walk on now to Killamuck.

WIDOW QUIN (turning to CHRISTY, as she goes out with the girls). Well, you're mighty huffy this day, Pegeen Mike, and, you young fellow, let you not forget the sports and racing when the noon is by.

(They go out).

CHRISTY rises, crosses to door, then to table. Takes cups. Spills porter on pants as crosses behind bar. Brushes it off, smiling at Pegeen.

PEGEEN (imperiously). Fling out that rubbish and put them cups away. (CHRISTY tidies away in great haste) Snove in the bench by the wall. (He does so) And hang that glass on the nail. What disturbed it at all?

CHRISTY (very meekly). I was making myself decent only, and this a fine country for young lovely girls.

PEGEEN (sharply). Whisht your talking of girls. (Goes to counter - right.)

Frowns. Body crouches. Speaks apologetically.

CHRISTY. Wouldn't any wish to be decent in a place...

PEGEEN. Whisht I'm saying.

Crosses to hearth. Picks up loy. Steps forward. Speaks fiercely.

CHRISTY (looks at her face for a moment with great misgivings, then as a last effort, takes up a loy, and goes towards her, with feigned assurance). It was with a loy the like of that I killed my father.

Body slouches. Crosses  
and sits dejectedly on  
bench.

Turns to Pegeen,  
shoulders hunched.

PEGEEN (still sharply). You've  
told me that story six times  
since the dawn of day.

CHRISTY (reproachfully). It's  
a queer thing you wouldn't care  
to be hearing it and them girls  
after walking four miles to be  
listening to me now.

PEGEEN (turning around  
astonished). Four miles.

CHRISTY (apologetically) Didn't  
himself say there were only  
four bona fides living in  
the place?

PEGEEN. It's bona fides by the  
road they are, but that lot  
came over the river lepping  
the stones. It's not three  
perches when you go like that,  
and I was down this morning  
looking on the papers the  
post-boy does have in his bag.  
(With meaning and emphasis)  
For there was great news this  
day, Christopher Mahon. (She  
goes into room left.)

Leans forward anxiously.

CHRISTY (suspiciously). Is it  
news of my murder?

CHRISTY cringes. Draws  
away from Pegeen. Face  
registers progressive  
fright.

PEGEEN (inside). Murder, indeed.

CHRISTY (loudly). A murdered  
da?

PEGEEN (coming in again and  
crossing right). There was not,  
but a story filled half a page  
of the hanging of a man. Ah,  
that should be a fearful end,  
young fellow, and it worst of  
all for a man who destroyed his  
da, for the like of him would  
get small mercies, and when



it's dead he is, they'd put him in a narrow grave, with cheap sacking wrapping him round, and pour down quicklime on his head, the way you'd see a woman pouring any frish-frash from a cup.

Turns to Pegeen. Leans forward. Speaks tearfully.

CHRISTY (very miserably). Oh, God help me. Are you thinking I'm safe? You were saying at the fall of night, I was shut of jeopardy and I here with yourselves.

PEGEEN (severely). You'll be shut of jeopardy in no place if you go talking with a pack of wild girls the like of them do be walking abroad with the peelers, talking whispers at the fall of night.

Draws back.

CHRISTY (with terror). And you're thinking they'd tell?

PEGEEN (with mock sympathy). Who knows, God help you.

Leans forward. Volume rises.

CHRISTY (loudly). What joy would they have to bring hanging to the likes of me?

PEGEEN. It's queer joys they have, and who knows the thing they'd do, if it'd make the green stones cry itself to think of you swaying and swiggling at the butt of a rope, and you with a fine, stout neck, God bless you! the way you'd be a half an hour, in great anguish, getting your death.

Hurriedly put on boots. Crosses to door.

CHRISTY (getting his boots and putting them on). If there's that terror of them, it'd be best, maybe, I went on wandering



like Esau or Cain and Abel on the sides of Neifin or the Erris plain.

PEGREEN (beginning to play with him). It would, maybe, for I've heard the Circuit Judges this place is a heartless crew.

Opens door, stops. Turns to Pegeen.

CHRISTY (bitterly). It's more than Judges this place is a heartless crew. (Looking up at her) And isn't it a poor thing to be starting again and I a lonesome fellow will be looking out on women and girls the way the needy fallen spirits do be looking on the Lord?

PEGREEN. What call have you to be that lonesome when there's poor girls walking Mayo in their thousands now?

Leans head on door. Crosses to bar. Leans forward. Arm points to door. Then lowers pitch. Indicates heart.

CHRISTY (grimly). It's well you know what call I have. It's well you know it's a lonesome thing to be passing small towns with the lights shining sideways when the night is down, or going in strange places with a dog noising before you and a dog noising behind, or drawn to the cities where you'd hear a voice kissing and talking deep love in every shadow of the ditch, and you passing on with an empty, hungry stomach failing from your heart.

PEGREEN. I'm thinking you're an odd man, Christy Mahon. The oddest walking fellow I ever set my eyes on to this hour to-day.

Eyebrows raised.

CHRISTY. What would any be but odd men and they living lonesome in the world?



Smiling, leans on bar.  
 Gestures to indicate  
 children.

PEGREEN. I'm not odd, and I'm my  
 whole life with my father only.

CHRISTY (with infinite admiration). How would a lovely  
 handsome woman the like of  
 you be lonesome when all men  
 should be thronging around  
 to hear the sweetness of your  
 voice, and the little infant  
 children should be pestering  
 your steps I'm thinking, and  
 you walking the roads.

PEGREEN. I'm hard set to know  
 what way a coaxing fellow the  
 like of yourself should be  
 lonesome either.

Frowns.

CHRISTY. Coaxing?

PEGREEN. Would you have me  
 think a man never talked with  
 the girls would have the words  
 you've spoken to-day? It's  
 only letting on you are to be  
 lonesome, the way you'd get  
 around me now.

Turns away.

CHRISTY. I wish to God I was  
 letting on; but I was lonesome  
 all times, and born lonesome,  
 I'm thinking, as the moon of  
 dawn. (Going to door.)

PEGREEN (puzzled by his talk).  
 Well, it's a story I'm not  
 understanding at all why you'd  
 be worse than another, Christy  
 Mahon, and you a fine lad with  
 the great savagery to destroy  
 your da.

Speaks piteously. Crosses  
 to door. Hesitates in  
 doorway.

CHRISTY. It's little I'm under-  
 standing myself, saving only  
 that my heart's scalded this  
 day, and I am going off stretch-  
 ing out the earth between us,  
 the way I'll not be waking near

you another dawn of the year  
till the two of us do arise  
to hope or judgment with the  
saints of God, and now I'd  
best be going with my wattle  
in my hand, for hanging is  
a poor thing (turning to go),  
and it's little welcome only is  
left me in this house to-day.

PEGEEN (sharply). Christy!  
(He turns round) Come here to  
me. (he goes towards her) Lay  
down that switch and throw  
some sods on the fire. You're  
pot-boy in this place, and  
I'll not have you mitch off  
from us now.

Crosses to hearth, puts  
on wood.

CHRISTY turning head to  
Pegeen smiles.

CHRISTY. You were saying I'd  
be hanged if I stay.

PEGEEN (quite kindly at last).  
I'm after going down and  
reading the fearful crimes of  
Ireland for two weeks or three,  
and there wasn't a word of  
your murder. (Getting up and  
going over to counter) They've  
likely not found the body.  
You're safe so with ourselves.

Rises, sits on bench.  
Speaks joyfully.

CHRISTY (astonished, slowly).  
It's making game of me you were  
(~~following her with fearful joy~~),  
and I can stay so, working at  
your side, and I not lonesome  
from this mortal day.

PEGEEN. What's to hinder you  
from staying, except the widow  
woman or the young girls would  
inveigle you off?

Looks at Pegeen. Pitch  
lowers.

CHRISTY (with rapture). And  
I'll have your words from this  
day filling my ears, and that  
look is come upon you meeting  
my two eyes, and I watching



you loafing around in the warm sun, or rinsing your ankles when the night is come.

PEGEEN (kindly, but a little embarrassed). I'm thinking you'll be loyal young lad to have working around, and if you fexed me a while since with your leaguering with the girls, I wouldn't give a thraneen for a lad hadn't a mighty spirit in him and a gamey heart.

CHRISTY about to kiss Pegeen as Shawn and Widow enter.

(SHAWN KEOGH runs in carrying a cleave on his back, followed by the WIDOW QUIN.)

SHAWN (to PEGEEN). I was passing below, and I seen your mountainy sheep eating cabbages in Jimmy's field. Run up or they'll be bursting surely.

PEGEEN. Oh, God mend them! (She puts a shawl over her head and runs out.)

Rises. Crosses to door.

CHRISTY (looking from one to the other. Still in high spirits). I'd best go to her aid maybe. I'm handy with ewes.

CHRISTY follows Widow down right.

WIDOW QUIN (closing the door). She can do that much, and there is Shaneen has long speeches for to tell you now. (She sits down with an amused smile.)

SHAWN (taking something from his pocket and offering it to CHRISTY). Do you see that, mister?

Examines ticket.

CHRISTY (looking at it). The half of a ticket to the Western States!



CHRISTY takes clothes.

SHAWN (trembling with anxiety)  
I'll give it to you and my new  
hat (pulling it out of hamper);  
and my breeches with the double  
seat (pulling it off); and my  
new coat is woven from the  
blackest shearings for three  
miles around (giving him the  
coat); I'll give you the whole  
of them, and my blessing, and  
the blessing of Father Reilly  
itself, maybe, if you'll quit  
from this and leave us in the  
peace we had till last night  
at the fall of dark.

Turns away. Looks over  
shoulder.

CHRISTY (with a new arrogance).  
And for what is it you're want-  
ing to get shut of me?

CHRISTY turns to Shawn.

SHAWN (looking to the WIDOW for  
help). I'm a poor scholar with  
middling faculties to coin a  
lie, so I'll tell you the truth,  
Christy Mahon. I'm wedding with  
Pegeen beyond, and I don't  
think well of having a clever  
fearless man the like of you  
dwelling in her house.

Raises eyebrows, widens  
eyes, raises pitch.  
Steps forward.

CHRISTY (almost pugnaciously).  
And you'd be using bribery for  
to banish me?

SHAWN ( in an imploring voice).  
Let you not take it badly, mister  
honey, isn't beyond the best  
place for you where you'll have  
golden chains and shiny coats  
and you riding upon hunters  
with the ladies of the land. (He  
makes an eager sign to the  
WIDOW QUIN to come to help him.)

CHRISTY turns to Widow.

WIDOW QUIN (coming over). It's  
true for him, and you'd best  
quit off and not have that  
poor girl setting her mind on  
you, for there's Shaneen thinks



she wouldn't suit you though  
all is saying that she'll  
wed you now.

(CHRISTY beams with delight.)

CHRISTY turns to  
Shawn. Frowns.

SHAWN (in terrified earnest).  
She wouldn't suit you, and  
she with the devil's own temper  
the way you'd be strangling  
one another in a score of days.  
(He makes the movement of  
strangling with his hands).  
It's the like of me only that  
she's fit for, a quiet simple  
fellow wouldn't raise a hand  
upon her if she scratched it-  
self.

CHRISTY takes clothes  
while Widow sets hat on  
his head.

WIDOW QUIN (putting SHAWN'S  
hat on CHRISTY). Fit them  
clothes on you anyhow, young  
fellow, and he'd maybe loan  
them to you for the sports.  
(Pushing him towards inner  
door) Fit them on and you  
can give your answer when you  
have them tried.

Grins. Flippantly ticks  
hat. Jauntily exits.

CHRISTY (beaming, delighted  
with the clothes). I will then.  
I'd like herself to see me in  
them tweeds and hat. (He goes  
into room and shuts the door.)

SHAWN (in great anxiety). He'd  
like herself to see them.  
He'll not leave us, Widow Quin.  
He's a score of devils in him  
the way it's well nigh certain  
he will wed Pegeen.

WIDOW QUIN (jeeringly). It's  
true all girls are fond of  
courage and do hate the like  
of you.

SHAWN (walking about in des-  
peration). Oh, Widow Quin,

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

WIDOW QUIN. A ewe's a small thing, but what would you give me if I did wed him and did save you so?

SHAWN (with astonishment).  
You?

WIDOW QUIN. Aye. Would you give me the red cow you have and the mountainy ram, and the right of way across your rye path, and a load of dung at Michaelmas, and turbary upon the western hill?

SHAWN (radiant with hope). I would surely, and I'd give you the wedding-ring I have, and the loan of a new suit, the way you'd have him decent on the wedding-day. I'd give you two kids for your dinner, and a gallon of poteen, and I'd call the piper on the long car to your wedding from Crossmolina or from Ballina. I'd give you...

WIDOW QUIN. That'll do so,  
and let you whisht, for he's  
coming now again.

CHRISTY enters. Grins  
expectantly.

(CHRISTY comes in very  
natty in the new clothes.  
WIDOW QUIN goes to him  
admiringly.)

WIDOW QUIN. If you seen your-  
self now, I'm thinking you'd  
be too proud to speak to us  
at all, and it'd be a pity  
surely to have your like  
sailing from Mayo to the  
Western World.

Straightens body. Grins.  
Crosses haughtily to  
hearth.

CHRISTY (proud as a peacock).  
I'm not going. If this is a  
poor place itself, I'll make  
myself contented to be  
lodging here.

(WIDOW QUIN makes a sign  
to SHAWN to leave them.)

SHAWN. Well, I'm going mea-  
suring the race course while  
the tide is low, so I'll leave  
you the garments and my blessing  
for the sports to-day. God  
bless you! (He wriggles out.)

WIDOW QUIN (admiring CHRISTY).  
Well, you're mighty spruce,  
young fellow. Sit down now  
while you're quiet till you  
talk with me.

Adjusts coat. Crosses  
to door.

CHRISTY (swaggering). I'm  
going abroad on the hillside  
for to seek Pegeen.

WIDOW QUIN. You'll have time  
and plenty for to seek Pegeen,  
and you heard me saying at  
the fall of night the two of  
us should be great company.

Pats Widow on arm. Eyes widen, grins. Looks off into space. Crosses to door. Stops.-

CHRISTY. From this out I'll have no want of company when all sorts is bringing me their food and clothing (he swaggers to the door, tightening his belt), the way they'd set their eyes upon a gallant orphan cleft his father with one blow to the breeches belt. (He opens door, then staggers back) Saints of glory! Holy angels from the throne of light!

WIDOW QUIN (going over). What ails you?

Points out of door.

CHRISTY. It's the walking spirit of my murdered da?

WIDOW QUIN (looking out). Is it that tramper?

Screams wildly. Jumps quickly behind door.

CHRISTY (wildly). Where'll I hide my poor body from that ghost of hell?

(The door is pushed open, and old Mahon appears on threshold. CHRISTY darts in behind door.)

CHRISTY stands still. Face registers terror.

WIDOW QUIN (in great amusement). God save you, my poor man.

MAHON (gruffly). Did you see a young lad passing this way in the early morning or the fall of night?

WIDOW QUIN. You're a queer kind to walk in not saluting at all.

MAHON. Did you see the young lad?

WIDOW QUIN (stiffly). What kind was he?

MAHON. An ugly young streeler with a murderous gob on him, and a little switch in his hand. I met a tramper seen him coming this way at the fall of night.

WIDOW QUIN. There's harvest hundreds do be passing these days for the Sligo boat. For what is it you're wanting him, my poor man?

MAHON. I want to destroy him for breaking the head on me with the clout of a loy. (he takes off a big hat, and shows his head in a mass of bandages and plaster, with some pride) It was he did that, and amn't I a great wonder to think I've traced him ten days with that rent in my crown?

WIDOW QUIN (taking his head in both hands and examining it with extreme delight). That was a great blow. And who hit you? A robber maybe?

MAHON. It was my own son hit me, and he the divil a robber, or anything else, but a dirty, stuttering lout.

CHRISTY during next speeches, shows amusement.

WIDOW QUIN (letting go his skull and wiping her hands in her apron). You'd best be wary of a mortified scalp, I think they call it, lepping around with that wound in the splendour of the sun. It was a bad blow surely, and you should have vexed him fearful to make him strike that gash in his da.

MAHON. Is it me?

WIDOW QUIN (amusing herself).  
Aye. And isn't it a great  
shame when the old and hardened  
do torment the young?

MAHON (raging). Torment him is  
it? And I after holding out  
with the patience of a martyred  
saint till there's nothing but  
destruction on, and I'm driven  
out in my old age with none to  
aid me.

WIDOW QUIN (greatly amused).  
It's a sacred wonder the way  
that wickedness will spoil  
a man.

CHRISTY snickers.  
Covers mouth with  
hand.

MAHON. My wickedness, is it?  
Amn't I after saying it is  
himself has me destroyed, and  
he a liar on walls, a talker  
of folly, a man you'd see  
stretched the half of the day  
in the brown ferns with his  
belly to the sun.

WIDOW QUIN. Not working at  
all?

MAHON. The divil a work, or  
if he did itself, you'd see  
him raising up a haystack like  
the stalk of a rush, or driving  
our last cow till he broke her  
leg at the hip, and when he  
wasn't at that he'd be fooling  
over little birds he had -  
finches and felts - or making  
mugs at his own self in the  
bit of a glass we had hung on  
the wall.

WIDOW QUIN (looking at CHRISTY).  
What way was he so foolish? It  
was running wild after the girls  
maybe?

CHRISTY shows anger.

MAHON (with a shout of derision).  
Running wild, is it? If he seen  
a red petticoat coming swinging  
over the hill, he'd be off to  
hide in the sticks, and you'd  
see him shooting out his sheep's  
eyes between the little twigs  
and the leaves, and his two  
ears rising like a hare looking  
out through a gap. Girls,  
indeed!

WIDOW QUIN. It was drink  
maybe?

MAHON. And he a poor fellow  
would get drunk on the smell  
of a pint. He'd a queer rotten  
stomach, I'm telling you, and  
when I gave him three pulls  
from my pipe a while since, he  
was taken with contortions till  
I had to send him in the ass  
cart to the females' nurse.

WIDOW QUIN (clasping her hands).  
Well, I never till this day  
heard tell of a man the like of  
that!

CHRISTY'S body tense,  
face expresses rage.  
Bites lips. Clenches  
fists.

MAHON. I'd take a mighty oath  
you didn't surely, and wasn't  
he the laughing joke of every  
female woman where four baronies  
meet, the way the girls would  
stop their weeding if they  
seen him coming the road to  
let a roar at him, and call  
him the looney of Mahon's.

WIDOW QUIN. I'd give the world  
and all to see the like of him.  
What kind was he?

MAHON. A small low fellow.

WIDOW QUIN. And dark?

MAHON. Dark and dirty.





CHRISTY starts violently,  
leans forward, looks  
pleadingly at Widow.

WIDOW QUIN (considering.) I'm  
thinking I seen him.

MAHON (eagerly). An ugly young  
blackguard.

WIDOW QUIN. A hideous, fearful  
villain, and the spit of you.

MAHON. What way is he fled?

CHRISTY breathes sigh  
of relief. Body relaxes.

WIDOW QUIN. Gone over the hills  
to catch a coasting steamer to  
the north or south.

MAHON. Could I pull up on him  
now?

WIDOW QUIN. If you'll cross the  
sands below where the tide is  
out, you'll be in it as soon  
as himself, for he had to go  
round ten miles by the top of  
the bay. (She points to the  
door) Strike down by the head  
beyond and then follow on the  
roadway to the north and east.

(MAHON goes abruptly.)

CHRISTY looks out from  
behind door. Face shows  
anger.

WIDOW QUIN (shouting after him).  
Let you give him a good vengeance  
when you come up with him, but  
don't put yourself in the power  
of the law, for it'd be a poor  
thing to see a judge in his  
black cap reading out his sen-  
tence on a civil warrior the  
like of you. (She swings the door  
to and looks at CHRISTY, who is  
cowering in terror, for a mo-  
ment, then she bursts into a  
laugh.)

WIDOW QUIN. Well, you're the  
walking Playboy of the Western  
World, and that's the poor man  
you had divided to his breeches  
belt.



Steps out. Points out  
of door.

CHRISTY (~~looking out; then, to  
her~~). What'll Pegeen say when  
she hears that story? What'll  
she be saying to me now?

WIDOW QUIN. She'll knock the  
head of you, I'm thinking, and  
drive you from the door. God  
help her to be taking you for  
a wonder, and you a little  
schemer making up the story  
you destroyed your da.

Cross end of bar. Speaks  
angrily. Cross back  
center.

CHRISTY (~~turning to the door,  
nearly speechless with rage,  
half to himself~~). To be let-  
ting on he was dead, and com-  
ing back to his life, and  
following after me like an  
old weasel tracing a rat, and  
coming in here laying desola-  
tion between my own self and  
the fine women of Ireland,  
and he a kind of carcase that  
you'd fling upon the sea...

WIDOW QUIN (more soberly).  
There's talking for a man's  
one only son.

Screaming with rage.  
Points to tooth. Points  
to eye. Limps to Widow.  
Cross to door. Then to  
bar. Cries.

CHRISTY (breaking out). His  
one son, is it? May I meet him  
with one tooth and it aching,  
and one eye to be seeing seven  
and seventy devils in the  
twists of the road, and one old  
timber leg on him to limp into  
the scalding grave. (Looking  
out) There he is now crossing  
the strands, and that the Lord  
God would send a high wave to  
wash him from the world.

WIDOW QUIN (scandalized). Have  
you no shame? (Putting her hand  
on his shoulder and turning him  
round) What ails you? Near  
crying, is it?

Pulls hat off. Leans on bar.

CHRISTY (in despair and grief).  
Amn't I after seeing the love-  
light of the star of knowledge  
shining from her brow, and hear-  
ing words would put you think-  
ing on the holy Brigid speak-  
ing to the infant saints, and  
now she'll be turning again,  
and speaking hard words to me,  
like an old woman with a  
spavindy ass she'd have,  
urging on a hill.

WIDOW QUIN. There's poetry  
talk for a girl you'd see  
itching and scratching, and  
she with a stale stink of  
poteen on her from selling in  
the shop.

Wheels to face Widow.  
Words clipped and  
evenly spaced. Leans  
forward. Body tense.

CHRISTY (impatiently). It's her  
like is fitted to be handling  
merchandise in the heavens  
above, and what'll I be doing  
now, I ask you, and I a kind  
of wonder was jilted by the  
heavens when a day was by.

Turns crosses to  
down stage end of bar.

(There is a distant noise of  
girls' voices. WIDOW QUIN looks  
from window and comes to him,  
hurriedly.)

WIDOW QUIN. You'll be doing  
like myself, I'm thinking, when  
I did destroy my man, for I'm  
above many's the day, odd times  
in great spirits, abroad in  
the sunshine, darning a stocking  
or stitching a shift; and odd  
times again looking out on the  
schooners, hookers, trawlers  
is sailing the sea, and I think-  
ing on the gallant hairy fellows  
are drifting beyond, and myself  
long years living alone.

Turns to Widow.

CHRISTY (interested). You're like  
me, so.

WIDOW QUIN. I am your like, and it's for that I'm taking a fancy to you, and I with my little houseen above where there'd by myself to tend you, and none to ask were you a murderer or what at all.

CHRISTY. And what would I be doing if I left Pegeen.

WIDOW QUIN. 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 curragh 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, and it's there yourself and me will have great times whispering and hugging...

VOICES (outside, calling far away). CHRISTY! Christy Mahon! Christy!

Looks at door. Steps back.

CHRISTY. Is it Pegeen Mike?

WIDOW QUIN. It's the young girls, I'm thinking, coming to bring you to the sports below, and what is it you'll have me to tell them now?

Crosses to Widow. Extends hands towards her. Speaks pleadingly. Pitch rises. Rate increases.

CHRISTY. Aid me for to win Pegeen. It's herself only that I'm seeking now. (WIDOW QUIN gets up and goes to window) Aid me for to win her, and I'll be asking God to stretch a hand to you in the hour of death, and lead you short cuts through the Meadows of Ease, and up the floor of Heaven to the Footstool of the Virgin's Son.

WIDOW QUIN. There's praying.

VOICES (nearer). Christy!  
Christy Mahon!

Grasps Widow's arm.

CHRISTY (with agitation).  
They're coming. Will you  
swear to aid and save me for  
the love of Christ?

WIDOW QUIN (looks at him for  
a moment). If I aid you, will  
you swear to give me a right  
of way I want, and a mountainy  
ram, and a load of dung at  
Michaelmas, the time that  
you'll be master here?

Clasps hands as if  
praying.

CHRISTY. I will, by the  
elements and stars of night.

WIDOW QUIN. Then we'll not say  
a word of the old fellow, the  
way Pegeen won't know your  
story till the end of time.

Crosses right. Speaks  
apprehensively.

CHRISTY. And if he chances to  
return again?

WIDOW QUIN. We'll swear he's a  
maniac and not your da. I could  
take an oath I seen him raving  
on the sands to-day.

(Girls run in.)

SUSAN. Com on to the sports  
below. Pegeen says you're to  
come.

SARA TANSEY. The lepping's  
beginning, and we've a jockey's  
suit to fit upon you for the  
mule race on the sands below.

HONOR. Come on, will you?

CHRISTY. I will then if Pegeen's  
beyond.

SARA TANSEY. She's in the  
boreen making game of Shaneen  
Keogh.

Speaks angrily. Exits  
through door.

CHRISTY. Then I'll be going  
to her now. (He runs out  
followed by the girls.)

WIDOW QUIN. Well, if the worst  
comes in the end of all, it'll  
be great game to see there's  
none to pity him but a widow  
woman, the like of me, has  
buried her children and  
destroyed her man. (She goes  
out.)

#### CURTAIN

#### ACT THREE

SCENE, as before. Later in the  
day. JIMMY comes in, slightly  
drunk.

JIMMY (calls). Pegeen! (Crosses  
to inner door) Pegeen Mike!  
(Comes back again into the room)  
Pegeen! (PHILLY comes in in  
the same state) (To PHILLY) Did  
you see herself?

PHILLY. I did not; but I sent  
Shawn Keogh with the ass cart  
for to bear him home. (Trying  
cupboards which are locked)  
Well, isn't he a nasty man to  
get into such staggers at a  
morning wake? and isn't her-  
self the divil's daughter for  
locking, and she so fussy  
after that young gaffer, you  
might take your death with  
drought and none to heed you?

JIMMY. It's little wonder she'd  
be fussy, and he after bring-  
ing bankrupt ruin on the rou-  
lette man, and the trick-o'-  
the-loop man, and breaking

the nose of the cockshot-man,  
and winning all in the sports  
below, racing, lepping,  
dancing, and the Lord knows  
what! He's right luck, I'm  
telling you.

PHILLY. If he has, he'll be  
rightly hoboed yet, and he  
not able to say ten words  
without making a brag of the  
way he killed his father, and  
the great blow he hit with  
the loy.

JIMMY. A man can't hang by  
his own informing, and his  
father should be rotten by  
now.

(OLD MAHON passes window  
slowly.)

PHILLY. Supposing a man's  
digging spuds in that field  
with a long spade, and  
supposing he flings up the  
two halves of that skull,  
what'll be said then in the  
papers and the courts of law?

JIMMY. They'd say it was an old  
Dane, maybe, was drowned in  
the flood. (OLD MAHON comes in  
and sits down near door listen-  
ing) Did you never hear tell  
of the skulls they have in the  
city of Dublin, ranged out  
like blue jugs in a cabin of  
Connaught?

PHILLY. And you believe that?

JIMMY (pugnaciously). Didn't a  
lad see them and he after com-  
ing from harvesting in the Liver-  
pool boat? "They have them there,"  
says he, "making a show of the



great people there was one time walking the world. White skulls and black skulls and yellow skulls, and some full teeth, and some haven't only but one."

PHILLY. It was no lie, maybe, for when I was a young lad there was a graveyard beyond the house with the remnants of a man who had thighs as long as your arm. He was a horrid man, I'm telling you, and there was many a fine Sunday I'd put him together for fun, and he with shiny bones, you wouldn't meet the like of these days in the cities of the world.

MAHON (getting up). You wouldn't, is it? Lay your eyes on that skull, and tell me where and when there was another the like of it, is splintered only from the blow of a loy.

PHILLY. Glory be to God! And who hit you at all?

MAHON (triumphantly). It was my own son hit me. Would you believe that?

JIMMY. Well, there's wonders hidden in the heart of man!

PHILLY (suspiciously). And what way was it done?

MAHON (wandering about the room). I'm after walking hundreds and long scores of miles, winning clean beds and the fill of my belly four times in the day, and I doing nothing but telling stories of that naked truth. (He comes to them a little aggressively)



Give me a supeen and I'll tell you now.

(WIDOW QUIN comes in and stands aghast behind him. He is facing JIMMY and PHILLY, who are on the left.)

JIMMY. Ask herself beyond. She's the stuff hidden in her shawl.

WIDOW QUIN (coming to MAHON quickly). You here, is it? You didn't go far at all?

MAHON. I seen the coasting steamer passing, and I got a drought upon me and a cramping leg, so I said, "The divil go along with him," and turned again. (Looking under her shawl) And let you give me a supeen, for I'm destroyed travelling since Tuesday was a week.

WIDOW QUIN (getting a glass, in a cajoling tone). Sit down then by the fire and take your ease for a space. You've a right to be destroyed indeed, with your walking, and fighting, and facing the sun (giving him poteen from a stone jar she has brought in). There now is a drink for you, and may it be to your happiness and length of life.

MAHON (taking glass greedily and sitting down by the fire). God increase you!

WIDOW QUIN (taking men to the right stealthily). Do you know what? That man's raving from his wound to-day, for I met him a while since telling a rambling tale of a tinker had him destroyed.

Then he heard of Christy's deed, and he up and says it was his son had cracked his skull. O isn't madness a fright, for he'll go killing someone yet, and he thinking it's the man has struck him so?

JIMMY (entirely convinced). It's a fright, surely. I knew a party was kicked in the head by a red mare, and he went killing horses a great while, till he eat the insides of a clock and died after.

PHILLY (with suspicion). Did he see Christy?

WIDOW QUIN. He didn't. (With a warning gesture) Let you not be putting him in mind of him, or you'll be likely summoned of there's murder done. (looking round at MAHON) Whisht! He's listening. Wait now till you hear me taking him easy and unravelling all. (She goes to MAHON) And what way are you feeling, mister? Are you in contentment now?

MAHON (slightly emotional from his drink). I'm poorly only, for it's a hard story the way I'm left to-day, when it was I did tend him from his hour of birth, and he a dunce never reached his second book, the way he'd come from school, many's the day, with his legs lamed under him, and he blackened with his beatings like a tinker's ass. It's a hard story, I'm saying, the way some do have their next and nighest raising up a hand of murder on them, and some is lonesome getting their death with lamentation

in the dead of night.

WIDOW QUIN (not knowing what to say). To hear you talking so quiet, who'd know you were the same fellow we seen pass to-day?

MAHON. I'm the same surely. The wrack and ruin of three score years; and it's a terror to live that length, I tell you, and to have your sons going to the dogs against you, and you wore out scolding them, and skelping them, and God knows what.

PHILLY (to JIMMY). He's not raving. (To WIDOW QUIN) Will you ask him what kind was his son?

WIDOW QUIN (to MAHON, with a peculiar look). Was your son that hit you a lad of one year and a score maybe, a great hand at racing and lepping and licking the world?

MAHON (turning on her with a roar of rage). Didn't you hear me say he was the fool of men, the way from this out he'll know the orphan's lot with old and young making game of him and they swearing, raging, kicking at him like a mangy cur.

(A great burst of cheering outside, some way off.)

MAHON (putting his hands to his ears). What in the name of God do they want roaring below?

WIDOW QUIN (with a shade of a smile). They're cheering a young lad, the champion Playboy of the Western World.

(More cheering.)

MAHON (going to window). It'd split my heart to hear them, and I with pulses in my brain-pan for a week gone by. Is it racing they are?

JIMMY (looking from door). It is then. They are mounting him for the mule race will be run upon the sands. That's the playboy on the winkered mule.

MAHON (puzzled). That lad, is it? If you said it was a fool he was, I'd have laid a mighty oath he was the likeness of my wandering son (uneasily, putting his hand to his head). Faith, I'm thinking I'll go walking for to view the race.

WIDOW QUIN (stopping him, sharply). You will not. You'd best take the road to Belmullet, and not be dilly-dallying in this place where there isn't a spot you could sleep.

PHILLY (coming forward). Don't mind her. Mount there on the bench and you'll have a view of the whole. They're hurrying before the tide will rise, and it'd be near over if you went down the pathway through the crags below.

MAHON (mounts on bench, WIDOW QUIN beside him). That's a right view again the edge of the sea. They're coming now from the point. He's leading. Who is he at all?

WIDOW QUIN. He's the champion of the world, I tell you and

there isn't a hop'orth isn't  
falling lucky to his hands  
to-day.

PHILLY (looking out, interested  
in the race). Look at that.  
They're pressing him now.

JIMMY. He'll win it yet.

PHILLY. Take your time, Jimmy  
Farrell. It's too soon to say.

WIDOW QUIN (shouting). Watch  
him taking the gate. There's  
riding.

JIMMY (cheering). More power  
to the young lad!

MAHON. He's passing the third.

JIMMY. He'll lick them yet!

WIDOW QUIN. He'd lick them if  
he was running races with a  
score itself.

MAHON. Look at the mule he has,  
kicking the stars...

WIDOW QUIN. There was a lep!  
(Catching hold of MAHON in her  
excitement) He's fallen! He's  
mounted again! Faith, he's  
passing them all!

JIMMY. Look at him skelping her!

PHILLY. And the mountain girls  
hooshing him on!

JIMMY. It's the last turn! The  
post's cleared for them now!

MAHON. Look at the narrow place.  
He'll be into the bogs! (With  
a yell) Good rider! He's  
through it again!

JIMMY. He's neck and neck!

MAHON. Good boy to him!  
Flames, but he's in!

(Great cheering, in which  
all join.)

MAHON (with hesitation). What's  
that? They're raising him up.  
They're coming this way. (With  
a roar of rage and astonish-  
ment) It's Christy! by the  
stars of God! I'd know his way  
of spitting and he astride  
the moon.

(He jumps down and makes for  
the door, but WIDOW QUIN  
catches him and pulls him back.)

WIDOW QUIN. Stay quiet, will you.  
That's not your son. (To JIMMY)  
Stop him, or you'll get a month  
for the abetting of manslaughter  
and be fined as well.

JIMMY. I'll hold him.

MAHON (struggling). Let me  
out! Let me out, the lot of  
you! till I have my vengeance  
on his head to-day.

WIDOW QUIN (shaking him  
vehemently). That's not your  
son. That's a man is going to  
make a marriage with the  
daughter of this house, a place  
with fine trade, with a license,  
and with poteen too.

MAHON (amazed). That man  
marrying a decent and moneyed  
girl! Is it mad yous are? Is it  
in a crazy-house for females  
that I'm landed now?

WIDOW QUIN. It's mad yourself



with the blow upon your head.  
That lad is the wonder of the  
Western World.

MAHON. I seen it's my son.

WIDOW QUIN. You seen that you're  
mad. (Cheering outside) Do you  
hear them cheering him in the  
zig-zags of the road? Aren't  
you after saying that your  
son's a fool, and how would  
they be cheering a true idiot  
born?

MAHON (getting distressed).  
It's maybe out of reason that  
that man's himself. (Cheering  
again) There's none surely will  
go cheering him. Oh, I'm  
raving with a madness that  
would fright the world! (He  
sits down with his hand to his  
head) There was one time I  
seen ten scarlet divils let-  
ting on they'd cork my spirit  
in a gallon can; and one time  
I seen rats as big as badgers  
sucking the life blood from  
the butt of my lug; but I  
never till this day confused  
that dribbling idiot with a  
likely man. I'm destroyed  
surely.

WIDOW QUIN. And who'd wonder  
when it's your brain-pan that  
is gaping now?

MAHON. Then the blight of the  
sacred drought upon myself and  
him, for I never went mad to  
this day, and I not three weeks  
with the Limerick girls drink-  
ing myself silly, and parlatie  
from the dusk to dawn. (To  
WIDOW QUIN, suddenly) Is my  
visage astray?

WIDOW QUIN. It is then. You're a sniggering maniac, a child could see.

MAHON (getting up more cheerfully). Then I'd best be going to the union beyond, and there'll be a welcome before me, I tell you (with great pride), and I a terrible and fearful case, the way that there I was one time, screeching in a straitened waistcoat, with seven doctors writing out my sayings in a printed book. Would you believe that?

WIDOW QUIN. If you're a wonder itself, you'd best be hasty, for them lads caught a maniac one time and pelted the poor creature till he ran out, raving and foaming, and was drowned in the sea.

MAHON (with philosophy). It's true mankind is the devil when your head's astray. Let me out now and I'll slip down the breen, and not see them so.

WIDOW QUIN. (Showing him out) That's it. Run to the right, and not a one will see.

(He runs off.)

PHILLY (wisely). You're at some gaming, Widow Quin; but I'll walk after him and give him his dinner and a time to rest, and I'll see then if he's raving or as sane as you.

WIDOW QUIN (annoyed). If you go near that lad, let you be wary of your head, I'm saying. Didn't you hear him telling he was crazed at times?



PHILLY. I heard him telling a power; and I'm thinking we'll have right sport, before night will fall. (He goes out.)

JIMMY. Well, Philly's a conceited and foolish man. How could that madman have his senses and his brain-pan slit? I'll go after them and see him turn on Philly now.

(He goes; WIDOW QUIN hides poteen behind counter. Then hubbub outside.)

VOICES. There you are! Good jumper! Grand lepper! Darlint boy! He's the racer! Bear him on, will you!

Crosses left, panting.  
Wipes brow, smiles.

(CHRISTY comes in, in JOCKEY'S dress, with PEGEEN MIKE, SARA, and other girls, and men.)

PEGEEN (to crowd). Go on now and don't destroy him and he drenching with sweat. Go along, I'm saying, and have your tug-of-warring till he's dried his skin.

CROWD. Here's his prizes! A bagpipes! A fiddle was played by a poet in the years gone by! A flat and three-thorned blackthorn would lick the scholars out of Dublin town!

Smiling. Shakes head.  
Eyes wide. Squints.

CHRISTY (taking prizes from the men). Thank you kindly, the lot of you. But you'd say it was little only I did this day if you'd seen me a while since striking my one single blow.

TOWN CRIER (outside, ringing a bell). Take notice, last event of this day! Tug-of-warring on the green below! Come on, the



lot of you! Great achievements for all Mayo men!

PEGEEN. Go on, and leave him for to rest and dry. Go on, I tell you, for he'll do no more. (She hustles crowd out; WIDOW QUIN following them.)

MEN (going) Come on, then. Good luck for the while!

CHRISTY grins at Pegeen. Hands her prizes.

PEGEEN (radiantly, wiping his face with her shawl). Well, you're the lad, and you'll have great times from this out when you could win that wealth of prizes, and you sweating in the heat of noon!

Nods head. Pauses.

CHRISTY (looking at her with delight). I'll have great times if I win the crowning prize I'm seeking now, and that's your promise that you'll wed me in a fortnight, when our banns is called.

PEGEEN (backing away from him). You've right daring to go ask me that, when all knows you'll be starting to some girl in your own townland, when your father's rotten in four months, or five.

Cross center. Stops. Shakes head. Looks into space. Indicates moon. Pitch lowers.

CHRISTY (indignantly). Starting from you, is it? (he follows her) I will not, then, and when the airs is warming in four months, or five, it's then yourself and me should be pacing 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.

CHRISTY'S eyes widen.

PEGEEN (looking at him playfully).



Smiles slightly.

Teasing voice. Crosses to table. Stretches out hands. Laughing, looks at ceiling.

And it's that kind of a poacher's love you'd make, Christy Mahon, on the sides of Neifin, when the night is down?

CHRISTY. 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 in all ages sitting lonesome in his golden chair.

PEGEEN. That'll be right fun, Christy Mahon, and any girl would walk her heart out before she'd meet a young man was your like for eloquence, or talk, at all.

Crosses around table. Lifts Pegeen onto table. Breathing rate increases.

CHRISTY (encouraged). Let you wait, to hear me talking, till we're astray in Erris, when Good Friday's by, drinking a sup from a well, and making mighty kisses with our wetted mouths, or gaming in a gap or sunshine, with yourself stretched back unto your necklace, in the flowers of the earth.

PEGEEN (in a lower voice, moved by his tone). I'd be nice so, is it?

Crosses right. Sits on stool. Holds Pegeen's hand. Grins. Sweep of arm and turn of head to indicate Helen of Troy.

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



PEGEEN (with real tenderness).  
And what is it I have, Christy  
Mahon, to make me fitting  
entertainment for the like of  
you, that has such poet's talk-  
ing, and such bravery of heart?

Pitch lowers. Speaks  
tenderly.

CHRISTY (in a low voice). 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 sal-  
mons in the Owen, or the  
Carrowmore?

CHRISTY frowns.

PEGEEN. If I was your wife, I'd  
be along with you those nights,  
Christy Mahon, the way you'd  
see I was a great hand at  
coaxing bailiffs, or coining  
funny nick-names for the stars  
of night.

Rises. Puts arm around  
her shoulder.

CHRISTY. You, is it? Taking  
your death in the hailstones,  
or in the fogs of dawn.

PEGEEN. Yourself and me would  
shelter easy in a narrow bush,  
(with a qualm of dread) but  
we're only talking, maybe, for  
this would be a poor, thatched  
place to hold a fine lad is  
the like of you.

Rests cheek on her head.  
Caresses hair. Uses  
stage whisper.

CHRISTY (putting his arm around  
her). If I wasn't a good  
Christian, it's on my naked  
knees I'd be saying my prayers  
and paters to every jackstraw  
you have roofing your head,  
and every stony pebble is  
paving the laneway to your door.

Draws slightly away.  
Laughs.

PEGEEN (radiantly). If that's  
the truth, I'll be burning  
candles from this out to the  
miracles of God that have

FIGURE 4

Act III

"and this the first time  
I've heard the like of your voice  
talking sweetly for my own  
delight."



Seated to right of table  
Seated around to right  
left end of table.



brought you from the south  
to-day, and I, with my gowns  
bought ready, the way that  
I can wed you, and not  
wait at all.

Nods head slightly.  
Looks into space.  
Speaks simply.

CHRISTY. It's miracles, and  
that's the truth. Me there  
tolling a long while, and  
walking a long while, not  
knowing at all I was drawing  
all times nearer to this holy  
day.

CHRISTY looks back at  
Pegeen. Laughs.

PEGEEN. And myself, a girl,  
was tempted often to go  
sailing the seas till I'd  
marry a Jew-man, with ten kegs  
of gold, and I not knowing at  
all there was the like of you  
drawing nearer, like the stars  
of God.

Crosses upstage end  
of table. Sits. Laughs.  
Then lowers pitch.

CHRISTY. And to think I'm long  
years hearing women talking  
that talk, to all bloody fools,  
and this the first time I've  
heard the like of your voice  
talking sweetly for my own  
delight.

CHRISTY about to kiss  
Pegeen as Mahon enters.  
Crosses around to down  
left end of table.

PEGEEN. And to think it's  
me is talkingsweetly, Christy  
Mahon, and I the fright of  
seven townlands for my biting  
tongue. Well, the heart's a  
wonder; and, I'm thinking,  
there won't be our like in  
Mayo, for gallant lovers,  
from this hour, to-day. (Drunk-  
en singing is heard outside)  
There's my father coming from  
the wake, and when he's had  
his sleep we'll tell him, for  
he's peaceful then.

(They separate.)

MICHAEL (singing outside).

The jailor and the turnkey  
 They quickly ran us down,  
 And brought us back as prisoners  
 Once more to Cavan town.

(He comes in supported by  
 Shawn.)

There we lay bewailing  
 All in a prison bound...

(He sees CHRISTY. Goes and  
 shakes him drunkenly by the  
 hand, while Pegeen and  
 Shawn talk on the left.)

CHRISTY led down left  
 by Michael. Frowns.

MICHAEL (to CHRISTY). The blessing of God and the holy angels on your head, young fellow. I hear tell you're after winning all in the sports below; and wasn't it a shame I didn't bear you along with me to Kate Cassidy's wake, a fine, stout lad, the like of you, for you'd never see the match of it for flows of drink; the way when we sunk her bones at noonday in her narrow grave, there were five men, aye, and six men, stretched out retching speechless on the holy stones.

Looks at Pegeen.

CHRISTY (uneasily, watching PEGEEN). Is that the truth.

MICHAEL. It is then, and aren't you a louty schemer to go burying your poor father unbeknownst when you'd a right to throw him on the crupper of a Kerry mule and drive him westwards, like holy Joseph in the days gone by, the way we could have given him a decent burial, and not have him rotting beyond, and not a Christian drinking a smart drop to the glory of his soul?



Turns from Michael.  
Folds arms.

CHRISTY turns to  
Michael. Eyes wide,  
mouth open.

CHRISTY (gruffly). It's well  
enough he's lying, for the likes  
of him.

MICHAEL (slapping him on the  
back). Well, aren't you a  
hardened slayer? It'll be a  
poor thing for the household  
man where you go sniffing for  
a female wife; and (pointing  
to SHAWN) look beyond at that  
shy and decent Christian I  
have chosen for my daughter's  
hand, and I after getting the  
gilded dispensation this day  
for to wed them now.

Grasps Michael by  
collar.

CHRISTY. And you'll be wedding  
them this day, is it?

MICHAEL (drawing himself up).  
Aye. Are you thinking, if I'm  
drunk itself, I'd leave my  
daughter living single with  
a little frisky rascal is the  
like of you?

PEGEEN (breaking away from  
SHAWN). Is it the truth the  
dispensation's come?

MICHAEL (triumphantly). Father  
Reilly's after reading it in  
gallous Latin, and "It's come  
in the nick of time," says he;  
"so I'll wed them in a hurry,  
dreading that young gaffer who'd  
capsize the stars."

CHRISTY looks relieved.  
Led up center by Pegeen.

PEGEEN (fiercely). He's missed  
his nick of time, for it's that  
lad, Christy Mahon, that I'm  
wedding now.

MICHAEL (loudly with horror).  
You'd be making him a son to  
me, and he wet and crusted with  
his father's blood?





CHRISTY smiles sarcastically at Shawn. Chest out. Hands on hips.

CHRISTY turns to look at Michael. Frowns. Looks threateningly at Shawn.

PEGEEN. Aye. Wouldn't it be a bitter thing for a girl to go marrying the like of Shaneen, and he a middling kind of a scarecrow, with no savagery or fine words in him at all?

MICHAEL (gasping and sinking on a chair). Oh, aren't you a heathen daughter to go shaking the fat of my heart, and I swamped and drowned with the weight of drink? Would you have them turning on me the way that I'd be roaring to the dawn of day with the wind upon my heart? Have you not a word to aid me, Shaneen? Are you not jealous at all?

SHAWN (in great misery). I'd be afeard to be jealous of a man did slay his da.

PEGEEN. Well, it'd be a poor thing to go marrying your like. I'm seeing there's a world of peril for an orphan girl, and isn't it a great blessing I didn't wed you, before himself came walking from the west or south?

SHAWN. It's a queer story you'd go picking a dirty tramp up from the highways of the world.

PEGEEN (playfully). And you think you're a likely beau to go straying along with, the shiny Sundays of the opening year, when it's sooner on a bullock's liver you'd put a poor girl thinking than on the lily or the rose?

SHAWN. And have you no mind of my weight of passion, and the holy dispensation, and the

CHRISTY. Scowls at Shawn. Takes step forward.

CHRISTY laughs. folds arms.

drift of heifers I am giving,  
and the golden ring?

PEGREEN. I'm thinking you're  
too fine for the like of me,  
Shawn Keogh of Killakeen, and  
let you go off till you'd find  
a radiant lady with droves of  
bullocks on the plains of Meath,  
and herself bedizened in the  
diamond jewelries of Pharaoh's  
ma. That'd be your match,  
Shaneen. So God save you now!  
(She retreats behind CHRISTY.)

SHAWN Won't you hear me tell-  
ing you...?

CHRISTY (with ferocity). Take  
yourself from this, young  
fellow, or I'll maybe add a  
murder to my deeds to-day.

MICHAEL (springing up with a  
shriek). Murder is it? Is it  
mad yous are? Would you go  
making murder in this place,  
and it piled with poteen for  
our drink to-night? Go on to the  
foreshore if it's fighting you  
want, where the rising tide will  
wash all traces from the memory  
of man. (Pushing SHAWN towards  
CHRISTY.)

SHAWN (shaking himself free,  
and getting behind MICHAEL).  
I'll not fight him, Michael  
James. I'd liefer live a  
bachelor, simmering in passions  
to the end of time, than face  
a lepping savage the like of  
him has descended from the Lord  
knows where. Strike him your-  
self, Michael James, or you'll  
lose my drift of heifers and  
my blue bull from Sneem.

Crosses quickly to  
Shawn. Voice shows  
mock ferocity.

CHRISTY. Takes step  
forward. Grins trying  
to look angry. Hand  
poised to strike  
Shawn.

MICHAEL. Is it me fight him, when it's father-slaying he's bred to now? (Pushing SHAWN) Go on you fool and fight him now.

SHAWN (coming forward a little). Will I strike him with my hand?

MICHAEL. Take the loy is on your western side.

SHAWN. I'd be afeard of the gallows if I struck him with that.

CHRISTY (taking up the loy). Then I'll make you face the gallows or quit off from this.

(SHAWN flies out of the door.)

CHRISTY. Well, fine weather be after him, (going to MICHAEL, coaxingly) and I'm thinking you wouldn't wish to have that quaking blackguard in your house at all. Let you give us your blessing and hear her swear her faith to me, for I'm mounted on the springtide of the stars of luck, the way it'll be good for any to have me in the house.

PEGREEN (at the other side of MICHAEL). Bless us now, for I swear to God I'll wed him, and I'll not renege.

MICHAEL (standing up in the centre, holding on to both of them). It's the will of God, I'm thinking, that all should win an easy or a cruel end, and it's the will of God that all should rear up lengthy families for the nurture of the earth. What's a single man, I ask you, eating a bit in one house and drinking a sup in

Crosses left. Picks up loy. Scowls.

Laughs heartily. Crosses to Michael. Leans forward. Advises Michael. Wide sweep of arm indicates stars.

CHRISTY grins. Nods periodically.

another, and he with no place of his own, like an old braying jackass strayed upon the rocks? (To CHRISTY) It's many would be in dread to bring your like into their house for to end them maybe, with a sudden end; but I'm a decent man of Ireland, and I liefer face the grave untimely and I seeing a score of grandsons growing up little gallant swearers by the name of God, than go peopling my bedside with puny weeds the like of what you'd breed, I'm thinking, out of Shaneen Keogh. (He joins their hands) A daring fellow is the jewel of the world, and a man did split his father's middle with a single clout, should have the bravery of ten, so may God and Mary and St. Patrick bless you, and increase you from this mortal day.

Bows head.

CHRISTY AND PEGEEN. Amen,  
O Lord!

(Hubbub outside.)

CHRISTY backs down left, cringes. Covers head with arm.

(OLD MAHON rushes in, followed by all the crowd, and WIDOW QUIN. He makes a rush at CHRISTY, knocks him down, and begins to beat him.)

PEGEEN (dragging back his arm). Stop that, will you? Who are you at all?

MAHON. His father, God forgive me!

PEGEEN (drawing back). Is it rose from the dead?

MAHON. Do you think I look so easy quenched with the tap of

FIGURE 5

Act III

"You've seen my doings this day  
and let you save me from the old man, for  
why would you be in such a scorch of  
haste to spur me to destruction now?"







a loy? (Beats CHRISTY again.)

PEGEEN (glaring at CHRISTY).  
And it's lies you told, let-  
ting on you had him slitted,  
and you nothing at all.

Raises head. Looks  
wildly around.  
Points to Widow.

CHRISTY (catching MAHON'S  
stick). He's not my father.  
He's a raving maniac would  
scare the world. (Pointing  
to WIDOW QUIN) Herself  
knows it is true.

CROWD. You're fooling  
Pegeen! The Widow Quin seen  
him this day, and you likely  
knew! You're a liar!

Volume rises. Jerks  
thumb toward Mahon.  
Speaks bitterly.

CHRISTY (dumbfounded). It's  
himself was a liar, lying  
stretched out with an open  
head on him, letting on he  
was dead.

MAHON. Weren't you off racing  
the hills before I got my  
breath with the start I had  
seeing you turn on me at all?

CHRISTY hangs head.

PEGEEN. And to think of the  
coaxing glory we had given him,  
and he after doing nothing but  
hitting a soft blow and chasing  
northward in a swear of fear.  
Quit off from this.

Raises on one arm.  
Extends other to  
Pegeen. Pleads.

CHRISTY (piteously). You've  
seen my doings this day, and  
let you save me from the old  
man; for why would you be in  
such a scorch of haste to spur  
me to destruction now?

CHRISTY'S body collapses  
on floor.

PEGEEN. It's there your trea-  
chery is spurring me, till I'm  
hard set to think you're the  
one I'm after lacing in my  
heart strings half-an-hour



gone by. (To MAHON) Take him on from this, for I think bad the world should see me raging for a Munster liar, and the fool of men.

CHRISTY pulled up by Mahon. Jerks free.

MAHON. Rise up now to retribution, and come on with me.

CROWD (jeeringly). There's the playboy! There's the lad thought he'd rule the roost in Mayo. Slate him now, mister.

Looks around. Takes step backwards. Speaks tearfully.

CHRISTY (getting up in shy terror). What is it drives you to torment me here, when I'd asked the thunders of the might of God to blast me if I ever did hurt to any saving only that one single blow.

MAHON (loudly). If you didn't, you're a poor good-for-nothing, and isn't it by the like of you the sins of the whole world are committed?

Raises hands as though praying.

CHRISTY (raising his hands). In the name of the Almighty God...

MAHON. Leave troubling the Lord God. Would you have him sending down droughts, and fevers, and the old hen and the cholera morbus?

Crosses to Widow. Pleads.

CHRISTY (to WIDOW QUIN) Will you come between us and protect me now?

WIDOW QUIN. I've tried a lot, God help me, and my share is done.

Speaks angrily. Crosses back up center. Looks

CHRISTY (looking round in desperation). And I must go back

around. Jerks thumb to throat.

into my torment is it, or run off like a vagabond straying through the Unions with the dusts of August making mud-stains in the gullet of my throat, or the winds of March blowing on me till I'd take an oath I felt them making whistles of my ribs within?

SARA. Ask Pegeen to aid you. Her like does often change.

Looks anquished. Pitch lowers.

CHRISTY. I will not then, for there's torment in the splendour of her like, and she a girl any moon of midnight would take pride to meet, facing southwards on the heaths of Keel. But what did I want crawling forward to scorch my understanding at her flaming brow?

CHRISTY looks hurt.

PEGEEN (to MAHON, vehemently, fearing she will break into tears). Take him on from this or I'll set the young lads to destroy him here.

CHRISTY steps back.

MAHON (going to him, shaking his stick). Come on now if you wouldn't have the company to see you skelped.

PEGEEN (half laughing, through her tears). That's it, now the world will see him pandied, and he an ugly liar was playing off the hero, and the fright of men.

Jerks arm free.

CHRISTY (to MAHON, very sharply). Leave me go!

CROWD. That's it. Now, Christy. If them two set fighting, it will lick the world.

MAHON (making a grab at CHRISTY). Come here to me.



Frees arm again. Speaks threateningly.

CHRISTY (more threateningly).  
Leave me go, I'm saying.

MAHON. I will maybe, when  
your legs is limping, and  
your back is blue.

CROWD. Keep it up, the two of  
you. I'll back the old one.  
Now the playboy.

Screams. Then speaks  
bitterly.

CHRISTY (in low and intense  
voice). Shut your yelling, for  
if you're after making a mighty  
man of me this day by the power  
of a lie, you're setting me now  
to think if it's a poor thing  
to be lonesome, it's worse  
maybe to go mixing with the  
fools of earth.

(MAHON makes a movement  
towards him.)

Yells. Suddenly grasps  
loy. Brandishes  
menacingly.

CHRISTY (almost shouting). Keep  
off... lest I do show a blow  
unto the lot of you would set  
the guardian angels winking in  
the clouds above. (He swings  
round with a sudden rapid move-  
ment and picks up a loy.)

CROWD (half frightened, half  
amused). He's going mad! Mind  
yourselves! Run from the idiot!

Crosses to Pegeen.  
Speaks to her back.

CHRISTY. If I am an idiot, I'm  
after hearing my voice this day  
saying words would raise the  
topknot on a poet in a merchant's  
town. I've won your racing,  
your lepping, and...

MAHON. Shut your gullet and  
come on with me.

CHRISTY. I'm going, but I'll  
stretch you first.

Yells with rage. Raises  
loy. Chases Mahon off.  
Enters stumbling to bar.



Then crosses to hearth,  
panting. Looks dazed.

(He runs at old MAHON with  
the loy, chases him out of the  
door, followed by crowd and  
WIDOW QUIN. There is a great  
moise outside, then a yell,  
and dead silence for a moment.  
CHRISTY comes in, half  
dazed, and goes to fire.)

WIDOW QUIN (coming in, hurriedly,  
and going to him). They're  
turning again you. Come on, or  
you'll be hanged, indeed.

Laughs. Eyes wide.

CHRISTY. I'm thinking, from  
this out, Pegeen'll be giving  
me praises the same as in the  
hours gone by.

CHRISTY pulled center  
by Widow. Frees him-  
self. Looks around  
confused.

WIDOW QUIN (impatiently). Come  
by the back-door. I'd think  
bad to have you stifled on  
the gallows tree.

CHRISTY (indignantly). I will  
not, then. What good'd be my  
life-time, if I left Pegeen?

WIDOW QUIN. Come on, and you'll  
be no worse than you were last  
night; and you with a double  
murder this time to be telling  
to the girls.

Turns from Widow.

CHRISTY. I'll not leave Pegeen  
Mike.

WIDOW QUIN (impatiently). Isn't  
there the match of her in every  
parish public, from Binghamstown  
unto the plain of Meath? Come on,  
I tell you, and I'll find you  
finer sweethearts at each waning  
moon.

Turns to Widow. Starts  
to stagger to bench.  
Stops.

CHRISTY. It's Pegeen I'm seeking  
only, and what'd I care if you  
brought me a drift of chosen  
females, standing in their shifts



itself, maybe, from this place to the Eastern World?

SARA (runs in, pulling off one of her petticoats). They're going to hang him. (Holding out petticoat and shawl) Fit these upon him, and let him run off to the east.

CHRISTY struggles with Widow.

WIDOW QUIN. He's raving now; but we'll fit them on him, and I'll take him, in the ferry, to the Achill boat.

Eyes wide. Laughs. Swings arm wildly.

CHRISTY (struggling feebly). Leave me go, will you? when I'm thinking of my luck to-day, for she will wed me surely, and I a proven hero in the end of all.

(They try to fasten petticoat round him.)

WIDOW QUIN. Take his left hand, and we'll pull him now. Come on, young fellow.

Pulls free angrily. Crosses Left, Grabs stool. Crosses Center.

CHRISTY (suddenly starting up). You'll be taking me from her? You're jealous, is it, of her wedding me? Go on from this. (He snatches up a stool, and threatens them with it.)

CHRISTY crosses to bench. Replaces stool. Sits. Stares at floor. To absorbed in thought to hear men.

WIDOW QUIN (going). It's in the mad-house they should put him, not in jail, at all. We'll go by the back-door, to call the doctor, and we'll save him so.

(She goes out, with SARA, through inner room. Men crowd in the doorway. CHRISTY sits down again by the fire.)

MICHAEL (in a terrified whisper). Is the old lad killed surely?

PHILLY. I'm after feeling the last gasps quitting his heart.

(They peer in at CHRISTY.)

MICHAEL (with a rope). Look at the way he is. Twist a hangman's knot on it, and slip it over his head, while he's not minding at all.

PHILLY. Let you take it, Shaneen. You're the soberest of all that's here.

SHAWN. Is it me to go near him, and he the wickedest and worst with me? Let you take it, Pegeen Mike.

PEGEEN. Come on, so.

(She goes forward with the others, and they drop the double hitch over his head.)

Sits upright. Surprised.

CHRISTY. What ails you?

SHAWN (triumphantly, as they pull the rope tight on his arms). Come on to the peelers, till then stretch you now.

Eyes widen. Body straightens.

CHRISTY. Me!

MICHAEL. If we took pity on you, the Lord God would, maybe, bring us ruin from the law to-day, so you'd best come easy, for hanging is an easy and a speedy end.

Shakes head. Leans to Pegeen almost scolding.

CHRISTY. I'll not stir. (To PEGEEN) And what is it you'll say to me, and I after doing it this time in the face of all?

PEGEEN. I'll say, a strange man

is a marvel, with his mighty talk; but what's a squabble in your back-yard, and the blow of a loy, have taught me that there's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed. (To MEN) Take him on from this, or the lot of us will be likely put on trial for his deed to-day.

Grasps bench.. Cries out in horror.

CHRISTY (with horror in his voice). And it's yourself will send me off, to have a horny-fingered hangman hitching his bloody slip-knots at the butt of my ear.

CHRISTY is pulled off bench. As pulled across stage, wraps legs around table leg. Looks over shoulder yelling.

MEN (pulling rope). Come on, will you?

(He is pulled down on the floor.)

CHRISTY (twisting his legs round the table). Cut the rope, Peggeen, and I'll quit the lot of you, and live from this out, like the madmen of Keel, eating muck and green weeds, on the faces of the cliffs.

CHRISTY struggles to free rope. Looks at men. Grimaces.

PEGGEEN. And leave us to hang, is it, for a saucy liar, the like of you? (To MEN) Take him on, out from this.

SHAWN. Pull a twist on his neck, and squeeze him so.

PHILLY. Twist yourself. Sure he cannot hurt you, if you keep your distance from his teeth alone.

SHAWN. I'm afeard of him. (To PEGGEEN) Lift a lighted sod, will you, and scorch his leg.

FIGURE 6

Act III

"You're blowing for to torture me."



CHRISTY looks terrified  
at PEGEEN.

PEGEEN (blowing the fire, with  
a bellows). Leave go now,  
young fellow, or I'll scorch  
your shins.

Speaks angrily. Eyes  
narrow. Looks around..

CHRISTY. You're blowing for to  
torture me. (His voice rising  
and growing stronger) That's  
your kind, is it? Then let the  
lot of you be wary, for, if  
I've to face the gallows, I'll  
have a gay march down, I tell  
you, and shed the blood of  
some of you before I die.

SHAWN (in terror). Keep a good  
hold, Philly. Be wary, for the  
love of God. For I'm thinking  
he would liefest wreak his  
pains on me.

Smiles. Speaks  
murderously. Arm  
indicates Limbo.

CHRISTY (almost gaily). If I  
do lay my hands on you, it's  
the way you'll be at the fall  
of night, hanging as a scare-  
crow for the fowls of hell.  
Ah, you'll have a gallous  
jaunt I'm saying, coaching out  
through Limbo with my father's  
ghost.

SHAWN (to PEGEEN). Make haste,  
will you? Oh, isn't he a holy  
terror, and isn't it true for  
Father Reilly, that all drink's  
a curse that has the lot of  
you so shaky and uncertain now?

Head thrown back. Looks  
and points Down Right  
while edges closer to  
Shawn. Grasps Shawn  
and bites leg.

CHRISTY. If I can wring a neck  
among you, I'll have a royal  
judgment looking on the trembl-  
ing jury in the courts of law.  
And won't there be crying out  
in Mayo the day I'm stretched  
upon the rope with ladies in  
their silks and satins snivell-  
ing in their lacy kerchiefs,  
and they rhyming songs and

ballads on the terror of my fate? (he squirms round on the floor and bites SHAWN'S leg.)

SHAWN (shrieking). My leg's bit on me. He's the like of a mad dog, I'm thinking, the way that I will surely die.

Laughs. Shakes head. Cocks head. Looks at Philly. Holds on to table leg.

CHRISTY (delighted with himself). You will then, the way you can shake out hell's flags of welcome for my coming in two weeks or three, for I'm thinking Satan hasn't many have killed their da in Kerry, and in Mayo too.

(OLD MAHON comes in behind on all fours and looks on unnoticed.)

MEN (to PEGEEN). Bring the sod, will you?

PEGREEN (coming over). God help him so. (Burns his leg.)

CHRISTY (kicking and screaming). O, glory be to God!

(He kicks loose from the table, and they all drag him towards the door.)

CHRISTY gets on hands and knees. Starts toward door. Stops.

JIMMY (seeing Old Mahon). Will you look what's come in?

(They all drop CHRISTY and run left.)

Puts face up to Mahon's. Speaks venomously. Scowls.

CHRISTY (scrambling on his knees face to face with old MAHON). Are you coming to be killed a third time or what ails you now?

MAHON. For what is it they have you tied?





CHRISTY. They're taking me to the peelers to have me hanged for slaying you.

MICHAEL (apologetically). It is the will of God that all should guard their little cabins from the treachery of law, and what would my daughter be doing if I was ruined or was hanged itself?

CHRISTY'S eyes widen. Mouth opens. Hands hang at sides.

MAHON (grimly, loosening CHRISTY). It's little I care if you put a bag on her back, and went picking cockles till the hour of death; but 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. (To CHRISTY, who is freed) Com on now.

Rises. Looks scornfully at others. Grins. Eyes widen.

CHRISTY. Go with you, is it? I will then, like a gallant captain with his heathen slave. Go on now and I'll see you from this day stewing my oatmeal and washing my spuds, for I'm master of all fights from now. (pushing MAHON) Go on, I'm saying.

MAHON. Is it me?

Gathers prizes. Pushes Mahon in stomach. Speaks gruffly. Starts to exit.

CHRISTY. Not a word out of you. Go on from this.

MAHON (walking out and looking back at CHRISTY over his shoulder). Glory be to God! (With a broad smile) I am crazy again! (Goes.)

Stops in doorway. Looks around. Grins. Speaks with great glee. Arm raised in saucy salute of farewell. Exits.

CHRISTY. Ten thousand blessings upon all that's here, for you've turned me a likely gaffer in the end of all, the way I'll go romancing through a romping life-

time from this hour to the  
dawning of the judgment day.  
(He goes out.)

MICHAEL. By the will of God,  
we'll have peace now for out  
drinks. Will you draw the  
porter, Pegeen?

SHAWN (going up to her). It's  
a miracle Father Reilly can  
wed us in the end of all, and  
we'll have none to trouble  
us when his vicious bite is  
healed.

PEGEEN (hitting him a box on  
the ear). Quit my sight. (Put-  
ting her shawl over her head  
and breaking out into wild  
lamentations) Oh my grief, I've  
lost him surely. I've lost the  
only Playboy of the Western  
World.

CURTAIN

## CHAPTER V

### THE ACTOR'S ANALYSIS

Before an actor undertakes the interpretation of a role, he must first thoroughly understand the play. This chapter will contain this actor's analysis of the play; an analysis made in light of what Synge gave in the play, and what the director wanted from the play. The analysis will be based on a system of critical evaluation derived from Aristotle's Poetics by Heffner, Selden, and Sellman.<sup>1</sup>

### PLOT

According to Heffner, Selden and Sellman, the plot of a play is the combination of incidents which gives the drama its particular power; the plot is a story constructed with a definite end in mind. The end is reached by having each of the events in the play related causally; that is, the opening situation gives rise to the next situation, that situation to another until the end of the play is reached.

The plot begins when the various counterpoised forces in the lives of the leading characters are not in a state of equilibrium. Although struggles have occurred and will occur in the future, there is a temporary lull in the forces opposing a smooth existence. This lull is of such

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<sup>1</sup> Hubert Heffner, Samuel Selden, Hunton Sellman, Modern Theatre Practice (New York: F.S. Crofts and Company, 1947) pp. 30-88

an unstable motive, however, that any physical or vocal act will cause motion to be renewed. This in turn affords a new series of probabilities which either occur or are eliminated. This leaves one remaining probability which the character must follow, the result of which is either suffering or profit.

The principles of plot construction may readily be seen in "Playboy". At the opening of the play, the inhabitants of Michael James' inn were in the midst of a precariously balanced existence. Pegeen, pledged to be the wife of the stolid Shawn, was writing a letter. Michael James had gone to meet some friends who were to accompany him on a night of drinking and merriment at a wake. Shawn entered the scene and he and Pegeen began to talk. She revealed the dissatisfaction that her humdrum life was causing. From the words which passed between the two, the fact that the County Mayo was a boring place became apparent. Pegeen revealed that almost any act out of the ordinary, no matter what its moral implications, was looked upon with great relish by the bored villagers. Later Michael James and his cronies appeared. Then approximately ten minutes after the curtain opened, a dirty, bedraggled, shy lad entered the scene. Christy Mahon was the factor which destroyed the equilibrium of the lives of the Flaughertys and villagers, because he was an alleged fatherslayer. The

introduction of this new wonder presented several possible avenues of reaction on the part of the people involved. Would they turn him over to the police, would they lynch him, or would they accept him? These possibilities were either eliminated or carried through, causing the arousal of new situations until the end of the play.

Characters are the materials out of which the plot is constructed. In other words, the plot is basically grounded, not merely upon overt actions, but also on what people are, think, and feel. Therefore, the sequence of events which occur in a play are the logical result of the choices of the characters involved. Thus the happenings in the drama appear to be the logical outgrowth of the interactions, rather than the result of whimsical and random choice on the part of the author. For example, Christy's wild ravings in Act II must be prompted by Christy's character and his reaction to the environment.

Character in Plot. Characters are the vehicles for the expression of dramatic action, and dramatic action is based upon the nature of those characters. That is, dramatic action is any exercise of the human will, of any decision that results in thought, emotion, speech or action. Therefore, dramatic action seems to be determined by the behavioral idiosyncrasies of the characters in the play.



If dramatic action is based so fundamentally upon character, a more detailed analysis of the term "character" may be of value. Character means "the sum of the traits that serve to individualize and personalize an agent in the story." In the process of creating a role, then, the actor seeks in the play those psychological, sociological, and physiological, characteristics which individualize the "character" who will logically execute the dramatic action of the play.

Heffner, Selden, and Sellman say that the fundamental makeup of a character is the first determinant of his actions.<sup>2</sup> That is, in the well constructed play, the situations which arise are the result of character action, and not chosen at random. For example, in Act I of The Playboy of the Western World, several areas of Christy's personality were revealed. In his response to the questioning about his father's death, the audience became aware of his volatile nature. Several times he was shown to be a liar. The whole of Act I tends to point out that Christy was starved for affection. Consequently, when, for the benefit of the village girls, his description of his father's killing reached wild proportions in Act II, the

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2 Heffner, Selden, and Sellman, op. cit., p. 43

audience viewed this as an action resulting from Christy's desire for admiration.

The next consideration is the fact that the actor may be responding in accordance with his own basic personality. These reactions are not enough to make the actual thought process evident to the audience. The playwright provides an appropriate stimulus, which arouses an emotion, which terminates in a positive or negative response. Some deliberation of either short or long duration is necessary. The outcome of this deliberation is an act of will. This act may be either a physical action, a release of words, or merely a change in attitude. This stimulus-response pattern must be observed by the actor.

An example of this pattern was seen in Act III of the play. The tormenting of the boy was the initial stimulus. The emotion of anger was aroused, and terminated in Christy's yelling. During the yelling, Christy contemplated a course of action which turned out to be threatening the villagers and Mahon with the loy.

Dramatic Surprise. A problem continually confronting the playwright is one of keeping the audience interested in the events occurring on the stage. One of the tools used for this purpose is the introduction of the unexpected or dramatic surprise. Despite the logic of events, the playwright must construct the course of action so that the outcome of a



situation will not be too obvious to the audience. There must be some element of the unexpected. Therefore, the playwright constructs the more important situations in such a way that there are several avenues of possible outcome.

An example of dramatic surprise seen in Act I of "Playboy" occurs just as Christy entered for the first time. Synge had prepared for this entrance since Shawn, Jimmy, Philly, and Michael talked earlier in the scene about a "queer dying fellow" reported to have been seen around the neighborhood. In order to frighten Shawn into remaining at the inn with Pegeen, thus freeing Michael to attend a wake, the horrible behavior and fierce appearance of the man were discussed in great detail. Since neither Michael nor the rest of the people at the inn had actually seen the fellow, their description of him was purely imaginative. However, Shawn decided to leave the safety of the inn anyway, and disappeared out the door. In just a few seconds he returned saying that he had seen the man looking over the ditch beyond. Also, that the plan of the others had worked was evidenced by the fact that Shawn was convinced the fellow was coming after him.

Since this was the clue for Christy's entrance, the assumption on the part of the audience might have been that they were about to see a rather unpleasant character. In the



actor's opinion, Synge wrote this opening scene with just that purpose in mind. Therefore, when a shy, frightened, self conscious young lad appeared apologetically at the door, the audience was surprised. Depending on the humor with which the scene prior to this entrance is played, Christy may even get a laugh. Thus, Synge has expertly used dramatic surprise in order to enliven the scene, and also to introduce the character of Christy effectively.

Parts of Plot. According to Heffner, Selden, and Sellman, a plot consists essentially of three parts, namely suffering, discovery, and reversal.<sup>3</sup> The first of these deals with the suffering of characters, and includes all degrees of emotional excitation, as well as actual physical pain. Suffering is necessary in a plot in order to make the story dramatic. That is, because of this element of emotional or physical stimulus, the incidents of the plot arise out of feelings and passions, the thing which is necessary in order for an event to be considered dramatic.

As Act I of "Playboy" opened, Shawn came to visit his fiance, Pegeen Mike. He pointed out that he and Pegeen were waiting for the holy dispensation to be married, and the audience assumed that Shawn was in love with Pegeen. Therefore, later in Act I when Shawn saw Christy drawing Pegeen's

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 47

affections away from him, a conflict or a suffering was kindled within him. Much of his action, both physical and verbal, was the result of this conflict.

After exchanging greetings, Shawn and Pegeen engaged in a conversation concerning the merit of the environment in which they lived. In the initial situation of the play, Pegeen had expressed dissatisfaction with the mediocrity of the people who surrounded her, and thus was in a state of suffering. Later in the play it was brought out that her feelings were shared by others. This type of suffering seems to have affected all the characters with the possible exception of Michael, Shawn, and Old Mahon. This was one of the reasons for the acceptance of Christy as a hero, despite his infraction of the law. In short, because of the dullness of their existence, the villagers were thankful to anyone who brought a little variety and excitement into their lives.

The second portion of the plot is discovery or realization. Because of the sufferings which characters undergo, they react in certain ways. These reactions lead to discoveries which further affect their lives.

Heffner, Selden, and Sellman say that there are several types of discoveries. Two of these are (1) discoveries made by reason or recall, (2) and discoveries which

arise naturally out of the situation itself.<sup>4</sup>

A great change took place within the character of Christy as the result of a discovery. After the crowd reacted so favorably to the story of his deed, the realization slowly dawned upon Christy that the villagers thought he was a hero. Thereafter, the boy exhibited a character completely opposite to the one he showed when first entering the inn. In place of the submissive introversion there appeared a dominant extroversion. This follows the principal that as a result of what characters feel or reason, discoveries are made which may change their relationship to others, and to their environment.

One of the most obvious examples of the discovery which arises out of the situation was seen in Act I. When Christy first entered the inn, Pegeen and the men were suspicious of his shy, withdrawn manner. When Pegeen discovered that he had killed his father, her behavior toward him changed. Whereas before his revelation she had treated him almost with contempt, afterwards she became sweet and considerate, making no attempt to hide her admiration for him.

The third part of the plot is known as the reversal. This element, which is the logical outgrowth of discovery,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 48



is the factor which determines the relative simplicity or complexity of a plot.

In Act I of The Playboy of the Western World, several illustrations of the reversal were seen. Pegeen discovered through Christy the long sought note of excitement. Consequently, her affections turned away from Shawn, and toward Christy. This is a reversal, and tends to further the possibilities of plot development.

Christy discovering that his deed had awed and delighted the villagers brought about the first major reversal of the play. The outcome of the play depended on the direction of this reversal.

Complication and Denouement. The series of sufferings, discoveries, and reversals of the plot are called the complications, and they lead to the major crises, and the final reversal. At the major crisis, the situation finally resolves itself, or is proven insoluble. The progression of the plot from this climax to the end of the play is called the denouement.

In the denouement, the major dramatic question is answered. Just as the situations in the plot have developed, been modified, or served as the impetus for new situations, the dramatic question is a progressive rather than an absolute thing. As the play opens, the initial situation raises the initial question. However, as the plot becomes more com-

plicated, the appearance of sufferings, discoveries, and reversals add to or modify the dramatic question.<sup>5</sup>

The complications of the plot, and the consequent development of the dramatic question may be seen in The Playboy of the Western World. As the Act I curtain opened, and the immediate circumstances were examined, the question of whether Shawn was going to remain at the inn arose. When Christy entered the inn and revealed his plight, the audience wondered about his safety, and about how he would be accepted. These questions went unanswered for a while thus maintaining suspense and interest. Meanwhile the question arose, would Pegeen forsake Shawn for Christy?

Finally Mahon appeared and revealed to the Widow Quin that Christy was a liar. Had the earlier portion of the plot been presented less skillfully, this situation would of necessity been the major climax. Consequently, an unwinding would have to take place. However, Synge introduced the element of Widow's Quin's attraction for Christy, which allowed for the introduction of a surprise in this situation. She threatened Christy with exposure unless he married her. Christy, however, was interested only in Pegeen. Being a realist, Widow Quin then said she would keep his secret in return for a cow, a sheep, and a few other things. Thus,

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5 Ibid., p.



the dramatic question was modified to, "How long before the rest find out the truth", and Christy's "What will Pegeen say now?"

Eventually, Pegeen and the others did learn of Christy's deception because Mahon, sent away earlier in the scene by the Widow Quin, returned. Christy struck him again, and his act was witnessed by all. The act then initiated a new series of events and possibilities. Christy, of course, felt that his act would merit the retaining of his status as a hero. However, another surprise was introduced when Pegeen and the rest of the crowd revealed that their feelings toward him were far from favorable. This bit of unwelcome news was received by Christy as the crowd slipped a noose over his head in preparation for hanging him. However, Christy offered a struggle. The introduction of this surprising change of attitude in the villagers, plus the reversal arising as the result of the change modified the dramatic question to, "Is Christy really going to be hanged? If not, how will he escape?"

Synge skillfully and humorously developed the closing scene of the play by the introduction of another surprise. Just as Christy had been forced to loosen his grip on the table by the application of a hot sod to his leg, Mahon appeared in the door way on his hands and knees. The humor of the whole situation was accentuated when Christy

screamed with wild agitation, "Are you coming to be killed a third time, or what ails you at all?" Mahon calmly replied by asking the boy why he had a rope around his neck, to which Christy answered that he was going to be hanged.

After this line, Mahon gently removed the rope from his son's neck, and helped him to his feet. Mahon then asked Christy to go back home with him, saying that the two of them would have a fine time telling stories about the way Christy duped the stupid villagers. Christy's reply to his father's suggestion constituted the final reversal. There could be no further development in the plot, in the channels previously followed since Christy was exposed, and his status at the inn destroyed. Therefore, his choice was to either go with his father, or go off by himself. Also, since the character of Christy was seen to grow throughout the play, the major question, "Will Christy's life be changed as the result of his experience?" was answered. When the boy looked scornfully at the villagers, grinned, looked wildeyed off into space, and said, "I will then. Like a gallant captain with his heathen slave", the audience knew that Christy had become aware of the possibilities of his future, and that he had decided to go with Mahon. Thus, the final answer to the major dramatic question was furnished.

#### CHARACTER

Characters are the vehicles through which discoveries,

conflicts, and the other ingredients of plot are manifested. In order to act, characters must be stimulated or stirred by emotion. This stimulation is provided by the playwright in the situations which compose the plot. The playwright must then manipulate his characters in such a way as to bring about, or connect these situations with dramatic action. Consequently, a character or characters are stimulated with emotion, these impulses causing the character to think, desire or act. Factors of conflict, choice and decision appear. The natural outcome of decision is an exercise of will which results in the desired dramatic action. This action may be anything from a purely mental process such as a change in attitudes to a verbal or physical outburst.

Christy's entrance in Act I illustrated the use of character to introduce conflict, choice and decision. After the boy entered, Pegeen, possessed by a desire for the lad's affections, experienced conflict because she was promised in marriage to Shawn. Therefore, she was faced with the choice of remaining with Shawn and keeping her father's blessing, or affiliating herself with the courageous, young Christy. As Act I closed Pegeen overtly showed her choice through dramatic action by tenderly preparing Christy's bed for the night.

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The major characters in The Playboy of the Western World are divided into two categories, known as the sympathetic and the antipathetic characters. That is, the sympathetic characters include the protagonist, or hero, and all of the characters who are more or less sympathetic to him. The antipathetic characters include the antagonist, or villain, and the characters who share his attitudes. In comedy the protagonist is usually responsible for the forward development of the plot.<sup>6</sup>

In "Playboy", there is no formal hero or villain. Christy is the character around whom the plot revolves. The situations in "Playboy" are developed in such a way that the forward movement of the play depends upon three fundamental character changes in Christy. First, there was the Christy who appeared timidly at the door of the inn. Secondly, there was the Christy altered by love. Finally, there was the Christy who appeared at the end of the play. All of these changes are the result of, and have a definite influence on the situations of the plot.

As Christy first appeared, he was dirty, frightened and shy. His appearance was the element which disturbed the equilibrium of the lives of Pegeen, Shawn, Michael and the Widow Quin. Pegeen was upset because of the dullness of her

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6 Heffner, Selden, and Sellman, op. cit., p.

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life, and that she was to wed the unexciting Shawn. Shawn was delighted to claim Pegeen as his bride. Michael James was fond of the idea of having a rich son-in-law, and a daughter who could take care of the inn while he loafed. The Widow Quin, having recently killed her husband and her children, was lonely. The introduction of Christy, then meant something very pertinent to each of these characters. To all, he was something unfamiliar and awesome. Pegeen found that he might offer some excitement and even an escape from Shawn. To Shawn he was a threat. If Shawn and Pegeen did not marry, Michael James's plans for an easy life were also upset, making Christy an undesirable element as far as he was concerned. The Widow Quin viewed the boy as a change in her lonesome life. Thus, the appearance of Christy in Act I created the initial situation of the play. In order for the play to develop any further, however, there had to be something of sufficient importance said or done by one of the characters. In the case of "Playboy" that impetus was Christy's revelation that he had killed his father. The statement delighted and astounded the rest of the characters to such an extent that Christy was immediately worshipped as a hero. The ensuing interaction of Christy and the other characters was the reason for the change which occurred in the boy. Thus, in Act II the meek, withdrawn Christy of Act I was seen as the braggart. As the play

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progressed and Christy was found to be a liar, the ground work was laid for the third and final stage in Christy's development. Mahon's appearance interrupted the villagers as they were dragging Christy out, and the old man asked the boy to come back and live with him again. In order to resolve the situation and bring an end to the play, Synge made the character of Christy undergo another change. Looking very triumphant, Christy announced that he would go with his father and be the taskmaster from then on. Thus, at the end of the play, Christy became the person he had pretended to be.

The plausibility of this third change depended on the vividness of his imagination which was unique even among people who were imaginative. This trait then was the reason for Christy's initial change, and his growth as the braggart. In Act III Christy, responding to his father's pleas, looked wild-eyed off into space and said, "I will then. Like a gallant captain with his heathen slave." This final change was readily accepted by the audience.

After Christy left, Shawn immediately resumed his talk of the approaching marriage, Michael James ordered Pegeen to set up the drinks, and Pegeen tearfully exclaimed that she had lost the one and only playboy of the Western World. All the villagers are left in much the same situa-



tions in which they were found at the beginning of the play. It may be assumed that they had not undergone any change or development of character.

#### THOUGHT

Plot and character are combined to provide the vehicles for the expression of emotion, feeling, choice, decision and through them, dramatic action. If character is responsible for choice and decision, thought is the underlying material from which character must work. Without the element of thought there could be no choice or decision and no dramatic action. The element of thought also provides the answer to the major dramatic question. The major dramatic question progresses by the elimination or incorporation of minor questions, and proofs are furnished by the actions of the agents in the story. What these people feel, think, say, and do evolve the dramatic question and answer it. For example, had Mahon failed to appear in Act III, the evolution of the dramatic question would have stopped at, "Is Christy going to be hanged?" Then, depending on the thought and action of the villagers, that question would have received an answer.

The first scene of Act III contributed to the element of thought in two ways. These ways were (1) by increasing anticipation toward the outcome of the play, (2) and by answering some of the minor questions.



Anticipation was increased by introducing Mahon into this scene. Since he had revealed his intentions of harming Christy earlier in the play, his reappearance in this scene caused further anticipation concerning the boy's safety.

One of the minor questions of the play was also answered by Mahon's appearance. The question of when the villagers would find out the truth about Christy was partially answered when Philly realized the Widow's deception.

Some writers consider the development and solution of the major dramatic question as the theme. Although that may well be true in many plays, it does not appear to apply to "Playboy". There was one line spoken by Pegeen in the latter portion of Act III which seemed to sum up the thought behind the play. As the crowd began to drag Christy out, he said to Pegeen, "And what is it you'll say to me, and I after doing it this time in the face of all?" To this Pegeen replied, "I'll say, a strange man is a marvel, with his mighty talk; but what's a squabble in your back yard, and the blow of a loy, have taught me that there's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed." This statement seemed to sum up the action, and the thought of the entire play. Perhaps, this may be more clearly seen by examining Pegeen's speech in portions. The "strange man"

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could refer to no one but Christy. She was further referring to his gallant stories of bravery and courage which won the bored villagers. However, Pegeen explained, after seeing Mahon and his son squabble right in her own back yard, and after witnessing Christy really hit the old man on the head, she realized the difference between hearing an entertaining story, and actually seeing the deed itself.

This is a serious message with the appearance of a universal truth. Synge may not have been concerned with writing plays with a profound message. The subjects and situations he chose were probably an expression of his twisted sense of humor but the ability to take situations which, in reality, were rather grim, and present them in a humorous light was one of the things which made Synge a great playwright.

In great plays, one or several themes may emerge. The presence of profound observations in a play may indeed be one mark of its greatness. It is probably unwise, however, to single out one such observation from a great play and assert that it alone is the theme of the play.

#### DISCOURSE OR DIALOGUE

The element of thought must have an expression to make the pattern of thought clear to the audience. A good actor can show a change of attitude by facial expression,

by gesture or by movement. The ability to express thought by facial expression, gesture and movement is the prerequisite of good pantomime.

On the stage, another means of expressing thought is the spoken word or discourse. The term "discourse" does not mean merely words but any sound made by the actor for the purpose of creating a rhythmic pattern. In some plays, the meaningful pattern of words is augmented by the overall melodic effect of the sounds. A few pages of any of Synge's plays reveal beautifully rhythmic speech and vivid imagery. The combination of meaning with the lyric elements of the speeches is important to the actor.

For expression of complex thought, words and phrases are more specific than pantomime. To differentiate words and phrases from other kinds of expression this author will use the term language.

Language is related to the character who uses it. Furthermore, language must be considered in terms of appropriateness, likeness, and consistency. For example, Shawn Keogh would hardly be eloquent and tender when speaking of love. By the same token, Christy would not blunder and stammer when trying to convince Pegeen of his affections. Secondly, the phrases uttered must be ones which the character would be likely to say. Even though the audience knew Christy was lying about the slaying of his father, the



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boy would not say anything to the villagers to reveal his lie. Shawn in a similar situation would be quite likely to do this. When he appeared in Act II with the gift of clothes to bribe Christy into leaving Mayo, he admitted his intentions. To reverse the lines for the two types of characterization would not follow the principle of likeness. Thirdly, the vocal expressions of the character must be consistent. In other words, if the character is interpreted as a soft spoken, gentle person who never raises his voice, if the events in the play are fairly equal in emotional intensity, a tirade of cursing and swearing during one portion of the play would be inconsistent.

Furthermore, dramatic language must be clear. The audience must be able to understand what the words and phrases mean. If this were not so, the thought of the play could not be understood and the dramatic question itself would be unknown. In short, the audience would be aware of nothing but the various stage pictures formed by the movement of the actor.

John Synge was particularly adept at manipulating strange word combinations for the purpose of stimulating striking mental pictures. Almost any page of the script will reveal several illustrations of this. For example, in Act III Christy was subtly expressing his love for Pegeen. She playfully taunted him about "starting" to some other girl



after the news of father's death had quieted down, and he replied "Starting from you is it? I will not then, and when the air is warming in four months or five, it's then yourself and me should be pacing Niefen in the dews of the night, the times sweet smells do be rising, and you'd see a little shiny new moon, maybe, sinking on the hills" In this speech the lines virtually transport the reader to the sides of the Niefen allowing him to feel and smell the fresh warm spring breezes and the cool dew on the grass. To this, Pegeen replied, "And it's that kind of a poacher's love you'd make Christy Mahon." Christy answered, "It's little you'll think if my love's a poacher's or an earl's itself, when you 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 in all ages sitting lonesome on his golden chair." A poacher was a person who hunted illegally. Therefore, the mention of a "poacher's love", insinuated that the relationship would be furtive. Christy then explained that his love will be more like an earl's. To the author, this pictured an earl as something fine and, an earl's love as smooth and glorious. Christy further said that his love would be proved "when you'll feel my two hands stretched around you". The use of the word "stretched" offered the stimulus for a visual picture here. The word implied a tenseness and provoked the picture of eager antici-



pation, and a tingling excitement from the very touch of Pegeen. The emotional intensity was enhanced by the words "squeezing kisses", in which the actor pictured the feverishness of the lover's embrace. The last portion of the speech was the summation of all the things Christy would feel in such a situation. The lines described the "Lord God" sitting lonesome in his golden chair" and Christy's sympathy for His solitude. To the actor, the speech stimulated the picture of God sitting above all the beauty and bliss which heaven denotes yet being unfortunate in not having the wild delight of holding Pegeen in his arms. It seems entirely plausible to the actor that a man given to wild flights of fantasy would think in romantic symbols.

Language has been analyzed in terms of thought, exposition, its relationship to the character, and its ability to evoke mental pictures. Aside from the combination of sounds into meaningful words, discourse is also concerned with rhythm. In "Playboy" written in Irish dialect, the lilt or rhythm is the key to a reasonably accurate representation of Irish speech.

Language is also used in plays for the purpose of establishing mood and locale. The mood which prevails in "Playboy" is light and comic. The lines contribute to the mood by the rhythm which they impart, and by Synge's humor.

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In judging which lines in "Playboy" were humorous, the reaction of the audiences which attended the performances in Studio Theatre will be considered.

A line which consistently evoked laughter was spoken by Christy in Act III. As Mahon entered on his hands and knees after being struck by the loy, Christy said "Are you coming to be killed a third time, or what ails you at all?" Even when taken out of context the line has some humor because of the arrangement of the words. The line can best be enjoyed, of course, when the situation prompting the speech is known. Therefore the reader is referred to Act III of the script contained in Chapter IV.

The Widow Quin, trying to dissuade Jimmy and Philly from believing Mahon's story about Christy having hit him, accuses the old man of insanity. She says to Jimmy, "Isn't madness a fright?" To this he replies, "It's a fright, surely. I knew a party was kicked in the head by a red mare, and he went killing horses a great while, till he eat the insides of a clock and died after." This line with its unique word arrangement, plus humor of the situation which it describes is one of the funniest speeches in the play. Synge's lines set the comic mood of "Playboy", and many of his lines are funny even outside the context of the play.

The rhythmic lilt of the lines as spoken by the actors on stage set the general locale of the play. In



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addition there were many references to the country of Ireland, and also to the county in which the play was taking place. In Act I, the Widow Quin tried to get Christy to go and live with her. To acquaint Christy with her virtues she said, "There isn't my match in Mayo for thatching, or mowing or shearing a sheep". In Act II, Pegeen questioned Christy's loneliness by remarking, "What call have you to be that lonesome when there's poor girls walking Mayo in their thousands now?" These are only two of the many lines which refer to places, the mention of which establish the scene as County Mayo, Ireland.

Melody or Music. Melody or Music as used here refers to the actual use of music in the play. Before the beginning of each act of the play music was used. Music is capable of setting mood or suggesting emotion if the selections are appropriate. Since the play was comic and gay, high-spirited Irish folk music was chosen to reinforce the gay comic mood.

When the Act II Curtain opened, Christy was discovered sitting on a bench shining a pair of Pegeen's boots. Because of his newfound friendships and physical comforts, the boy was very happy. Therefore, the decision was made to have him sing a song as he worked. The actor knew an old Irish ballad about the devil appearing on earth to relieve a farmer of his shrewish wife. It was a gay tune with a



light and rapid tempo. When the singing of this ballad was completed, the tempo for the scene was set. The music seemed to aid the actor in portraying a bubbling happiness throughout the scene.

Spectacle. The sixth and final part of the drama to be discussed is spectacle. Although it may be suggested in a generalized way by the playwright, spectacle is often left to the ingenuity of the theatre craftsmen. Lighting, designing, costumes, blocking and business of the actors, in fact everything seen by the audience is a part of the spectacle.

Spectacle is the means by which the play with its theme, mood and other qualities is visually interpreted. The settings, the costumes and the action on stage must all be appropriate to the plot and the thought of drama.

In sets and costumes, color, form, and style are principle factors. Pegeen and Christy were of very moderate means, and they appeared in appropriately simple dress. Since Pegeen was a vivacious and lively girl, the colors of her costume were bright. Because of the story and thought expressed in the story, the inn of necessity was rather shabby. However, by the use of color, in sets and in lights, and by the quaintness of such things the fireplace and the bar, the room acquired a warm, cheerful appearance. The lightness of the play was enhanced by these elements of spectacle.

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The placing of the various characters on stage contributes to spectacle through the stage picture which the actors form. For example, when the village girls came to present Christy with their gifts, the girls and not Christy were the important object. Therefore, the director placed the actor in the relatively weak body position of a three-quarter turn in, and with the girls all on a plane above Christy. Thus, the audience's attention was directed to the girls more than to Christy.

Just as with discourse and character, there are certain criteria by which spectacle may be judged. The first criteria concerns function. That is, spectacle must serve a clearly defined function, and any piece of business, lighting, or stage effect should not be introduced purely for its own sake. An illustration of the elimination of unmotivated spectacle occurred during the rehearsal for "Playboy". The scene was the one in which Christy appeared in Shawn's clothes. During rehearsals, a rather ill-fitting cutaway coat with striped trousers, and a badly battered slouch hat were used. The effect never failed to break up rehearsals with laughter. However, because the clothes were supposed to represent Shawn's best, the costume was changed for performance. Although the outfit might have been humorous, it violated the criterion of functionality and the more ridiculous outfit was discarded.

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The element of spectacle should be consistent, or harmonious. All the components of spectacle should blend into a unified and harmonious whole. Each must act for the benefit of the others. The spectacle of "Playboy" would have been inconsistent if the set, costumes and movement had expressed the right mood for the play, but the lights had been blues, violets, and colors appropriate to tragedy.

#### CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF CHRISTY

The analysis of the character of Christy will be carried out under three major divisions. These are physiological factors, sociological factors, and psychological factors.

Physiological Factors. At his first entrance Christy was described as "slight". In other words, Christy was of medium height and weight. Also Christy was a "young man". Pegeen was approximately twenty-one, and Christy was probably between twenty-one and twenty-five.

Other aspects of the boy's appearance are discovered by demands of the play. For instance, even though the boy was slight, his victories in the sport contests indicated an athletic build. There were no more than hints in the plot as to Christy's good-looks. Pegeen and the rest of the villagers were attracted to the boy because of his story telling ability and the actor's good looks were not considered



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important. However, the director felt that the actor's blonde hair should be dyed black, in order to satisfy the popular conception of an Irishman.

Sociological Factors. Christy was of rather poor economic status. This was probably due to his father's lack of interest in farming and his preference for women and drink. Thus the land which might have provided a living for the Mahons was probably allowed to deteriorate. The economic status of Christy may best be described as lower class.

No mention is made in the play of Christy's education, or even of any schools. The assumption was that Christy had enjoyed a limited education if any at all.

There were many references to Christy's home life. Several of these descriptions came from the boy himself, while others were given by Old Mahon. Because Christy habitually elaborated the truth, unqualified acceptance of his picture of his home life was impossible. Also, Old Mahon's motives in telling the Widow Quin of Christy's behavior at home make dubious the authenticity of his report. However, the fact that Christy struck his father indicated that domestic friction had been present. The shyness, and timidity which Christy exhibited in Act I makes some of Mahon's testimony convincing. For example, Mahon said Christy was afraid of girls, and hid when they

appeared. The boy himself said that he had never been friendly with any girl except Pegeen. Mahon's description of Christy's making faces at himself in the mirror again was verified when the boy later said that the mirror at home would "twist a squint across an angel's brow." Christy told Pegeen of the thrill he felt in the woods at night when searching for rabbits. Mahon's description of him fooling with "finches and felts" appeared to substantiate his interest in wild life.

Psychological Factors. Frustration is one of the primary elements in the psychology of character. Christy's main frustration resulted from the thwarting of his primary goal in life, which was to escape his impoverished, submissive existence, and become a different person. The kind of person he wished to become was explained in the opening scene of Act II. Delighted with his new surroundings, Christy gleefully expounded on his present good fortune. In those speeches he compared the person he had been and the person he was sure to become in his new environment. He said that the inn would be a fine place in which to spend the rest of his days. There he could converse with "swearing Christians in place of my old dog and cat," indicating the lack of companionship in his former surroundings. He remarked further that now he would have to do no work harder than "drawing a cork an odd time, or wiping a glass." Another

indication of the disdain with which he viewed his labors as a farmer was apparent when he said, "and I'll be growing fine from this day, the way I'll have a soft, lovely skin on me and won't be the like the clumsy young fellows to be plowing all times in the earth and dung".

The attainment of his goal was continually thwarted by the omnipresent Mahon. Christy feared Old Mahon too much to affect a change, and his frustration was perpetuated. Consequently, Christy came to hate his father.

In terms of general moral development, Christy seemed to be retrograde. His almost pathological lying cannot be considered virtuous. Furthermore, the boy had no qualms about the act of murder. Irishmen of 1910 considered Christy an extremely vulgar person because he told the Widow Quin that he would forsake Pegeen for any number of other girls, even if they stood before him in their underwear.<sup>7</sup> However, the average American would not consider the speech immoral.

Any general statement about the boy's temperament would be incomplete. This is due to Christy's changes of character during the play. At first, he was very submissive, and introverted. As the play progressed, Christy became extroverted and self-confident. However, even during his

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<sup>7</sup> Maurice Bourgeois, John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre, (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1913) p. 200



wildest ravings, a few sharp words from Pegeen were enough to make the boy cringe. At the end of the play, Christy was not only an extrovert full of confidence and self esteem, but he also dominated Mahon. Among Christy's specific abilities, probably the most outstanding was his ability to use his vivid imagination. In fact, his acceptance by Pegeen and the others depended upon his ability extemporaneously to describe fantastic events and fabulous situations. Secondly, the athletic ability which Christy displayed aided him in increasing his popularity just when Mahon was dangerously near to exposing him.

The personality of Christy might be described as schizoid. That is, Christy exhibited with in the range of normality, traits which, in slightly greater degree, would be typical of a psychotic suffering from schizophrenia. The psychosis schizophrenia is exhibited by persons who no longer have contact with the world of reality, and who exist in an imaginary world of their own making. Further there are several types of schizophrenics, the type depending on more specific symptoms. One of the most common forms of this psychosis is known as paranoid schizophrenia. Persons exhibiting this form of the disease are usually given to delusions of persecution or grandeur.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Robert White, The Abnormal Personality (New York; The Ronald Press Company, 1948) pp. 521-560



Christy exhibited paranoid tendencies. This was easily recognized in his descriptions of killing his father, or his Act I revelation to Pegeen concerning the "wide and windy acres of rich Munster land" which allededly belonged to his ancestors. The fact that these tendencies were noticed in the character however, does not mean to imply that the actor created the character of a mad man. The actor merely was aware of these abnormal tendencies, hoping that a more intimate knowledge of the character would aid in a better interpretation of the role.

#### RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER CHARACTERS

The relationship between Christy and the other characters in the play should be considered. No effective interpretation is possible unless the actor has a clear idea of his relationship to the characters with whom he is interacting.

The Girls. First of all, there were several characters in "Playboy" who did not become individuals in Christy's mind. These characters were identified with the group which they composed, particularly the girls in Act II. The reason for this is that the scene in which they appeared was relatively short. Also, the girls dominated the scene as a group, each one contributing equally to the scene while Christy merely muttered brief answers.

The actor conceived Christy's initial reaction to





these girls as one of flattery and shyness. When he learned the reason for their visit though, the boy was flattered and delighted. Thus, when he subsequently described the events leading to his attack upon his father, Christy did his best to impress the girls.

The village girls assumed quite another character when they composed part of the vicious crowd which appeared in Act III. As Christy and Mahon struggled verbally and physically, the crowd jeered and encouraged the combatants. At this point, Christy realized that they were not concerned with him as a person, but only with the excitement and novelty which he could provide. Consequently, Christy grew to almost hate them.

Jimmy and Philly. Because there was never a time during which Jimmy and Philly didn't appear on the stage together, the actor also considered them as a group. During Act I, both men questioned Christy about his activities before entering the inn. Here the actor considered them as merely curious men who were strange, and thus frightening. Later in the act, when the two men were duly impressed with the boy's story, Christy was flattered. As Jimmy and Philly made their final exit in Act I, Christy felt that he had just won himself two new friends.

Jimmy and Philly were also part of the dreaded crowd.

They too turned against Christy and favored Old Mahon.

When this occurred, Christy realized the foolishness of his trust in them, and he expressed his resentment. Later, when the two men helped put the rope over his head and started to take him to his execution, Christy knew stark fear.

The Widow Quin. When Christy was first introduced to the Widow Quin, he was crouched on a bench fearfully and curiously awaiting her entrance. When he found the Widow's manner was friendly the boy became less withdrawn. When Christy learned of the reason for her visit, he was flattered, and began to like the Widow. When Pegeen and the Widow argued about where Christy was to spend the night, the boy was overjoyed, and a firmer affection was formed.

As the plot developed, however, the relationship between Christy and the Widow Quin changed. That is, even though the Widow was still eager to have the boy go home with her, Christy was so absorbed in his attempt to win Pegeen that he was almost unaware of her presence. Later in Act II when Christy's position has been threatened by the appearance of Old Mahon, he began to depend on her to keep his secret.

In the middle of Act III, another change in the relationship between Christy and the Widow Quin occurred. When confronted by Pegeen and Mahon, he asked her to convince Pegeen that he wasn't lying. The Widow Quin, realizing that

she might endanger her own interests by a lie, refused to speak. Thus, Christy saw another ally reject him and he experienced bitter resentment.

Shawn Keogh. The relationship of Christy with Shawn was relatively uncomplicated. Very shortly after appearing on the scene, Christy was aware of Shawn as a potential block between himself and Pegeen. His frustration was expressed in terms of an aggression, which did not alter essentially throughout the play. There were times, of course, when Christy's dislike for Shawn varied in intensity. For example, when Christy chased Shawn from the inn during Act III, the actor felt an almost sadistic delight in Shawn's terror. On the other hand, when Christy saw Shawn as one of his tormentors in the Act III fight scene, pure hatred was in the mind of the actor. The basic feeling of dislike was always there, but its intensity was determined by the situation.

Old Mahon. On the surface, the relationship between Old Mahon and Christy appeared to be similar to the one between Christy and Shawn. Actually the boy's feelings toward Mahon were much more complicated. Christy hated the old man, a natural reaction to the boy's home life as he had described it. But the actor was not able to maintain this attitude throughout the entire play. Had Christy's feelings

not changed, he would not have gone off with his father in the end. To find a satisfactory explanation for this alteration within the play itself seemed impossible to the actor. Therefore, the reason for the change was imaginatively created. In the creation of the role, the actor carefully attempted to point up Christy's changeability and love of the bizarre. Hence, when Mahon asked Christy to come back and live with him, the previously established unpredicable nature of the boy allowed any one of a series of possible choices. Consequently, the decision to accompany Old Mahon was attributed to the fluidity of Christy's set of values.

Michael James. When Christy made his initial appearance, Michael James was at first merely one part of the strange surroundings.

Later in Act I, as Michael James began to question Christy, the boy's suspicions were aroused and Christy decided that he should be careful of his conversation around Michael James.

Just before Michael made his final exit in Act I, he became very friendly towards Christy, offering him a permanent job at the inn. The boy's vanity, already inflated tremendously by the excitement which he had inspired was even further delighted by the proposition. Consequently, Christy discarded his previous evasiveness toward Michael



James and accepted him as a friend.

Christy did not encounter Michael James again until the man drunkenly returned from the wake. To the boy, his arrival was rather untimely as it interrupted a kiss which he was about to share with Pegeen. Consequently, Christy's attitude, though not overtly antagonistic, was one of annoyance. Then during his talk with Christy, Michael James revealed that he had chosen Shawn for Pegeen's husband, and that they would be married that very day. Immediately Christy bristled with anger towards Michael James. However, his anger was prevented expression by Pegeen's hasty assertion that she intended to wed Christy in spite of her father's wishes. Even though appeased for the moment, Christy now looked upon Michael James as a possible barrier to his desired goal.

In a moment, Michael James realized the futility of his objections, and consented to give Christy and Pegeen his blessings. Again Christy's vain nature was complimented and he dismissed the thought of Michael James as an enemy.

The error of his thinking was painfully impressed upon Christy when Michael reappeared in Act III as the leader of the group who came to hang him. Then the boy felt a mixture of anger and terror. Thus, in his last encounter with the innkeeper Christy saw Michael James as a deceitful

and hypocritical man with no particular qualms about his methods of fulfilling his desires.

Pegeen Mike. Even though the relationship between Christy and Pegeen was extremely complicated, their interaction was probably more true to life than any of the other relationships in the play. Essentially, theirs is the usual bond between a boy and girl experiencing the first "crush".

Pegeen was the first pretty girl Christy had ever known. Therefore, at first he was awed by the girl. When, during the questioning of Christy by the men, the boy hesitates in telling that he had killed his father, Pegeen rather sharply asked if he was never slapped for not answering. Christy was very apologetic and frightened as he replied that he was "slow at learning." Later in the same act, however, Christy fervently told Pegeen of his admiration of her beauty. At his first introduction the boy was shy and unsure. Pegeen, her curiosity aroused, began to find out what kind of a person she was faced with. After learning the mystery which surrounded the boy, Pegeen openly showed her approval. Christy was delighted and immediately developed a "crush". When Pegeen insisted that Christy had flattered other girls she was teasing. The boy, unfamiliar with the ways of young girls, responded appropriately



and defended his opinion even more strongly. By the end of the act, Pegeen had quarreled with another woman over Christy, and the boy was relatively sure of her affection.

When in Act II Pegeen discovered Christy surrounded by the village girls, her reaction was one of jealousy. In a fit of temper she ordered Christy away. Christy, although not quite sure of what he had done wrong, realized he had erred and hastily offered apologies. When Pegeen did not yield, Christy decided to gamble on her sincerity. Preparing himself to accept the worst, he agreed to go. As he started out the door, Pegeen called him back, and he was then sure of her affections. Certain of Pegeen, Christy allowed his affections for her to grow.

The intensity of Christy's passion reached its peak in Act III. After the sports events, Christy and Pegeen retired to the inn. There, they both spoke of their love for each other, and even made plans to be married. During this scene, Christy's affection for Pegeen was at a maximum. But Christy was not really in love. Instead, his words were the wild expression of the violent emotion of young romance. However, in this scene, the actor did his best to impart the feeling of love because even though Christy realized later he was not really in love with Pegeen, at the moment of this scene, he was certain of his emotions.

This attitude continued in Christy until the fight in the last portion of Act III. When the boy saw Pegeen turn against him, his affections began to die. Then when she burned his leg, Christy feared and resented her. To the actor, this was the most natural of all the aspects of their relationship, because the end of the feeling for Pegeen was merely the logical ending of a first love affair. Christy was then confident in the knowledge of his prowess as a lover, was free to seek other romances. He was thankful to Pegeen for awakening his latent talents, and not in the least reluctant to leave her. Synge very aptly summed up Christy's final relationship to Pegeen as well as all the other people in the inn with the boy's final speech, "Ten thousand blessings upon that's here, for you've turned me a likely gaffer in the end of all, the way I'll go romancing through a romping life time from this hour to the dawning of judgement day."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ACTING PROBLEMS

With the preliminary study of the author and his influences, the country and the people completed, the actual acting problems confronted in the script and how they were solved will next be considered. For purposes of clarity and continuity, the play will be divided into specific sections which will contain all of Christy's scenes.

#### Act I Section 1<sup>1</sup>

Act I, Section 1 will be considered as beginning with the first entrance of Christy, and ending with the exit of Michael, Jimmy, and Philly. The section will include problems encountered on the first entrance of Christy, the questioning by the men, and Christy's revelation of his murder.

The author would like to open the discussion with a problem which appeared on Christy's very first line, "God save all here." The correct interpretation of this line was especially important because it was the first introduction the audience would have with Christy.

During the first weeks of rehearsal the actor encountered difficulty in perceiving the correct inflection for the line. The term "correct" as used here does not necessarily

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1 Found in Chapter IV from p. 53 to p. 62

mean what the director considered appropriate, although all efforts were made within that framework. Rather, the word refers to an interpretation which felt right to the actor. During the first rehearsals, the line always left the actor with a sense of uneasiness and inadequacy, although the director asserted that the line sounded all right.

The method of attack which finally proved successful involved a reconstruction of the events leading to Christy's entrance in Act I, all references being made to activities occurring before the opening of the play. The events considered included the fight with the old man, the blow on the head, and the flight to the inn. The actor then relived these scenes, filling in the details as the character might have recalled them. This recall was carried on to the extent of even trying to imagine the sight of the hills and ditches, the smell of the sea air, and the terror of a fugitive. With this picture clearly in mind, the actor entered the unfamiliar surroundings of the inn as the insecure and shy Christy. When the line was then spoken, it became the only logical thing the character could say, and the inflection took care of itself.

The main problem encountered in this section was one involving the beginning of a transition. At first, Christy was very mild and timid, but as the scene progressed he began to reveal himself as a braggart. The development was



accompanied by extreme flights of fantasy, the first of which occurred in this section. Hence, the actor was faced with the problem of differentiating between the character as he originally appeared, and as he appeared during the transition and subsequent scenes.

The first indication of the transition occurred shortly after Christy's entrance in Act I, when he discovered that the villagers thought he was a hero. After being asked to describe how he killed his father, Christy stated that he "riz the loy and let fall the edge of it on the ridge of his (the father's) skull, and he went down at my feet like an empty sack, and never let a grunt nor a groan from him at all". Up to that time, Christy's movements had been very small and restricted. At this point, the actor felt that a change in the dynamics of physical gesture would aid in interpreting this change. More specifically, the physical movement needed to be larger, and more sweeping. During the description of the man falling, the author made a wide flowing gesture beginning with the arms crossed in front of him, each one then extending through a downward arc toward the floor and ending when they had been spread as far as possible to the sides. Up to this point in the play, Christy had his walking stick with him. The natural thing to do then was to use it as the loy. This probably made the imaginary act more vivid in the eyes of all spectators, and helped convey the

intense emotion which Christy felt in reliving his act. This was also done with the body, with the main attention centered in body position. In order to present tension, the muscles themselves were made stiff, the tension being slightly exaggerated in order to be perceptible to the audience. The body position assumed by the actor was the logical outgrowth of the preceding gestures. When beginning the speech, Christy took one half a step ahead by extending his right foot, doing so to capture the attention of the other characters who were engaged in a discussion among themselves. This movement was also made to draw the attention of the audience away from the conversing group on the other side of the stage. Then when the gesture indicating the prone figure of the father was performed, the body was bent at the waist. Simultaneously with the extending of the arms and bending at the waist, the weight was put on the right foot and the left foot extended out slightly to the rear. Although the position was relatively stable for the actor, the odd angle of the body was sufficient to create an atmosphere of tension about the character.

Act I, Section 1 presented another troublesome reading problem. The difficulty arose because the line occurred early in Act I, and concerned a very important part of the exposition. Christy had just explained to Michael James and the rest of the people in the inn that he had killed his

father. Michael James then asked if he buried his father after he killed him to which Christy replied, "Aye! I buried him then. Wasn't I diggin' spuds in the field?" The truth was that Christy did not bury his father. He was so frightened at the idea of having killed the old man that he immediately ran off across the fields, a fact which gave a very important clue to Christy's character. Thus the audience began to become aware of the fact that Christy was beginning to grasp at every opportunity to make the people at the inn think that he was an extremely brave and ferocious lad. Furthermore, the discovery was made later in the play that the old man was not dead at all, having not moved after he was struck because of his amazement at Christy's revolt. Therefore, if the audience was not aware that Christy was lying when he said he buried his father, the rest of the play would have been out of tune.

As was mentioned before, the problem was made even more difficult because of the fact that it occurred right after Christy's entrance in Act I, while the audience was yet unaware of the nature of his character. There was yet no indication which would suggest that Christy was an uninhibited liar. As a result, any possibility of gradually building this idea was ruled out, and the effect had to be suddenly and unmistakably effected in the single line, "Aye! I buried him then."



Necessity demanded the investigation of several avenues of attack before the right one was discovered. At first the actor merely took his cue from the preceding line, and said his speech emphatically. The result sounded as though Christy were heartily agreeing with Michael James. The suggestion was then made that a "take" be used just before the line was spoken. That is, the actor, upon hearing Michael's suggestion was to turn his head away as though dismissing the idea, realize the significance of the suggestion, and turn quickly back to Michael James, all the movements being executed in rapid succession. Thus, after the cue line was given, the actor did the "take", and then said the line with the same inflection as before. This method was also unsuccessful because it implied either that Christy had suddenly remembered this detail of his adventure, or that he hadn't heard Michael's question.

The director then presented the problem to the actor in terms of another situation. The idea was that a person was being questioned about an act which he was supposed to have committed. As was the case with Christy, the person did not want to admit what really happened, so he searched his mind for a logical answer. His interrogator saying, "Did you do this? That? Or that?" , the person being questioned, realized that one of the answers was the logical, although untrue, response. At this suggestion, the head of

the person being questioned snapped up, his face beamed, and he heartily responded, "Yes! I did do that!" In saying the line, the individual naturally emphasized the word "did". This same technique was then used in the final interpretation of the line in question. When the cue speech was completed, the actor hesitated while he registered a wideeyed look of amazement, smiled knowingly and said, "Aye! I buried him then." As is indicated, the word "buried" was emphasized. The remainder of the speech, "Wasn't I diggin' spuds in the field?", was spoken in a suspicious tone, with the eyes half closed, and eyebrows raised in an attempt to look crafty. The only criterion for judging the success of this final interpretation was the director's response which was favorable.

Because of the chronology of events that Synge has presented in "Playboy", there were various problems involved in rather sharp changes which occurred in the development of Christy's character. As Synge created the character, he was a frightened and shy lad when he first appeared at the inn. This was pointed out by the fact that Christy had some difficulty convincing Pegeen and her father that he really killed his dad. This problem was also attacked in the rehearsal of Act I, Section 1 of the play because Pegeen replied, "A soft lad the like of you wouldn't slit the windpipe of a screeching sow." However, as soon as they were convinced that Christy's statement was true, he was forced to become bold and swaggering

in order to fulfill the picture which the immediately formed of him. There was some difficulty in deciding at exactly which point the alteration was to take place. Finally, the line, "Aye! It was maybe something big." was decided upon as the logical place. When Christy entered in the beginning of Act I, the first question he asked was whether the police came into the place often. Immediately, Michael James' curiosity was aroused, and he tried to find out why the boy should be afraid. After several unsuccessful attempts at divining the truth, Michael hopefully spoke of Christy's mysterious deed as "maybe something big." At this point Christy saw the eager anticipation on the faces of Michael and the rest, and the full realization of the situation struck him for the first time. Furthermore he realized these people actually wanted his deed to be something important, that they might even have praised him for it, and that he should play along with the idea. Thus the audience needed to be shown that the change which took place in Christy at this point was not prompted solely by intellect. In Act II he revealed how he had been lonely and mistreated most of his life. Therefore, because of the lack of praise in his early life, he almost instinctively began to play the role of the hero. The line "Aye, it was maybe something big" was therefore considered as the logical place to begin the transition, and, it was spoken with a note of sudden realization and boasting.



Act I Section 2<sup>2</sup>

The second section of Act I will include the few short pages of the script after Michael James, Jimmy, Philly and Shawn have gone. As the men left, Christy seated himself by the fire and prepared to rest. When Pegeen began to talk with him, Christy apparently noticed her physical beauty for the first time, and began to take an interest in her. The problem involved in this scene was one of returning the character from the braggart to the simple, straight forward character who was explaining his situation to a person he wanted to convince. Use of the body and the voice were the two main techniques concentrated on in this scene.

The Body. In attempting to portray sincerity and honesty by using the body, the movement was changed from the dynamic gestures and activity used in the previous scene, and was restricted almost to the point of Naturalism. Since the scene demanded that a shy and somewhat thwarted peasant be presented to the audience, the movements were slow in comparison to the more fanatical scenes, and were more natural. For example, when Christy made reference to the scribes and bogs which he passed during his flight to the inn, he indicated the general direction in which they had lain, the gesture being a simple, slight extending of the arm. The point may

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2 Found in Chapter IV from p. 63 to p. 67

be made more understandable by the use of a comparison. Later in another portion of Act I, Section 2, Christy made a reference to "wide and windy acres of rich Munster land." This line was accompanied by a wide sweeping gesture which was supposed to indicate the vastness of the area. However, in the scene now under consideration, the actor merely moved the arm slightly in the direction from which he had traveled. This is only one solitary example of the type of gestures used, but all those used in this particular section followed a simple pattern.

As for body position, instead of rising to his full height and swaggering around the stage, the actor allowed his body to relax, and he walked normally. Consider again the comparison made in the preceding paragraph. During the first, more vital indication of the landscape, the actor's body was tense, and while saying the line, the actor leaned forward in eager anticipation, as though he were trying to touch the image. The second description was given in a much simpler fashion with the body relaxed and shoulders released into the normal position of a person at ease.

The Voice. The voice was also relaxed. That is, none of the techniques, such as extreme range of pitch, force, range or vocal quality were used, although there were of course, times when the actor used slight changes in the vocal pattern. For example, at one point in this scene, Christy became very

confidential with Pegeen, lowering the volume slightly, and speaking in the manner which one would naturally use when speaking confidentially. However, outside of the fact that the actor utilized projection sufficient to make himself heard, and the usual amount of stage inflectional exaggeration, the lines were delivered in his normal speaking voice. Therefore, by keeping his actions and voice within the realm of everyday living, and my mentally keeping in the character of Christy, the actor was able to overcome the problem.

Act I, Section 2 also contained single lines which were a challenge in reading for the actor. Near the end of the Act Pegeen and Christy were left alone, and Christy took off his boots in preparation for stretching out for the night. As Pegeen saw his feet she exclaimed, "Ah, you must have had great people in your family, from the little small feet you have." Christy's answer was, "Oh, we were great surely, with wide and windy acres of rich Munster land." Before this point in the play, nothing was mentioned about the status of Christy's family, so their being rich land owners was entirely possible. However, that was not the case, and the audience had to be made aware of the deception, thus having an insight into Christy's moral and ethical standards.

This line was handled in essentially the same way as the one previously mentioned, with one slight difference. That is, the actor registered surprise at the idea, and then made

a very emphatic positive reply. The slight difference in the handling of the line occurred in the tone of voice, and the facial expression used. The line was spoken with a note of dreaminess, and grandeur, and the eyes were widened with pleasure. The head was turned about a quarter turn out, and held as though the actor were vividly seeing the sweeping lands and magnificent houses of his ancestors. With the use of these techniques, the actor attempted to show Christy's habitual use of world of make believe, and hence to show that the described wealth was only a figment of his imagination.

Act I Section 3<sup>3</sup>

As Pegeen and Christy became better acquainted she mentioned a situation which again reminded Christy of his father, and for the first time, he really began to describe the old man. He painted a picture of a violent, delinquent bully who "never gave peace to any, saving when he had two months or three." Therefore, Act I, Section 3 began with his description and ended with the entrance of Widow Quin.

Since the audience to this point had heard many references to Mahon without ever really having been given his description, that they be impressed with the kind of a man he was is important. The description as Christy gave it was also of extreme importance in that it reflected the

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3 Found in Chapter IV from p. 67 to p. 69



relationship between the father and son, and also built the character of Christy. Hence, the problem was partially one of providing sufficient emphasis, while also providing an excellent place to inject some variety. Whereas the previous scene was relatively serious and slow moving, the tempo in this scene was changed for variation. More specifically, the change was brought about in the form of increasing the rhythm and tension by the use of interpretation and bodily movement.

Interpretation. In order to speed up the tempo of the scene, the actors and director decided that a much faster picking up of cues was necessary. This did not mean that the lines were necessarily to be spoken with more speed, but rather that there be as short as possible an interval between the conclusion of one character's speech, and the beginning of another. By the use of this technique, the actors were able to say the lines at the same rate of speaking but the tempo of a scene was changed a great deal.

The manner in which individual lines were spoken was also of great importance. Pegeen and Christy were the only two characters involved in this scene, and they represented extremes. That is, Pegeen was completely unaware of the nature of Mahon until Christy described him, and she was amazed and wide-eyed at Christy's words. Christy on the other hand was delighted to have Pegeen as an audience, and became

completely enthralled in the relation of his story. The actor had wonderful cooperation from Miss Houtchins, the actress portraying Pegeen, in this scene, and was able to employ a technique which aided in building the tension and excitement of the section. As was mentioned, Pegeen was amazed when Christy began his description of Mahon. As he added to the story, she became more and more awe-inspired. Upon noticing Pegeen's wonderment, Christy was stimulated even further, and became more excited and active each time, trying to top the information given before. This contributed to the vividness of his picturization of Mahon, as well as to the tempo of the scene.

Bodily Movement. Since the body was used as one of the chief means of establishing character in the flight scenes, a detailed analysis of bodily movement will be presented later in the chapter. As far as this section is concerned, movement will be talked about in terms of the changes it underwent in the transition from the scene between Christy and Pegeen at the bar in Act I, Section 2 to Christy's description of Mahon in Act I, Section 3.

As was mentioned before, the movement in Act I, Section 2 was relatively free, slow, and natural in accordance with the tempo of the scene. Since the section now under consideration was considerably different in tempo, a change in the type of movement used had to be made. Furthermore, this

change had to be made gradually and easily so as not to appear artificial.

The beginning of the transition occurred when Pegeen, being surprised at Christy's tale of his suffering youth, remarked that she thought he was probably some sort of royalty. At this point, Christy became very bitter and told Pegeen that the only joy he had in life was hunting rabbits at night. He then began to be carried away by memories of the past, and he told of watching the stars and fog, and hearing the rabbits scampering around in the brush. During the speech, the actor's body began to become more tense, and his gestures were broader and more volatile. While speaking of the fog and stars, a broad sweeping gesture was used. Christy's story then turned again to Mahon, and the way he would snore at night, and swear during the day, at the memory of which the actor showed more tightening of the body, and registered displeasure on the face. From this point, the gestures became freer almost to the point of wildness, and as the scene progressed, the body positions became more and more grotesque. In fact, while employing the previously mentioned building technique with the interpretation, the same thing was done with the body.

An extremely difficult problem in Act I, Section 3 presented itself in connection with gesture and movement which accompanied this and other scenes. Partly because of

past roles, and partly because of misinterpretation of the role, the actor found himself using short, rapid, and disjointed movements in scenes which called for emotional tension. Arm and hand gestures were short and pointed, head movements were sharp, and physical interpretation in general was jerky and tense. The director felt that this type of movement was inappropriate for a play involving a slow paced peasant society, and that the actor's gesturing had to be adapted.

As a result, the actor merely used more freely flowing gestures. In place of short, jerky arm movements, a wider yet more rapid movement was made, and a long, forceful stride was substituted for the quick, nervous walk. In short, movement was made more easy and countryish. By accompanying these movements with other devices such as body position, voice, and facial expression, the desired amount of tension or excitement was obtained.

#### Act I Section 4<sup>4</sup>

Act I, Section 4 began as the Widow Quin entered, continued with Pegeen and the Widow arguing about where Christy should spend the night, and ended after the two women had both exited.

There were very few times when Christy spoke at all,

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<sup>4</sup> Found in Chapter IV from p. 69 to p.74

but he was nevertheless an integral part of the scene. This was due primarily to two factors. First, there were only three people on stage during the entire scene, and it was impossible to completely eliminate one of the characters from the audience's attention. If the stage had been bigger, it would have been possible to reduce the prominence of one person to a minimum. This was impractical on the Studio Theatre stage because of its limited size. The second factor, namely that the script dictated that Christy share the scene, was also taken into consideration. As a result, the director blocked the scene with Christy, Pegeen, and the Widow Quin in a relatively compact group, making the only problem inherent here one of reaction.

When reaction is spoken of as a problem, the term means not only deciding what reactions were appropriate to the scene, but also the degree to which the actor should respond. The first of these, the reactions appropriate to the scene, demanded the more attention of the two. To say that a definite plan or set pattern of reaction was worked out and followed, would be false. Rather, the actor tried at all times to think in the character of Christy, allowing the reaction to a scene to take more or less care of itself. This does not mean, however, that the plot situation was not analyzed. On the contrary, it was minutely analyzed, but the analysis took place in the mind of Christy as the

scene went on. Hence, the reactions were the overt manifestations of the various aspects of the plot situation as Christy mentally examined them.

Hence, through continual rehearsal and repeated exploration of the situation, a series of reactions were established. Each time the scene was rehearsed, the actor saw the relationship of the various segments of the scene in the same light, and the same general outward reactions occurred. However, the fact that these reactions varied slightly each time Christy's reasoning deviated prevented them from becoming stereotyped and artificial.

Perhaps an examination of the thought processes which occurred in the mind of Christy, and also the reactions which grew from them would be of value. First of all, however, some consideration must be given to the events which had taken place up to the time of the Widow Quin's entrance. The most important fact the actor had to keep in mind was that Christy was in great fear of being hunted by the police when he entered the inn for the first time. As the scene progressed, Christy became more and more bold until he finally told Peggotty that he was quite a fellow, endowed with great strength and bravery. As his speech was interrupted by a sharp knock on the door, immediately the thought of the police entered his mind, and he quaked with fright. Also the fact that Christy was naturally shy must be remembered, and so

when Widow Quin entered he sat huddled in the corner. During the first moments of this scene, the actor remained in this attitude and did not change until the Widow Quin made a certain statement.

When the Widow revealed the reason for her visit, Christy began to take notice. In response to Pegeens questioning, Widow Quin said that she had come to take Christy home with her for the night. Up to that point, Christy had decided to spend the night at the inn, and was looking forward to it. His pleasure arose partly from the fact that he was beginning to feel affection toward Pegeen; partly from the warm reception he had received from the villagers; and partly from the fact that he had no where else to go. These facts, plus Christy's own native shyness caused him to register a good deal of surprise at Widow Quin's suggestion.

In response to the proposal that Christy spend the night elsewhere, Pegeen began to object violently. Not to be outdone, the Widow rather outrageously presented her side of the argument, and a verbal battle between the two women followed, a scene which evoked a series of three reactions in Christy. First as the argument began he was somewhat frightened and withdrawn. As the struggle continued, however, he noticed that Pegeen was upset at the thought of losing him and he realized that she cared for him a little.

At the same time, Christy saw that the Widow Quin was quite determined to get him for herself. This caused the actor to exhibit a combination of active interest and wonder at the actions of the two women. As the argument progressed, Christy became used to the boisterousness, began enjoying the situation, and registered great delight. It is interesting to note a particular bit of business used in this scene which produced a surprisingly humorous reaction in the audience. This business consisted of the actor registering a broad grin and intense delight during the portion of the argument in which Christy took the greatest delight. The aim of this business was to show that he was really becoming up in the conversation. The actor suddenly put his foot on the bench, rested his elbow against his knee, and cupped his chin in his hand while watching the two women. The effect was designed to be one of a young man settling back to enjoy the sight of two women fighting over him, evoked an unexpected, hearty laugh from the audience.

The second factor which was considered while working with the problem of reaction in Act I, Section 4 was the matter of how strong or weak the reaction was to be. The actor tried to think and feel as the character would have thought and felt and the degree of reaction he used was the one which Christy might have used.





Act I Section 5<sup>5</sup>

Act I, Section 5 will be considered as beginning with Pegeen's exit, and ending with the completion of the act.

During this section Christy was seen alone on stage for the first time since he entered the inn, and was therefore an excellent place in which to reveal the effect which all the happenings in the inn had had on him, and to see the real Christy unaffected by gasing admirers. Therefore, it was desirable that the actor present a character which aroused the audience's affection and sympathy. In a less skillfully written play, this problem would have been very difficult. However, Synge provided the actor with a curtain speech which said that because of the good luck that was coming his way, it was a shame that he hadn't killed his father earlier. With this speech, Christy's character was laid bare for the audience's approval.

The only problem inherent here was deciding on the degree of projection to be used, the term "projection" being used here to mean personality projection. Since this actor believed that a person alone would be less assertive in his manner, this last scene was played with the actor merely restraining the overt expression of the characters's

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<sup>5</sup> Found in Chapter IV from p. 74 to p. 75

personality slightly.

Also, since the line is so very tremendous in its humor and impact, the actor was very careful to appear quite natural and sincere, fearing that the speech would sound affected.



Act II Section I<sup>6</sup>

Act II section 1 began at the opening of the curtain, and extended to the entrance of the village girls. Since the actor was on stage alone during this scene, problems of audience attention, and maintaining a semblance of realism during the speeches presented themselves.

KEEPING AUDIENCE ATTENTION

In attempting to hold the attention of the audience, the actor depended upon voice, movement, and business to provide variety.

Voice: When the curtain first opened, Christy was seen sitting on a bench and shining a pair of shoes. After working for a minute, he noticed the bottles on the shelf and began counting them. This was the first time the script called for any speaking. However, the actor and the director felt that something more was necessary, so Christy hummed an Irish ballad as the act curtain opened. At other times when essential business was being done, the tune was used again. Thus, variety between the singing and speaking voices was established.

The speaking voice itself was also used for variety. The fact that Christy was in high spirits permitted the use

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6 Found in Chapter IV from p. 75 to p. 76

of a wide range of pitch which a person in a more serene emotional state would not have used. Also, the speeches in the script provided opportunities for the use of laughter. One of these speeches occurred when Christy was counting the jugs and bottles. After examining them, the actor remarked that the contents of so many bottles could do an excellent job of inebriating most of the surrounding villagers. This particular speech allowed considerable variety since the previous bottle counting speeches were done with a tone of amazement and wonder. Later in the scene Christy spoke of his good fortune in finding a place like the inn in which to stay. While describing how he would be smoking his pipe and drinking his fill, the actor again tried for vocal variety by using a voice which imitated a gruff, successful and contented land owner. Also, the lines following this scene were perfect for a repeated use of laughter. Christy, happened to spy a mirror in the wall, and immediately fell in love with his own image. In fact, his first line was, "Didn't I know rightly I was handsom?" and from there on, his words were all in self praise.

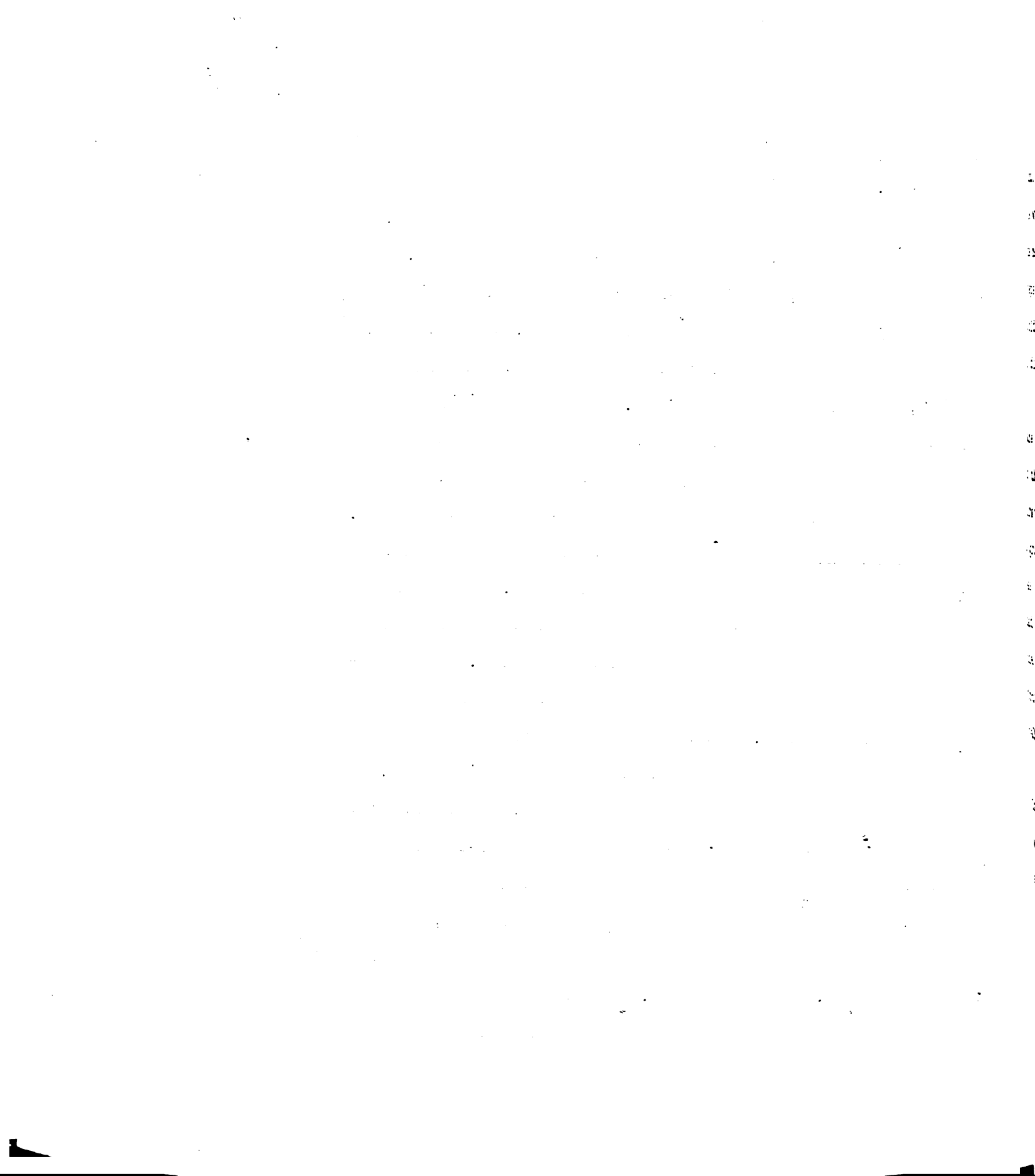
Movement: Since the mood of the entire scene in question was one of happiness, the actor tried to use movements which depicted that emotion. He tried to make the movements of his body appear buoyant or resilient. There were several places where variety could be used. For



example, at the opening of the scene, the actor almost skipped to the bar when he crossed to count the bottles. The walk was made very springy by walking on the toes. As he reached the bar, another variation in movement was obtained by jumping up and sitting on the bar. Later, other portions of the scene allowed for swaggering, forceful walking, and also a hasty retreat. Since the actor used each of these types of movement to build the mood of the scene and enhance the development of the character, their contribution to the factor of variety cannot be overlooked.

Business: The use of business in the first scene of Act II was also an aid in gaining variety. Synge provided Christy with a pair of shoes to shine, and the actor added the business of spitting on them slightly. The business is a stock one which was added for comedy as well as character development. At this point the lines began with "Half a hundred beyond, ten there, a score that's above." Since Christy was seated across the stage from the bar, the actor and director felt that it was necessary for purposes of clarification to direct the attention of the audience to the bar. The shoe brush was used for this purpose, and as he finished polishing the boots, the actor swung the brush out to the side, toward the bar. Then, as he turned his body toward the bottles, the brush was held upright in his





hand. After a look at the jugs, the actor's hand relaxed, and the wrist and the brush fell forward, pointing at the bar. The movement was done as a complete gesture rather than in the steps as described, and was meant to look as though it were accidental. Although the gesture was slight, it was enough to direct attention to the bottles, thus explaining the line.

Another chance for variety by the use of business came when Christy returned the finished boots to the bench. At this point he seemingly noticed the shoebrush for the first time. Since Christy had the line, "Aye, and isn't it a grand brush she has?", the actor felt that some business was indicated. He was aided by the brush itself, since it had a long handle which protruded from its top. Hence, as the line was being said, the actor brandished the brush in front of him, holding it gently as though it were of great value.

The portion of the scene which followed, included Christy's description of the great times he anticipated while living in the inn. As he described how he would be smoking his pipe, and drinking all that he could hold, the actor stalked around the stage pantomiming the actions of smoking a pipe, pulling the corks from the wine bottles, and acting generally important and content. Although these particular bits of business were used frequently in scenes of this type, they served their purpose by providing variety.

Attempt At Semblance of Realism: Although stage business was mentioned as an aid in gaining variety, it was also applied in Act II, Section 1 in attempting to deliver the soliloquy more realistically. When the speeches were accompanied with a large amount of business or pantomime, they seemed to be verbal thought processes, and thus more realistic.

The manner in which the lines were spoken was based on the premise that a person talking to himself would use a voice quality not used in regular conversation. The principle changes used were to make the quality more natural and to lower the pitch. The actor employed these techniques, and was careful to be heard throughout the house.

The business used to produce realism helped to solve the problem of speaking the soliloquy. To obtain a realistic presentation of the soliloquy, the lines were spoken in any body position except full front. Since the actor was usually handling some property or effecting some bit of pantomime, he fell into a variety of body positions.

The few closing lines of Act II Section 1 provided the actor with a chance to try some comedy techniques. The situation was that the shirtless Christy, who has been washing his face, heard the village girls nearing the inn. Aware of his nakedness, and the fact that the girls were strangers to him, Christy decided on a hasty retreat into the bedroom to finish dressing.

Because of the gay and carefree mood which Christy had established up to this point, a reaction of fear to the approach of the girls would offer contrast. Consequently, when the line, "Stranger girls. God help me, where'll I hide myself away and my long neck naked to the world," was spoken, a high pitched, nervous laugh was used accompanied by a widening of the eyes in mock terror and a hasty crossing of the hands over the chest. The effect was one of pretended distress combined with a touch of gleeful excitement.

#### Act II Section 2<sup>7</sup>

Act II Section 2 began when Christy was called from the bedroom to which he fled when the girls entered, and extended until the appearance of the Widow Quin. During this portion of the play, the only thing that happened was the girls' questioning of Christy, and the presentation of their gifts. Thus, Christy's acting problems were minimized.

As Christy emerged from the bedroom, he was completely surrounded by the excited girls. While they questioned him and gave him the gifts, he was forced to stand in one position. He was permitted only the briefest answers in response to the questions posed to him, and during the offering of the presents muttered an occasional, "Thank You," thus offering few reading problems.

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<sup>7</sup> Found in Chapter IV from p. 77 to p. 79

In this portion of Act II, the actor was allowed to reestablish the restraint from which he could build to less restrained movements and speech in following scenes. When Christy reappeared from the bedroom, he had become the same shy frightened lad who entered the inn near the beginning of Act I. The face registered a look of uncertainty and timidity, the gestures were very restrained and small, and the body assumed a position similar to the crouch of a person expecting a beating at any minute.

### Act II Section 3<sup>8</sup>

Act II Section 3 began at the entrance of the Widow Quin, and ended with the entrance of Pegeen.

The aim in this section was to show the growth of Christy from a state of extreme timidity, fright, and introversion to one of exaggerated, dominating self confidence and self assertion. The degree to which embellished and glorified the account of his deeds was one mark of his character growth, and his ravings reached a climax during that account. Now the actor had to show this growth by an even more fantastic escape from reality.

This was done by the use of several devices, one of which was the voice. In Act II Section 3 Christy described

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<sup>8</sup> Found in Chapter IV from p. 79 to p. 83

his deed to the village girls. During the description the actor's voice was pitched slightly higher to devote excitement. Since the pitch was raised at other times during the performance, a differentiation had to be made. This was accomplished by adding a trembling quality to the voice. By conditioning himself through rehearsals, the actor was able to make himself feel a real delight when explaining the act of aggression and it was a relatively simple matter to say the lines with a slight note of laughter in the voice. This produced the trembling, and also, an expression of the tremendous excitement the character was feeling.

The body was used to help create the feelings of tension. Actually, the technique used here was just a more extreme version of the one used in Act I, Section 1, but the actor felt that even a more grotesque body position was necessary. In reality, this particular account took place during a series of Christy's speeches. At one point, when describing how his father swung at him with the scythe, Christy made a jump back as though he were really avoiding the blade. Then, he went on to tell how he hit the old man with the loy. As in Act I, the actor started with his hand upraised as though holding the loy, and stood facing the audience in a quarter turn out, with his back to his group of listeners. Again, as the arm descended in the blow, the body bent forward at the waist, and the weight was shifted

to the right foot. At this point, the speech had been, "I hit him a blow, laid him stretched out..." While completing the last part of the speech, "and he split to the knob of the gullet", the top part of the body was turned to the girls, and the thumb was jerked up to indicate the gullet. This left the bottom portion of the body facing front, and the top part bent over, and facing the girls. The actor felt that the oddity of this position was such as to suggest the entirely different emotional stimuli which Christy was experiencing. He further felt that this position was sufficiently more unusual than the similar one in Act I to indicate the development in emotional intensity.

There was also a problem encountered in revealing Christy's inner motives. The motives themselves were easily discerned. This was Christy's initial contact with the village girls and after overcoming his bashfulness, he was anxious to make a good impression upon them. In fact, it was their presence which inspired him to paint a more thrilling picture of his deed than he had done previously. Therefore the actor had to show that Christy was performing for an audience of girls and doing his best to thrill them.

This was achieved with the voice and the body. The solution was similar to the one discussed under Act I, Section 3, where the voice and body were used as means for building the scene. Since village girls were enthralled by Christy's

words, and encouraged him. He became more and more excited at each portion of his description, and built each part to a higher emotional level.

Voice. One of the specific vocal techniques involved a special use of breathing. During the first few speeches in Act II, Section 3, Christy was relatively restrained, and spoke in a normal voice supported by normal breath. However, he was not very long in warming up to the occasion, and he started showing tension on the third speech of the scene. At first, the excitement was shown in the voice by a slightly higher pitch. As the scene progressed, the actor began to breathe more rapidly, and with less depth. The aim was to show the beginning of an emotional upheaval within Christy. The build mentioned previously was then augmented by increasing the irregularity and shallowness of the breathing until the actor was almost panting. By the use of this technique, the intensity of the scene was led upward. The task of clarifying the reason for the excitement, the desire to impress the girls, fell to another vocal technique.

The problem of the use of the voice was really more one of reading than of speaking. As was mentioned, this problem came into being because of the necessity of correlating the excitement and its corresponding stimulant. In other words, the real task of showing the motives in Christy's elaborate descriptions had to be taken over by the reading



devices. As the scene began, the actor spoke Christy's lines with the usual timidity and restraint. Then as he began to describe the striking of his father, an imitating technique was used. There were several lines in which Christy recited the words which his father had supposedly said to him. During these speeches, the actor used greater projection, and employed a huskier quality and a emphatic delivery. These speeches had to be spoken with a different quality because Christy's own answers were also spoken with great vitality. The particular characteristics used to differentiate the two voices were increased during each speech in response to the approving sighs and glances of the village girls. The actor responded verbally to the stimulation from the girls, and tried to make each segment of his description bigger and better.

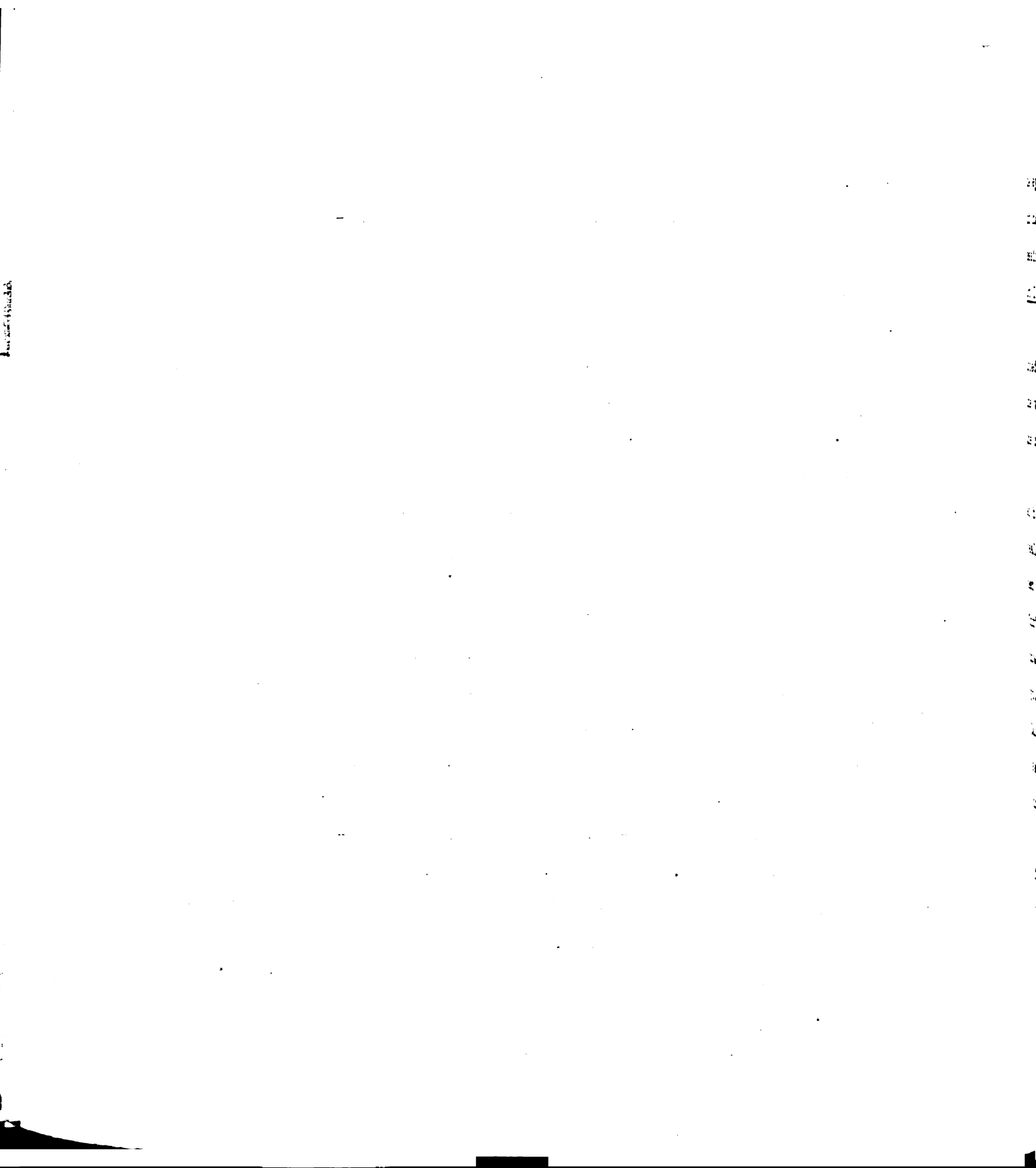
The Body. Without the use of a wide variety of body positions and gestures, principally with the head, the problem of making Christy's motives evident would have been difficult. The technique used was extremely simple, yet it was the logical and natural thing to do. Throughout his description, Christy would have wondered what effect his words were having on his listeners. Therefore, at the end of each of several of the speeches Christy glanced at the girls in search of their approval. The facial expression used was a combination of pride and expectation, changing

to pure glee when compliments were afforded him. When considering the fact that the body was also used extensively in this scene for the purpose of increasing the tension, and portraying the excitement which Christy felt, some appreciation of the total amount of movement may be gained.

Earlier in this chapter the use of comic technique was discussed. The circumstances under which a comic gesture might be used with reference to a particular speech, and the relationship of the gesture and speech were mentioned. Also, a specific example of a gesture made during a speech for comic effect was given. During Section 3 of Act II, an opportunity for using the gesture at the end of the line presented itself. As Christy finished his account of the slaying, he exclaimed, "I hit him a blow, laid him stretched out, and he split to the knob of the gullet." Up to that point, the tension of the scene, and also the laugh had been building, and the actor considered it time to allow the audience a release of some of their emotions. The line itself was not sufficiently funny to evoke an overt reaction. It was not instantaneously funny. However, if given time for a moment, the audience might realize that the blow had progressed from a crack on the head, to splitting open the skull, to a rent which extended down to the gullet. The line then became humorous, and capable of evoking a response. However,

in the script, there was no pause in the lines directly following this speech. Hence, the actor felt that the introduction of a gesture to be done at the end of the speech would allow enough time for the audience to appreciate the situation. When the last portion of the line, "and he split to the knob of the gullet" was spoken, the actor assumed the odd body position already described, and indicated the "gullet" with his thumb. At the same time, the face assumed a look of wild eyed excitement with the mouth open and the tongue out. The audience laughed immediately, but it is difficult to say whether the laugh was really provoked by the realization of the situation, or by the silly look on the actor's face.

The preceding discussion does not imply that the few cases mentioned in this chapter were the only ones in which Christy left the realm of reality. On the contrary, his departures occurred frequently throughout the play. However, after the first few times, the audience should be aware of this peculiarity in Christy's make-up, and should not be surprised when it occurred again. The actor, therefore, did not deem it necessary to work out a completely different vocal and physical pattern for each occurrence. Instead, certain characteristic eye movements were established to indicate one of those flights. The effect attempted was a glassy-eyed, dreamy, yet excited look. This was accomplished by widening



the eyes as much as possible, avoiding an immediate focus, and having the face raised. The actor appeared to be witnessing some distant ethereal scene.

#### Act II Section 4<sup>9</sup>

Act II, Section 4 began as Pegeen entered and interrupted the festive activities of Christy, the Widow Quin, and the village girls, and ended as Christy finished tidying up the room.

As Pegeen entered the inn and found Christy surrounded by a host of female admirers, she experienced a feeling of jealousy. She immediately ordered the girls out, and turned her wrath upon Christy. Not suspecting how Pegeen felt, Christy turned genially to her. His pleasure was short-lived, however, and he found himself face to face with a very angry young lady who ordered him to begin straightening up the room. During the resulting action, there were only eight speeches said, and most of the business occurred during intervals of the first speech.

Business. As was mentioned, Christy was in a gay frame of mind when Pegeen entered. However, when he heard the tone of her first line, "Fling out that rubbish", his happiness soon departed and was replaced by fright, surprise and hurt. Attempting to show these things in his facial expression, the

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9 Found in Chapter IV from p. 83 to p. 85

actor rose, picked up the basin in which he had been washing, crossed slowly and timidly to the door and threw out the water. Hoping that this was the only thing that Pegeen was upset about, he turned to her with a smile. His friendliness was met with, "and put them cups away," spoken even more harshly than the first line. When the actor heard the order, his smile was still present. Then as an awareness of the seriousness of the circumstances gradually dawned on him, the eyes slowly relaxed and the mouth was held open, showing the disappearance of pleasure from the smile. The grin was also slowly relaxed until the expression on the face changed to a scowl.

The rest of the action resulting from Pegeen's order that the cups be put away, occurred because there were five cups, a wine bottle, and a pitcher used in an earlier scene which remained on the table at the left side of the stage. There was quite an armload which Christy was to carry to the bar. Because of Pegeen's belligerent tone, he was frightened and very nervous. As a result, when the actor went to gather the cups from the low table, he pretended that the chore was more difficult than it really was and allowed the cups to slip out of his grasp. While trying hurriedly to get them together, he constantly stole anxious glances at Pegeen to see if her patience was becoming exhausted. When he finally did succeed in obtaining all the cups, the bottle, and the pitcher, he

remained in the half squatting position while scuttling across the stage. The pitcher was also a useful property for comedy, for when picking it off the table, the actor was careful to hold the snout end toward himself. While crossing the stage, the grip on the handle relaxed allowing water to pour down the front of his trousers. During this sequence, the actor did his best to register all the appropriate expressions of embarrassment and discomfort.

The spilling of the water was useful not only for comedy on the cross, but it also gave rise to another bit of business behind the bar. After Christy finally got his burden safely to the bar, he turned his attention to the water on his trousers. The fact that the bar was between Pegeen and himself was advantageous in that the audience was able to see this water, and Pegeen could not. Hence, with the partition hiding his activity, the humor of the situation was increased as the actor tried frantically to brush the water from his trousers, while endeavoring to be calm and confident before Pegeen.

Reading. Because the first part of this section depended on business, there were no unusual reading problems present. After Christy had returned the drinking materials to their correct places, Pegeen told him to replace a mirror which he had removed from the wall. His explanation of the removal of the mirror was Christy's first speech in this

section. The reply was, "I was making myself decent only, and this a fine place for young pretty girls." In the first part of this speech, the actor spoke with a very apologetic tone, a quality that was the outgrowth of timidity and repentance. The result was almost a whine. At the middle of the speech, however, it was as though the character thought he might subside Pegeen's anger with childish flattery. The last portion of the speech was spoken with Christy smiling knowingly and with approximately the same tone he would use in coquettishly saying, "This is a fine place for pretty girls, expecially with you here." His flattery was of no avail though, because Pegeen replied, "Whisht your talking of girls!" Not to be discouraged so easily, Christy began again in the same tone. This time, the sharpness of Pegeen's answer, as well as the look on her face decided him against trying any further. The actor then shrugged, crossed to the fireplace, and stood there somewhat in an attitude of pouting. After a brief pause, he realized that he had picked up the loy, and was swinging it absent-mindedly. Immediately he saw another opportunity for redemption and blurted out, "It was with a loy the like of that there that I killed my father." This time, the line was spoken with much fierceness and force, accompanied by an expectant look. When Pegeen answered that she had heard that story six times since the



dawn of day, Christy's hopes were shattered. Not knowing any other means to get Pegeen's thoughts away from his recent activities with the village girls he sighed, "It's a queer thing you wouldn't care to be hearing it, and them girls after walking four miles to be listening to me now." The line was spoken in the same meek, apologetic voice that characterized Christy in the beginning of Act I, and upon its completion, the actor sank disgruntled to the bench. This speech and movement marked the end of Act II, Section 4.

Act II Section 5<sup>10</sup>

Act II, Section 5 began as Christy finished straightening the room, put on his boots, and prepared to leave, and ended with the entrance of Shawn and the Widow Quin. The problems encountered in this section were ones involving movement.

Movement. Near the end of Act I, Christy had removed his boots in preparation for going to bed, and at the time of this scene he had still neglected to put them on. However, when Pegeen impressed upon him the possible grim circumstances of his death, he was prone to retreat to the door. The time which the actor was allowed to use in putting on the boots was limited to the few seconds required to say the line, "Well, if that's the terror of them, it's best I went on wandering

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10 Found in Chapter IV from p. 85 to p. 89

maybe".

The girls had picked up the boots and examined them earlier in the scene and had replaced them close to the bench. The actor noted their position before sitting down, and adjusted his movements accordingly. Also, the height of the boots hindered the actor from putting them on speedily. After experimenting with various ways of holding the boots and slipping the foot in, a satisfactory pattern was established.

#### Act II Section 6<sup>11</sup>

Act II, Section 6 began with the entrance of the Widow Quin and ended with the entrance of Old Mahon.

When Shawn entered, he revealed that he had come to offer Christy some new clothes in hopes of bribing the Playboy into leaving the village. After some argument, Christy decided to wear the clothes temporarily to see how they looked. He retired to the other room to don his newly acquired finery, and presently reappeared in all his glory. When Christy came out garbed in all ill-fitting bomburg hat, gray coat, and black double seated trousers, the actor was tempted to play the scene for its comic effect. Therefore, during the first weeks of rehearsal, the scene was played pointing up that action. However, after consider-

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<sup>11</sup> Found in Chapter IV from p. 89 to p. 94



ation, the actor and the director realized that since Christy had previously done nothing bold or swaggering unless forced into it by the other people at the inn, this contradiction was out of key. A reaction of uncertainty seemed more the logical one for this scene, so that when Christy appeared at the door his purpose was to see how the Widow and Shawn reacted to the sight of him.

As the actor walked on stage, his actions were small, inhibited, and nervous, his walk was slow with almost mincing steps, and the arms were bent slightly and held in close to the sides. The body indicated physical submissiveness, with the shoulders hunched slightly as though the actor expected to feel a blow struck across his back.

The use of facial expression was the only comic contrast presented. The expression, a shy grin of anticipation, was accomplished by bowing the head slightly so that the eyebrows had to be raised, and by looking up into the faces of Shawn and the Widow Quin. At the same time, a half hearted smile was employed. Consequently, the actor appeared to be rather hesitantly trying to see whether the others were pleased with his appearance or not. The humor of the situation was cut down, and the audience was not given an opportunity to laugh. As the scene progressed, the Widow and Shawn had nothing but praise for his ensemble, and the Widow remarked, "If you seen yourself now, I'm thinking you'd



be too proud to speak to us at all, and it'd be a pity surely to have your like sailing from Mayo to the Western World." This was what Christy had been waiting for, and he immediately underwent a complete change by assuming a very dignified look, adjusting his coat collar, and stalking across the stage while replying, "I ain't going." With this complete change of character to the comic side, the audience was given a chance to relieve the build up reaction.

In affecting the change, the actor applied practically the same techniques used in the flight scenes mentioned in Act I, Section 1, and Act II, Section 3. That is, the movements were broad and sweeping, with the voice and face expressing extreme delight.

#### Act II Section 7<sup>12</sup>

Act II, Section 7 began as Old Mahon entered the inn, and ended with his exit.

Immediately following Christy's discovery of Old Mahon, he ducked behind the door, and the old man entered the inn. During the ensuing scene between Mahon and the Widow Quin, Christy was forced to remain concealed, and once again the problem was one of reaction. The difference between this problem and the one encountered in Act I,

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12 Found in Chapter IV from p.94 to p.98



Section 4 arose as the result of the difference of Christy's participation in the two scenes. In Act I he had a few lines, and was placed in a position where emphatic value demanded that he have some attention. Consequently, Christy's reactions were restrained and natural. In this scene, the actor was upstage half hidden by the door and the other actors. Old Mahon was asking questions pertaining to hisson's whereabouts, also adding certain descriptions of the boy which were anything but favorable. Hence, the audience was interested in Christy's reaction to certain parts of the conversation. With the actor within full view of the audience in an area of the stage that was well lighted, the slightest movement would have detracted from the rest of the scene. For this reason, reactions to only parts of the scene were necessary. After an examination of the references made to him during the conversation, several places were decided upon as the ones in which the audience would be most likely to glance at Christy, the main factor used in this selection being the relative strength of the detrimental nature of the various lines. Another factor to be considered was the importance of the lines and business which followed a reaction speech. The actor felt that a strong reaction from him which occurred on an important line would have completely killed the line itself. Hence, with these two principles in mind, several places for strong reactions were chosen.



When Mahon first entered the inn angrily explaining that he wanted to find Christy and "destroy him", the actor felt that a reaction of fright was appropriate. Then, as the Widow Quin began chiding Mahon for tormenting Christy, the boy became slightly amused at Mahon's hearty protests. However, as the old man continued, The Widow Quin appeared to believe the story, and Christy showed his anger during the more derogatory portions of the tale. Particularly because of his interest in Pegeen, Christy was especially irritated by Mahon's line, "If he seen a red petticoat coming swinging over the hill, he'd be off to hide in the sticks, and you'd see him shooting out his two sheepseyes between the twigs". Mahon also revealed that Christy was extremely lazy, and spent his time looking at himself in the mirror. Although a reaction of fear would have been appropriate here, the actor felt that the audience should be aware of the line for purposes of adding to their understanding of the vanity in Christy's character. Consequently, no reaction was used on the completion of this speech, but the audience was allowed to concentrate on the old man's speech. Again, as the Widow revealed that she knew where the boy could be found, Christy's reaction was one of fear, the actor feeling that the audience would be more interested in Christy's reaction here than Mahon's. Then relief appeared as the Widow sent Mahon out, and was replaced by anger at the thought of what Pegeen would

say after finding out that he had been lying.

Act II Section 8<sup>13</sup>

Act II, Section 8 began immediately after Old Mahon's denouncement of his son when Christy stepped from his hiding place to face the mocking Widow Quin, and ended when the Act II curtain closed.

As Christy met the Widow, his first reactions were ones of fear. That is, fear of what Pegeen would say to him when she found out that he had lied. Then as he realized that Old Mahon had dethroned him, his fear turned to bitterness and anger against his father. Therefore, the problem encountered in this section was one of portraying this anger in its various stages.

There were several ways in which the voice was used to denote anger. While interpreting the first phase of Christy's anger, the actor thought it appropriate to use raving and ranting techniques.

While hidden behind the door, Christy was primarily interested in the disparaging remarks made by Old Mahon, and whether the Widow would reveal his whereabouts or not. However, during the few moments after the old man left, the Widow Quin returned and Christy became aware of his predicament. This was indicated by his first line, "What'll Pegeen say

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13 Found in Chapter IV from p.98 to p.103

when she hears that story? What'll she be saying to me now?" When the Widow replied that he could thank his father for the problem he faced, his anger suddenly began and was manifested in spontaneous outburst of cursing. The actor's voice was pitched slightly higher than usual with a husky quality introduced for the purpose of keeping the higher pitch from causing harsh shrillness, and a great amount of volume was also employed.

The Body. In considering the appropriate use of the body to accompany the voice in these scenes the actor decided to use tension as the primary body technique in his interpretation. Consequently, gestures and small movements were executed in a jerky and unco-ordinated fashion, and all the muscles in the body were made rigid.

As Christy continued his verbal attack on his father, his anger grew to such proportions that he was overwhelmed and began to cry. In this portion of the scene relatively the same bodily techniques mentioned above were used. The voice, however, was kept in the lower registers, with a tremor added and the words were clipped and evenly spaced.

The difficulty met in attempting the crying was such that it warrants individual consideration here. At first, the approach of remembering crying experiences was employed. Although the actor felt the tragedy of the situation when this concept of acting was used, the appropriate vocal patterns



refused to come. Therefore, a detailed study of the physical processes employed in the act of crying was made. As a result, a crude muscular pattern was set up, and some idea of the appropriate stimuli to be experienced was gained. After many rehearsals in which this series of internal stimuli were experimented with, a method of effecting the crying was found which felt and sounded right.



Act III Section 1<sup>14</sup>

Act III, Section 1 began late in Act III when Christy and Pegeen returned from the games, and ended with the entrance of Old Mahon.

Because Christy was sincere in this section, and not attempting to fabricate a story there were no special vocal or characterization problems involved. The actor merely relied upon the same techniques of voice and body used in Act I, Section 2 where sincerity was again the keynote. The only acting problem was one of movement and that was in actual blocking. Synge's directions call for much of the action to be played around a table down right. The lines and plot dictated that the scene be shared equally between Pegeen and Christy, with each speech making their relationship more closely knit. The action therefore, was planned to allow Pegeen and Christy to draw closer together whenever any movement was made. At the climax of the scene, Christy was seated on the stool beside Pegeen holding her hand. She was seated on the corner of the table. The seriousness of the scene then broke for a short time, and Pegeen and Christy both became very gay. That break was used and Christy moved up behind the table, crossing around to the other side of Pegeen. As Christy seated himself on the table in a three-

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14 Found in Chapter IV from p. 114 to p. 124

quarter turn out with Pegeen sitting a quarter turn in, both of the faces were in profile. The shared scene was necessary because Pegeen and Christy made one final compliment to each other before being interrupted by Michael James.

Act III Section 2 <sup>15</sup>

Act III, Section 2 began with the entrance of Old Mahon and the crowd, included the boys second attack on his father, and ended as Christy sank thoughtfully to the bench by the hearth.

One of the major problems of this scene was planning the movement of the struggle. As Mahon came bursting in the door, he stopped, saw Christy, and rushed at the boy. Immediately the father and son grappled Mahon throwing Christy to the floor. The question was how to make the fall safe, yet realistic.

Due to the natural exuberance of Mr. Lenhoff, the actor who portrayed Mahon, Christy was sometimes thrown violently on his back. In order to avoid injury, the decision was made to devise a set of protective movements which would still look realistic.

As Mahon entered the inn, Christy was standing in a three quarter turn position facing the door. When Mahon



approached, the actor grasped him by the shoulders of his coat. At the same time, Mahon threw his arms around Christy's neck, as if trying to force the boy to the floor. As Mahon bent forward at the waist, Christy, still clinging to the old man, threw his feet up in the air. Then, as the forward motion of Mahon's body stopped, the actor relaxed his arms, allowing his shoulders to come to rest on the floor. At this point, the actor's feet, still in the air, were then brought heavily to the floor. Since the entire movement did not require more than a few seconds, the confusing flailing of arms and legs plus the loud noise of the feet striking the ground gave the impression that Christy was thrown bodily to the stage floor.

Another problem existed in this scene, and arose as the result of a necessary transition in Christy. As was mentioned in Chapter 5, the final reversal, and a major change in Christy both occurred in the last scene of the play. Hence, since the action was fairly fast moving from the section now being discussed until the end of the play, Act II, Section 2 was decided upon as the logical place in which to prepare for the final transition. That is, the actor felt that the change in Christy which prompted him to leave the inn later in Act III had to be presented.

The main factor responsible for this transition in Christy was the realization of the fact that the persons he

had previously considered as friends were now turning against him. By the end of the play, disappointment and frustration had destroyed any emotional bonds which might have kept him at the inn.

Since the realization came to the actor gradually during the scene, its overt expression was made in terms of the emotion which it aroused, namely anger. As the crowd began to torment him, Christy began to see that they were turning against him. However, he was too occupied with the task of pleading with Pegeen to be angry. As the jeering continued, however, he turned to the Widow Quin saying, "Will you come between us and protect me now?" At her refusal, the first stage of anger was released and this emotion was shown on his next speech. The actor tensed his body muscles, and gritted his teeth, spoke with an outburst of volume, a slightly higher pitch, and a quavering in the voice. The actor used a slight nasal quality which gave hint of a sneer. As the scene progressed, the anger became more intense as shown by lowering the volume and pitch by clipping the words and tensing the facial muscles. The climax came when Mahon ordered the boy out of the inn. At this point, Christy replied, "I'm going, but I'm going to stretch you first." The line was yelled with all the volume the actor possessed, and the arm holding the boy was poised for striking.

With this change in Christy's attitude which began in this section, Christy's leaving the inn in Act III, Section 4 was the logical outcome of the situation.

At this point, Mahon rushed from the stage pursued by Christy and the crowd. After a moment of silence, an offstage gasp from the crowd revealed that Christy had caught and struck Mahon and Christy then stumbled back into the inn. By the use of widened eyes, a glassy stare, and a lack of expression on the face, the actor attempted to show the dazed confusion of Christy's mind, a condition resulting from the fact that the crowd had turned against him when he hit Mahon. Then the Widow Quin entered, and even during her pleading attempts to get the boy to flee from the inn, Christy was unable to comprehend the situation. Finally, as the Widow Quin and Sarah tried forcible to drag him from the inn, Christy snatched up a stool and chased them away. Still bewildered, the boy walked to the hearth, and sank to the bench lost in his own thoughts.

#### Act III Section 3<sup>16</sup>

Act III, Section 3 began as Michael and the villagers entered to find Christy seated at the hearth, and ended with the reappearance of Old Mahon. The chief problems encountered here were in terms of movement and voice.

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16 Found in Chapter IV from p.130 to p. 134

As Michael James and the crowd entered and found Christy so absorbed in thought that he was unaware of their presence, they slipped the hangman's noose over his head. When they then found that he had no intentions of moving, they jerked the boy off of the bench and onto the floor. Since Christy was pulled backwards, necessity again demanded that the action be planned to protect the actor. After practising the fall several times, the other actors found that the rope stayed on more consistently when placed around Christy's arms, although restricting the arm movement.

When the crowd began pulling on the rope, Christy grabbed the edge of the bench. This allowed the top part of his body to be pulled back until he was almost horizontal. When back as far as he could go, the actor let go with his hands, swung his right knee around, and toppled off the bench. With the knees extended down, the actor slid off the bench, rolled on his knee, and sprawled on the floor. The actual fall of the body was only a few inches, but when executed rapidly, it looked as though the actor had fallen from the seat level.

Immediately following the fall from the bench, Christy was dragged across the floor to a table where he wrapped his legs and feet around a table leg. This was taken care of by the way the fall was handled. When the actor swung his knee down to meet the floor, he turned his body in the

direction of the table. Thus, when falling, he landed on his side with his feet pointing towards the table. When sitting up, he turned his body completely around and grasped the table leg. The other actors merely had to learn how to swing Christy in the general direction of the table.

The Voice. The vocal problem to be mentioned now did not really find its origin in Act III, Section 3, but rather grew throughout the entire play, reaching its maximum difficulty in this section. Fear of Christy's voice giving out in this scene prompted an investigation which revealed that the actor was not consciously making a definite attempt to employ diaphragmatic breathing. This particular portion of the play necessitated a large amount of screaming and yelling on the part of Christy, and the director decided that some of the effort and strain involved would be eliminated by concentrating on proper breathing. Actually, the factors of effort and the strained sound were looked upon as symptomatic indications of the possibility of the actor's temporary neglect of correct breathing techniques.

Hence, the actor and director conducted special review sessions during which all attention to interpretation was sacrificed, the main consideration being given to breath control. Thus, the actor received a better idea of the times

in which to breath, and since the tenseness arising as the result of uncertainty was eliminated, the problem of forced speech was solved.

Because of the small size of Studio Theatre, the actor had no difficulty in making himself heard above the crowd noise. Consequently, it was not necessary for the other actors to lower the volume of their speeches, this actor being able to top them without straining by the use of the above mentioned techniques.

Act III Section 4<sup>17</sup>

Act III, Section 4 began as Mahon entered on his hands and knees to interrupt the carrying off of Christy, and concluded with Christy's final exit.

Act III, Section 4 climaxed with the major reversal discussed in Chapter V, and the question of "What will become of Christy?" is answered. As mentioned, the preparation for this change was made in Act III, Section 3 when Christy saw the breakdown of the relationships with Pegeen and the villagers. By the time Mahon appeared in this section, the boy was in terror of his life, and any appearance of affection for any of the natives was gone. Therefore, when Mahon saved him from the crowd and then suggested that they leave together, Christy was willing to consider the possibilities. Since the

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17 Found in Chapter IV from p. 134 to p. 136

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treachery of the villagers had destroyed his previous feelings and made remaining at the inn impossible, he could either go with his father or else start his lonely wandering again.

At this point, the final change in Christy occurred. As he stood thinking, his eyes began to widen, a smile grew on his face, and he stared into space. This type of reaction had been established earlier in the play as the times when Christy was in his dream world so when he used this facial expression again the audience could see the decision being made in Christy's mind.

This smile or realization marked the beginning of a new character that had just awakened to the possibilities which the future might hold. The first indication of this new character was seen on the line, "I will then. Like a gallant captain with his heathen slave." Then the total picture of the new Christy was seen on the next line, "Go on now, and I'll see you from this day stewing my oatmeal and washing my spuds, for I'm master of all fights from now." A vocal techniques was also used in attempting to show the change in Christy. When he said his line "I will then...", laughter in the voice was employed. This pitch was slightly higher, and a voice quaver accompanied by a breathy quality was used.

Also, the voice was used as an aid in showing the new relationship between Christy and Mahon during the speech,



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and "I'll see you from this day stewing my oatmeal..." At this point, the actor used a vocal inflection designed to show Christy's first rather clumsy attempt at dominance, plus an indication of the delight which Christy felt at the outcome of the situation. The pitch was lowered, and the delivery was moderately forceful.

With this speech, Christy and Old Mahon started out the door. However, just before his exit, the boy stopped, turned in the doorway, and surveyed the people in the inn. Then the actor's face broke into a wide grin, and he said, "Ten thousand blessings on all that's here, for you've turned me a likely gaffer in the end of all, the way I'll go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of judgement day". The last portion of this speech revealed the idea which Christy had of his future, and the line was said with a note of jaunty self assurance. As the last words of the speech were said, the actor saluted the others pertly, and made his final exit.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY

Following a study of the background of The Playboy of the Western World and the contribution made by John Millington Synge in writing about this segment of the Irish people, the character of Christy Mahon was analyzed in terms of its physiological, psychological, and sociological factors.

Physically, he was of slight but athletic build, between twenty one and twenty five years of age. Actual facial characteristics were not considered important, but the actor's blonde hair was dyed black in order to satisfy the popular conception of Irish types.

Psychologically, he was found to be suffering from frustration resulting mainly from relationship with his father. Since Mahon stood in Christy's way of becoming a different person, his frustration was exhibited as hatred for his father. As a result of this frustration, Christy was prone to escape into the world of fantasy at times. The reaction of fear and timidity was the result of out-growth of Mahon's earlier abuse. Mahon's lack of affection for his son caused Christy to respond quickly to any friendliness or affection shown him by others.

Sociologically Christy was effected by the fact that the contributions of his homelife and background had been meager. Because of Mahon's apathy, the land which they

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had was poor, placing them in the lowest economic class. All during the play, the boy was impressed by material elements, a fact which may have indicated a lack of these in his former life.

Characterization. When analyzing the character development of Christy, the following considerations were made. Since the play was set in Ireland, the question of an Irish dialect arose. Because of the rhythm and sentence structure which Synge used, the Irish inflection appeared without too much trouble after working with the lines. When the Irish pattern was established, the actor then turned his attention to presenting a meaningful interpretation of the lines.

The principle problem of characterization was centered on the necessity of showing four separate aspects of Christy's character, (1) timidity, (2) ability to show anger, (3) imaginativeness, and (4) the ability to be affectionate.

The creation of timidity as revealed when he first appeared at the inn was the most difficult of the four for this actor. The technique used was one of analyzing Christy's life to discover the reasons for this shyness, his fright of girls, and the domination exerted over him by his father. Since Mahon influenced so much of the activity in his early life, Christy might very possibly have generalized his

father's cruelty as typical of that which everyone he met would give him. When the lines in Act I which indicated his feelings were spoken with a vocal pattern revealing fear and uncertainty, this element of timidity was conveyed.

Christy's ability to become angry was seen all through the play. Even during Act I when he was frightened by the villagers, he occasionally lost his temper. The actor again considered the boy's earlier life realizing that the effect which the ridicule and cruelty shown him by Mahon might have been the cause of his anger. Later, in Act III after the climax of the play the presence of Mahon in the scene stimulated his anger. The actor relied on recalling this emotion in himself and adapted his reactions to how the character would respond. Increased volume and body tenseness aided in gaining the desired effect.

The script also revealed that Christy was very imaginative when he glorified the accounts of his life before entering the inn. However, Synge did not require Christy to create purely fictitious situations, but rather to exaggerate the happenings as they occurred. The vivid imagination of the character was conveyed on the stage, therefore, by using the element of exaggeration. During the speeches in which Christy was describing previous events, facial expressions were exaggerated, and a higher vocal pitch, faster rate, increased volume, and less inhibited

movements were employed.

Synge also created scenes in which Christy was required to be romantic and affectionate. The justification for this trait was again revealed in an examination of the boy's home life. Since Christy was denied any affection from his father, his response to Pegeen's friendliness was not only natural, but even passionate.

Since Christy's desire for Pegeen did not arise out of a wish to show off, affectionate scenes were played with simplicity. The actor remembered similar moments and experiences in his own life, and tried to exhibit those reactions which a shy but responsive young man would have shown by using quiet movement and a more modulated voice.

Movement. In working on the movement pattern set up by Christy, the following factors were important. When Christy first appeared at the inn, he was shy, timid, and frightened. This impression was conveyed by a slow walk and mincing steps. The carriage of the body was a combination of hunched shoulders, head slightly bowed, and arms held close to the side. As the scene progressed, the same walk was used with minor variations in body position. For example, many overt movements by the other characters caused Christy to cringe automatically, or to look suspiciously around.

The second phase of his character appeared gradually rather than instantaneously, and consequently the movement

was also gradually modified. The first modification appeared in Act I as Christy described the killing of his father. At this point, the movement became broader and less inhibited. A wide, swinging gesture which ended in a grotesque body position was used to indicate the emergence of the new Christy. As the play progressed, the walk became a self-assured stride, movements were free, yet smooth, while holding the body upright with a straight back, and the head erect.

Later in Act II, when the character of Christy had fully reached the second stage, the actor used an even more grotesque body position, with exaggerated arm gestures and tense body position.

During the love scene, the actor's aim was to convey sincerity, so all body movement used was made as simple as possible drawing on that activity which might be seen in an every-day situation. Because of the limited size of the Studio Theatre auditorium, there was no worry concerning the visual projection of movements. The more controlled type of movement was also used to show the maturation of the character of Christy.

On the last few speeches of Act III, the final phase of the character of Christy was evident. He was now an individual who was going out to make a place for himself in the world by searching for greater compliments on his physical prowess.



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The movement used here was similar to that used in the second phase of the character's development, except more assurance and positiveness in gesture and breadth of movement was stressed.

Vocal Techniques. The voice was also used to help convey the various stages of Christy's evolution. When he made his initial entrance, the actor used a "small voice", as Synge described it. That is, the volume was only loud enough to permit the actor to be heard, the pitch was the actor's normal pitch, and a slightly breathy quality was used.

However, as he began to explain the killing of his father, the pitch rose, the volume increased, and the rate quickened. As periods of excitement reoccurred in Christy, a trembling quality was added.

During the Act II scenes where he was very gay, the same techniques were used to convey excitement, but a hint of laughter in the voice was added by using a catching breathy quality.

As the boy began to see the true nature of the people at the inn, and he approached the third phase of his character where periods of extreme anger occurred, extremes in volume were used. Sometimes, the words were clipped with an exaggerated decrease in rate. A harsh quality was used that gave strength to the reaction.

In considering this thesis project as a whole, the actor found the experience of creating the role of Christy very profitable and enjoyable. Previously unaware of Synge's work, the actor was introduced to playwrighting which was both delightful and inspiring. One result was an increased appreciation of the power of rhythm and imagery in speech.

The creation of this unusual character also helped more clearly to define ideas of acting techniques, and principles of play construction that had heretofore been nebulous in the actor's mind. In addition, many new techniques of movement, voice, and characterization were learned.

According to those information sources available, the creation and presentation of this role was successful. The response of the audience, both during the run of the play and after the performances, the director, and the press,<sup>1</sup> was favorable. The clearest, yet not always the most accurate criteria of success was the fact that the box office receipts increased steadily as the play progressed, and while there is no way of knowing what the draw of a single actor can be, yet the work of the "Playboy" is important in furthering the acceptance by the audience of the play.

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<sup>1</sup> The Michigan State News, November ', 1951 "The roles that Daniel Simpson undertakes have been memorable regardless of the play itself, and in this he seems to wear it with comfort of a fireside slipper."

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