

LITTLE HOUND IN MAYO: SYNGE'S PLAYBOY AND THE COMIC TRADITION IN IRISH LITERATURE

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IN A RECENT ARTICLE in the *Dalhousie Review*, it has been suggested that the central action of *The Playboy of the Western World*, the blow on the head, can be read as a modern version of the beheading game as it appears in "The Championship of Ulster".¹ The comparison is an apt one: indeed, in discussing the links between the saga material of ancient Ireland and Synge's play, Professor Sidnell does not go far enough. In using this motif for his drama, the playwright himself is taking a role very much like that of the inaugurator of the beheading action, the traditional poet figure, Bricriu. As Bricriu manipulates the men of Ulster at his famous feast, sometimes with comically malicious intent, so does Synge, I would suggest, manipulate his Irish peasant characters in a sustained mock-heroic vein; at the same time, he provides one character who, like Cuchulain, nicely survives and even transcends the machinations. In both cases the rest of the characters are in various ways made to look ridiculous.

When Shaw once wrote that "The Playboy's real name was Synge",² another way of saying that the playwright himself was the real hoaxer and mischief-maker, he pointed the way to clarification of Synge's specific ironic dimension in the play. On the other hand, Frank O'Connor, in his posthumous study of Irish literature, *The Backward Look*, insists on what he calls Synge's great structural mistake in the play when he does not reveal at the very first that Old Mahon is alive. He argues that the audience should grasp the irony of Christy's tale-spinning as soon as possible.³ Surely, however, there is a strong indication in Synge of what Yeats describes generally as an Irish habit of mind with its "mischievous extravagance", a hidden malice which delights when someone is willing to "take the sport for gloomy earnest".⁴ Thus at the very beginning *The Playboy* audience is deliberately placed into something of the same absurd position as the villagers in the comedy.

To be swept along by the glories of romance rather than by the plain

fare of reality is a universal human tendency, but it is one that Synge saw as particularly and richly Irish. Synge's game is to show up audience and characters alike by letting both get involved in what is essentially a mock-heroic situation. Christy is lauded for killing his father, though—unlike the events in "The Championship of Ulster"—no one literally loses his head. No one in *The Playboy* among either audience or characters—not even Christy himself—knows that no murder has been committed. The other characters are of course directly, if unwittingly, involved in creating the fable, but the audience with its lack of essential knowledge is caught up as well.

The first audiences took Synge's sport for gloomy earnest because they resented having to tolerate an immoral situation which they believed to be a falsification of Irish peasant life. They were perhaps too much concerned with the superficialities of the national image, no doubt preferring the nobilities of *Kathleen ni Houlihan* or the nostalgia of *The Land of Heart's Desire*. What they failed to perceive was that the Irish peasant was not in himself the object of attack, nor indeed, as one early critic declared, did Synge heap scorn on the head of his hero, Christy Mahon.⁵ On the contrary, to Synge the vigour of the Irish tradition was in the keeping of the highly imaginative peasant with whom he so frequently associated. But at the same time in this particular play he seems to have used his peasant material for a further purpose than in his previous work. On one level at least, he created an effective comment on what he seems to have considered the unrealistic preoccupation of the Celtic renaissance.

Several years earlier he had written, in reply to the Celtic point of view expressed by his friend Stephen MacKenna, that "no drama can grow out of anything other than the fundamental realities of life which are never fantastic, are neither modern nor unmodern and, as I see them, rarely 'springdayish, or breezy or Cuchulainoid'." And, he went on to affirm, "Ireland will gain if Irish writers deal manfully, directly and decently with the entire reality of life."⁶ One might go as far as to suggest that paradoxically Synge chose to point this out by indirection in *The Playboy*. Perhaps because he was aware of the absurdities in a nationalist movement that saw in Cuchulain the spirit of a new as well as the old Ireland,⁷ he gave his Irish audience a mock-heroic version of the Red Branch buried in the framework of a peasant comedy. In so doing he demonstrated in the final triumph of Christy Mahon that self-knowledge and self-realization were necessary to achieve a national as well as a personal destiny. This is the "reality" of *The Playboy of the Western World*,

or perhaps one of the "several sides" to it hinted at by Synge himself in his letter to *The Irish Times* shortly after the play's riotous première.⁶

The evidence for such a reading becomes apparent with an examination of elements of the Ulster hero story other than those that are dealt with by Professor Sidnell. Nevertheless, his citing of the beheading game, when Cuchulain becomes the Champion of Ulster, as the parallel for the central action for which Christy is named Champion Playboy of the Western World, is the significant starting point for further argument. Throughout the play, Synge maintains the mock-heroic tone in two ways: the comic analogies to the Cuchulain lore, sustained by the continuing humour of the modern-peasant/ancient-nobleman inversion, and sometimes by the direct ironic reversal of mythical incident and personality.

It is illuminating, first of all, to examine the father-son relationship in terms of the Ulster material. While, in keeping with the beheading motif, Old Mahon is a Curoi figure, Curoi is not described in the Ulster cycle as Cuchulain's parent.⁸ There are several conflicting accounts in the birthtale of Cuchulain as to the identity of his father. Lady Gregory follows the oldest tradition, which as much as says that he is the god Lug of the Long Hand.⁹ Dechtire, sister of King Conchubar, is always the mother, but in one version Conchubar himself is the father; in another it is Sualtim, Dechtire's husband. In any case there are a number of heroic father and authority figures in Cuchulain's life—those mentioned above, other guardians and tutors, as well as those with whom he comes into direct conflict, such as Forgall, father of Emer, Curoi Mac Daire, and Culain the Smith. Lug of the Long Hand is largely unknown to his earthly son, but on one memorable occasion when Cuchulain has been for weeks holding off the armies of Maeve of Connaught single-handed, Lug makes a miraculous appearance to give the severely pressed hero a rest from his trials.

Christy knows only too well who his father is, having been plagued and bullied by him all his young life; yet Christy is the kind of son who has grown up never really knowing his parent in an intimate way. Therefore Howarth sees Christy's unconscious view of Old Mahon as of a "god and object of worship".⁷ Certainly in the first telling of his tale of parricide, Christy exposes his mixed feelings of fear, awe, and reluctant pride towards the old man. The more we see and hear of Old Mahon, the more we realize that while Pegeen is busy creating a man out of Christy and he in turn is trying to match her image of himself, the old father is everything that Christy is not. While it may seem extreme to call him a god, Old Mahon is unquestionably heroic in dimension.

Although to us he is comically heroic, a loud-mouthed, grasping, greedy, drunken old brawler, he is one who might have been more socially acceptable in the spacious days of the Red Branch. In him we see Synge's version of "romantic Ireland", neither "dead and gone", nor imprisoned between the covers of a translation. And it is significant to the Cuchulain parallel that the reprehensible old father makes his most dramatic entrance in the play just at the point when Christy is hard pressed by the ire of a whole community.

The motivating action of *The Playboy* is Christy's blow on his father's head. The myth of Christy's heroics arises out of his belief that he has actually killed Mahon, but the comic irony of the play reaches a climax when the old man appears before the Widow Quin, battered but very much alive. This leads to the Widow's sarcastic remark "Well, you're the walking Playboy of the Western World". Christy's real triumph occurs at the end, when he accepts the return challenge that old Mahon thrusts at him, in the presence of all Christy's former admirers, and batters him a second time. This is the act which to his father demonstrates Christy's real worth as "Playboy of the Western World". It therefore takes the time between these two events for Christy to re-establish himself, not as the hoaxer the Widow Quin implied him to be, nor even, as he later becomes, a "champion of the world" at sports.¹⁰ Ultimately he has to become "the likely gaffer" who has the dare-devil power to defy all the fools who have suddenly renounced the hero they themselves helped to create. Mock-heroics have been transformed into reality when Christy can handle himself and all comers. Moreover, father and son have been reunited with a mythically appropriate reversal of their positions.

Another strand of the Ulster hero story to be found in the play is the reference to the naming of the hero. Cuchulain first comes to public attention when he is only a little fellow aged seven. His given name is Setanta. He insinuates himself into Conchubar's Boy Troop by virtue of his superior skill at games, particularly hurling. The first major event in his life occurs when he acquires the name by which he is to be known to fame: the killing of the fierce hound of Culain the Smith. When Culain is angered by his loss, the boy volunteers to serve the smith as protector of his goods until he can seek and train a new dog. Thus he becomes known as Hound of Culain, often shortened affectionately to Little Hound. He is a popular figure at Emain Macha, and although excessively proper as a child, he is much loved and admired by the women of Ulster for his beauty of face, sweetness of speech, and athletic prowess. So much so, that he is hardly out of adolescence when the men of Ulster decide they must protect themselves by finding him a wife.

In direct mock-heroic contrast, Christy Mahon is a timid little peasant weakling, physically "a small low fellow," a lazy worker and a dreamer; he is afraid of girls and when it comes to athletic prowess is "the fool of men." His father tells that he is therefore universally known to the district as "the looney of Mahon's." Also he has so little appeal to the opposite sex that he is "the laughing joke of every female woman where four Baronies meet".

Cuchulain's taking of arms occurs when he is still a child. He chooses an auspicious day, one for which it is prophesied that he who takes arms will die young, and live on in immortal fame. Only King Conchubar's weapons satisfy the boy, and he goes off to prove his worth against three fierce sons of Nechtan. He defeats the first with his iron hurling ball, the second with his sword, and the third with his spear, employing in each case the athletic prowess for which he has already become well known. He returns home with the three heads for trophies, as well as two stags that he chased on foot and a flock of white swans that he captured alive. Since his battle-anger is still upon him as he approaches Emin Macha, steps have to be taken to subdue his wildness before it is safe to welcome him.

The comparable event in Christy's career occurs at a later time in his life, but then Synge in any case crowds Christy's heroic activity into a period of about ten days. Christy's unexpected success at the local athletic competition represents his triumphant initiation into combat. His borrowed arms are the borrowed clothes of Shawn Keough and his trophies the bagpipes, fiddle, and blackthorn which he wins for jumping, leaping, and racing. Here he has really earned the Widow's now unironic compliment when she calls him "the Champion Playboy of the Western World" in the sense of being successful at sports. He is still a hoaxer in his parricidal claims, but he has acquired the courage and bravado to keep up the front. He has yet to win his true championship, the one that is comparable, in comic terms, to Cuchulain's triumph of courage in the beheading game.

Another important event in the life of Cuchulain is "The Wooing of Emer," a tale which in Lady Gregory follows the taking of arms. Since the men of Ulster have been unsuccessful in finding him a wife to his liking, the youth seeks out the distinguished maiden Emer, daughter of Forgall Manach the Wily, feeling that she alone is worthy of his birth, education, and reputation for strength and skill in combat. Emer has the "six gifts" of beauty, voice, sweet speech, skill at needlework, wisdom, and chastity.

Part of Cuchulain's wooing is couched in traditional mythological metaphor, ostensibly devised for the occasion to prevent Emer's maidens from un-

derstanding his intent and reporting to Forgall, who is against him. Emer herself, however, is interested in the hero's suit, but warns him that he will have to accomplish several difficult feats in order to overcome her reluctant father. When the wily parent discovers Cuchulain's intent, he tricks Conchubar into sending the young aspirant to the woman-warrior Scathach on the pretext of further training in combat, but actually he hopes that Cuchulain will perish on the journey. While Cuchulain is away, Forgall finds another suitor for Emer—Lugaid, a king of Munster. When Emer explains that she loves Cuchulain, Lugaid is reluctant to take her, for he is afraid of Cuchulain's reputation for strength. Emer's recalcitrant father continues to resist at the expense of his life when Cuchulain returns to win his bride.

Christy is attracted to Pegeen early in their acquaintance, but it is his success at sports that gives him the courage to seek her hand in earnest. She herself has prepared the way by turning him into a hero almost the moment she hears what he did to his father. In comic contrast to Emer, who is surrounded by the warrior world, she is starved for exciting action and therefore has to make her own. She starts with the traditional idea of associating hero with poet, displaying the equally traditional awe and admiration for such a figure: "and I've heard all times it's the poets are your like—fine fiery fellows with great rages when their temper's roused." She has already noted Christy's supposedly aristocratic "small feet" and "quality name, the like of what you'd find in the great powers and potentates of France and Spain". Here one recalls not only the noble lineage of Cuchulain but also that his childhood tutor was Amergin, "fighter and poet", who taught him—as he tells Emer—courage to stand up to any man and poetic skill in making "praises for the doings of a king". Christy's first telling of his own "doings" is timid and reluctant, but encouraged by the admiration of Pegeen, his description of the "battle rage" which was supposed to have led to his father's death becomes increasingly imaginative. This warrior too has the voice of the poet.

Christy finds in Pegeen the several gifts which Cuchulain admires in Emer. We find that the shebeen-keeper's daughter has her own peasant version of the "six gifts". To the Playboy she is "a lovely handsome woman"; he admires the "sweetness" of her voice and speech. She is even skilled at needlework: the cover that she puts over Christy on the night of his stay "I'm after quilting a while since with my own two hands." But in some way these and the other "gifts" also operate in comic reversal: the Widow Quin sees her as undistinguished in physical charm, "itching and scratching, and she with the stale stink of poteen"; of her sweet speech, Pegeen herself admits she can

be "the fright of seven townlands for my biting tongue"; there are a number of examples of her less than lovely voice, as for example when she berates Christy for his response to the other girls, or when she discovers the lie of her lover's reputation. Although Pegeen's chastity is never in doubt, she is, in the view of Shawn, immodest in her determination to house Christy overnight unchaperoned. Wisdom she later acquires, but too late, when she realizes "I've lost the only Playboy of the Western World".

Christy's words of wooing to Pegeen are universally celebrated for the richness of their poetry. They are more overt in their implications and intentions than Cuchulain's elaborate metaphor and poetic formality, but there is a kind of measured ceremony in the lovers' dialogue, which, as Alan Price has noticed, gives "the impression of ritual".¹¹ More specifically, Christy also uses the lore of belief and tradition in his speech, though his metaphors are of course relevant to his own time. An example is his extravagant avowal: "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, like Emer, has another suitor who is approved by her father. However, in contrast to Forgall, Michael James does give at least temporary consent. He is suddenly impressed by Christy's spirit, which leads him to dream of "a score of grandsons growing up little gallant swearers". Again in contrast to Forgall, who dies resisting Cuchulain as a son-in-law, Michael James claims that if necessary he will happily risk an untimely grave in order to make Christy a part of his family. Needless to say he changes his mind and is the first at hand with a rope to apprehend the denigrated hero.

Cuchulain's visit to Scathach is a prelude to the trials of strength which win him Emer for his bride. Scathach is a renowned woman warrior who also has the druid power of prophecy. Her "sunny house" is on an island "in the east of Alban" where she lives in the company of beautiful maidens. One of these is her daughter Uacthach who falls in love with the Ulster hero at first sight. She sends him to her mother whom Cuchulain immediately seizes and holds at sword-point until Scathach agrees to teach him her great skill at arms. In return Scathach has good service from Cuchulain during his stay: he becomes Uacthach's temporary husband,¹² and in defeating the fierce woman warrior Aoife, saves Scathach's two sons from the enemy. In some ways, then, Scathach is the wise old woman in Cuchulain's life: she tutors him and trains him, tries to protect him from harm during his stay, and receives assistance

from him in return. As he leaves for Ulster she uses her druid power, making a forecast of the dangers of his career, his victories, fame, and how "he would die in his full strength". On his return home, Cuchulain kills the required number of opponents in his determination to fulfil his word to Emer and for this is given "the headship of the young men of Ulster".

Christy's counsellor and aid to his success is the Widow Quin. She is the one who signs him up for the sports in which he triumphs and is the first to pronounce him "Playboy of the Western World". When she discovers that his story of parricide is an error, she does everything in her power, in return for the promise of certain favours, to deceive both the villagers and Old Mahon. Thus she functions as a kind of parody of the wise old-woman figure with her greater knowledge of the situation and her shrewd sense of how to handle it for her own ultimate benefit.

In keeping with the idea of comic contrast, she starts out by wanting the Playboy for herself rather than for any of the young girls in whose company she is frequently found. She offers the young man the comforts of her version of the "sunny house", the "hou-reen" described in scathing terms by Pegeen as a decrepit dwelling, where "leaky thatch is growing more pasture for her buck goat than her square of fields". The most significant feature to be found in the Widow Quin, in comic parallel to Scathach, is that as Scathach and Cuchulain have a common bond as warriors of repute, so, in Synge's terms, do the Widow and Christy. Years ago she "destroyed" her man who died of blood poisoning after she had hit him "with a worn pick". Again in scathing terms, Pegeen comments that it was "a sneaky kind of murder did win small glory with the boys itself". But Christy does not wish to cement their bond, and when the Widow sees that her case is hopeless, she strikes the bargain to help him win Pegeen; and when Christy loses his bride in the end, it is through no lack of effort on her part.

The final scuffle, which in *The Playboy* is comparable in its sequence of events to Cuchulain's slaughter of the protectors of Emer for which Scathach helped him prepare, begins inauspiciously. Mahon makes his third appearance, as if from the dead, and begins beating his son with a stick. When he can no longer deny that this is his "murdered" father, Christy runs to the Widow for protection. But she can do nothing, and so, faced with the loss of his new reputation and lady love, Christy confronts his tormentors. Out of the undignified turmoil which follows, Christy really does acquire by mock-heroic means a modern form of heroic stature; it is achieved at the expense of a bride but at the gain of wisdom and self-knowledge. His title is secure.

It has been suggested here that Synge has, in a comic-satiric way, made a special use of the revival of ancient lore current in the contemporary literary movement. Yet Vivian Mercier's recent study would place Synge "almost entirely outside the Gaelic literary tradition", the author of a new "genre" in Irish literature: "Unlike the class-conscious Gaelic poets and satirists, Synge sympathizes with the underdog and the outcast, be he tramp or tinker, parricide or blind beggar."¹³ That such an association does not necessarily rule out the traditional connection for *The Playboy* is most modestly argued by Professor Sidnell, according to whom "*The Playboy* may be seen as the story of the Championship of Ulster after it had passed through the literary guts of an Irish Tramp". This is certainly a way to see interest in the contemporary peasant and the heroic tradition as not being mutually exclusive, though it does not particularly illuminate the question of Synge's relationship to the Irish comic tradition.

Use may now be made of Mercier's rather cogent general insights into the comic tradition of Irish literature to show that Synge, specifically in *The Playboy*, did in fact belong to that tradition, and on Mercier's terms. Mercier writes that "the most striking, single fact about Irish literature in either Gaelic or English is the high proportion of satire which it contains."¹⁴ He goes on to refer to the probable magical origins of satire, pointing to evidence that in Old Irish the general word for the genre must have originally meant "spell" or "enchantment". Fear of a power which must have been inherited from the Druids enhanced the prestige of the poet-satirist, his "spell-derived" abuse having the power of curse. This can be substantiated from the record in the *Mythological Cycle* of the first satire composed in Ireland, down to Douglas Hyde's Gaelic play *The Twisting of the Rope*. The potency of the poet-satirist should already be evident in Synge himself in his role described above as analogous to that of Bricriu, Ulster satirist and trouble-maker; and perhaps the awe with which Pegeen beholds her poet-hero can also be traced to this tradition.

Among major elements in Irish comic and satiric writing, both past and modern, Mercier lists the fantastic, the macabre, and the grotesque. The comic use of fantasy is related to magical events such as shape-changing, transformation, and miracle. The stories of "Manannan at Play" recorded in Lady Gregory's *Gods and Fighting Men* are good examples of fantastic humour. Certainly the transformations of Cuchulainn to and from his battle rages were not intended to be humorous, but Synge could be said to draw on this tradition in a comic way, with the magic of Christy's lightning-quick changes from

snivelling coward to man of violence. Even the comic hints of the traditional beheading-game motif suggest the humorous handling of the marvellous. Fantasy can also be a pretext for sexual ribaldry, says Mercier, although "purely erotic writing does not come naturally to the modern Irish".¹⁴ The closest example of this in *The Playboy* lies in the possible titillation of Christy's once controversial speech: "It's Pegeen I'm seeking only, and what'd I care if you brought me a drift of females, standing in their shifts itself, maybe, from this place to the eastern world?"

Concerning the macabre and the grotesque, Mercier describes the effect of one as a defence mechanism against the idea of death, the other as a means of belittling the awe inspired by life.¹⁴ With regard to the macabre elements in *The Playboy*, he briefly mentions that Synge has developed "the comic possibilities of parricide with a thoroughness unparalleled elsewhere in literature",¹⁴ rightly seeing the father-son conflict as macabre in a universal rather than a specifically Irish sense. But it should be added that Synge, as a deliberate technique, backs away from the macabre when he makes his peasants so horrified at the spectacle of Christy's second murder attempt, and that he does this to make his comic-satiric point about the contemporary Irishman who balks when faced with actions comparable in violence to the old heroic tales; that, while the peasant loves to hear and repeat macabre stories, "there's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed." Thus, of a piece with the psychological climate which makes a sensation of the hearsay murder of Mahon we have Philly's account of his boyhood Sunday game of playing with the skeleton of a man "who had thighs as long as your arms", and Jimmy Farrell's "skulls they have in the city of Dublin, ranged out like jugs in a cabin of Connaught". It is all mere matter for goose-bumps; and in no way matched by a capacity to stomach real bloodshed and corpses. In this way, Synge comments ironically within the framework of his play on one aspect of the Irish literary movement, in whose enthusiasts a story like that of Cuchulain playing hurley with the head of the dead half-man might invoke equally delicious thrills.¹⁵

But the most conspicuous traditional comic characteristic reinforcing the central action of the parricide in *The Playboy* is Synge's handling of the grotesque. The grossness of some of Old Mahon's self-confessed indulgences may have more than a faint ring of the character and behaviour of the Dagda, ancient father god of the Tuatha de Danaan, whose crude exploits have a strongly comic note even in their earliest forms. He is quick in temper, fierce in battle, gross in appearance, lusty in behaviour, and later in his career he is duped out of his dwelling by his son Angus Og.¹⁶

Less is known and recorded of the Dagda's female counterpart, the Sheela-na-gig, goddess of creation and destruction, usually considered a primitive prototype of the Great Queen and war goddess, the Morrighu. In surviving statuary the Sheela-na-gig is a grotesque combination of skeleton ribs, enlarged sex organ, and a big scowling or sometimes laughing mouth. There is some debate over the size or even presence of bosom on the typical Sheela-na-gig, although one interpretation of her name is "Sheila of the Breasts." There is evidence that the name was used in modern times in an area of Cork to mean "hag", and of course, the hag-figure plays a predominant role in Irish hero lore.¹⁴ The most conspicuous hag figure who also has Sheela-na-gig aspects in *The Playboy* is one who never makes an appearance on stage, but is described thus: "A walking terror from beyond the hills, and she two score and five years, and two hundred weights and five pounds in the weighing scales, with a limping leg on her and a blinded eye, and she a woman of noted misbehaviour with the old and young." This is the widow Casey whom Christy's father wants him to marry for his own mercenary reasons. But the young man is horrified; not only is she "a hag this day with a tongue on her has the crows and seabirds scattered, the way they wouldn't cast a shadow on her garden with the dread of her curse," but even worse "when all know she did suckle me for six weeks when I came into the world."

In the Ulster Cycle, Cuchulain has various adventures with vicious one-eyed hags. During his stay with Scathach, he meets Ess Enchenn, "blind of the left eye", who is anxious to kill him in revenge for the death of her three sons. After the battles of the Cattle Raid of Cooley, the three one-eyed daughters of Calatin pursue him to his near peril. Towards the end of his career, three hags, also blind in the left eye, force him to break his taboo and eat roasted hound, with fatal consequences. The Morrighu herself becomes his sworn enemy during the Cooley conflict when, in the guise of a red woman, she offers herself to him and is rejected. When he answers her threats with his sword, the woman disappears "and all he saw was a black crow, and it sitting on a branch, and by that he knew it was the Morrighu had been talking with him."

The Widow Quin has some resemblance to both the hag and Morrighu figures. She has a reputation for grotesque female behaviour, such as the suckling of a ewe which recalls Sheila of the Breasts. She has a warlike fierceness which led to the death of her man, and she is anxious to wed the young Christy. She also has a crafty quality, but this is of no personal avail; circumstances and the hero's preferences defeat her. She even fails in her unhaglike attempt

to save him from his inevitable fate, in contrast to the three hags who drive Cuchulain to his doom. But Christy's fortune is happier than that of his ancient counterpart. Cuchulain's price of fame is his young life, while Christy, whose heroic days are also over, will nevertheless live on to enjoy his own 'immortality'. The price is the loss of his beautiful romance with the lovely Pegeen. But while she is left to lament her folly, "the likely gaffer" she has helped to self-fulfilment will "go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgement day."

Thus, Synge may be said to have written *The Playboy* out of materials in which the ancient Irish tradition and contemporary country lore manage to coincide. But the one is a remote shadow of the other; and it is in the psychological disparity between them that the play finds its ironic centre.

NOTES

1. M. J. Sidnell, "Synge's *Playboy* and the Champion of Ulster", *Dalhousie Review*, XLV (1965), 51-59, 53.
2. Maurice Bourgeois, *John Millington Synge* (London, 1913), p. 193.
3. London, 1967, p. 170.
4. *Synge and the Ireland of his Time* (Churchtown, Dundrum, 1911), p. 34.
5. A. E. Malone, *Irish Drama* (London, 1929, reissued 1965), p. 152.
6. David H. Greene and Edward M. Stephens, *J. M. Synge: 1871-1909* (New York, 1959), pp. 156-158, 244.
7. See Herbert Howarth, *The Irish Writers 1880-1940* (London, 1958), pp. 26-31, 223.
8. See R. S. Loomis, *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* (New York, 1926), pp. 55-59, for a discussion of Curoi as a variant of Lug and therefore father of Cuchulain, and also an analysis of the beheading game as a combat between the old and young sun god.
9. *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (London, 1902). Since Synge knew Lady Gregory's text well, it will be the source for Ulster Cycle material following, unless otherwise indicated.
10. See Bourgeois, pp. 193-194, for an analysis of Synge's uses of the word "play-boy".
11. *Synge and the Anglo-Irish Drama* (London, 1961), p. 171.
12. This is a detail omitted by Lady Gregory, but included in *Ancient Irish Tales*, eds. T. P. Cross and C. H. Slover (New York, 1936), p. 165.
13. *The Irish Comic Tradition* (Oxford, 1962), p. 239.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 105, 40, 49, 68, 53-56.
15. This tale, not recorded in Lady Gregory, is summarized by Mercier, *op.cit.*, pp. 63-64.
16. Lady Gregory, *Gods and Fighting Men* (London, 1904), pp. 79-80.