

Naturalist Aesthetics in John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and *The Playboy of the Western World*

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Abstract: Efforts have always been made by literary scholars and critics to read the aesthetics of John Millington Synge's drama. However, little attention has been paid to the naturalistic dimension of Synge's plays. This study, therefore, investigates the naturalist aesthetics in Synge's dramaturgy. This is in an attempt to show that individuals' attitudes in certain contexts are conditioned by the forces of the environment they inhabit. The study adopts the naturalist dramatic theory in order to account for the intricate connection between human beings and nature. Also the study engages aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis to unveil the psychological implications of the actions and reactions of the individuals in Synge's plays. For the purpose of critical analysis, two of Synge's plays are selected - *Riders to the Sea* and *The Playboy of the Western World*. The study maintains that Synge's dramaturgy is influenced, in fact enriched by his close study of the Irish peasantry in the Aran Island. Both texts selected for this study reveal that Synge recreates and records the contemporary life of the Islanders in a journalist and objective style. The people's struggle for life in their Darwinian environment is captured in different dramatic forms. While *Riders to the Sea* presents a tragic vision of life, *The Playboy of the Western World* perfectly blends the comic with the tragic to present a farcical vision of life. Life in both texts is represented in journey motif. The journey of life in the closed system of the Island presented in *Riders to the Sea* often results in death and loss, and the journey of life in *The Playboy of the Western World* is coloured by disappointment, loss, rage, violence, boredom, and failure. The pessimistic and bleak realities of the people's life, in no small measure, affect their psyche and dictate their deeds. This signifies that there is a symbiotic relationship between person and place. Synge's dramaturgy is a stage where art and life in its wild realities co-exist. It is a justifiable fact that such a co-existence maintains a contractual relationship. While the

Irish life feeds Synge's dramatic imagination, he gives back to that life by aiming to reform it through his satiric representations.

Keywords: Naturalist, Dramaturgy, Journey motif, Environment, Psyche

Introduction

John Millington Synge is one of the greatest Irish dramatists, whose work captures the contemporary life of Ireland. Synge makes significant contributions to the development of modern Irish drama. Synge surfaces on the scene of the Abbey Theatre established by Synge William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory for the development of Irish national drama "at a time when dramatic reservoir of the Abbey was depleting fast and there was lack of plays which could appeal to the audience's ethos immediately" (Asghar Ali Ansari, 2012:68). The plays of Synge, Ansari claims, represent the contemporary ethos of Ireland (68). According to David Hlavsa (1990:1):

No playwright in Ireland had the powers of observation or recorded the life of the peasantry with as much delight and objectivity as John Millington Synge.... [He] was the premier dramatist of the Irish literary Renaissance and an important figure in the development of the naturalist theatre.

Synge's fascination with the objective details of the life of the peasants in the Aran Island shapes the direction of his plays. There is an intricate tie between Synge's plays and "the folk-imagination" of "the Irish peasantry" (Synge, 1907:174). Synge acknowledges "the folk imagination" in his preface to *The Playboy of the Western World*. He submits that:

In writing "The Playboy of the Western World", as in my other plays, I have used one or two words only that I have not heard

among the country people of Ireland or spoken in my own nursery before I could read the newspapers. A certain number of the phrases I employ I have heard also from herds and fishermen along the coast from Kerry to Mayo or from beggar women and ballad-singers nearer Dublin (174).

According to Francis Bickley (1912:21), Synge sees art as a form of expression “not of life keyed down to the low pitch convenient for those who live in the narrow streets of civilization,” but of life “superb and wild in reality” (Synge, 175). The Aran Island provides the raw materials that feed Synge’s dramatic imagination. This is as a result of his experiences in the Aran Island, where he visits and stays with the people and gets obsessed with their ways to life. Of course, his visit to the Island is made possible by Yeats’ advice, when they meet in Paris. Hlavsa records that:

Synge managed to get fairly close to the Islanders, attending funerals, witnessing an eviction, talking to the people about their daily lives, and listening to their stories without intruding or causing them embarrassment. Over the course of several visits to the Western world, Synge... fell in love with the Aran Islands (5).

Synge, born in 1871 in Rathfarnham, near Dublin, writes six plays before in death at age thirty seven. The plays 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 the last, which is not completed before his death, *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. In all these plays, Synge displays his commitment to describing and recording the lives of the Irish peasantry in significant details, adopting journalistic, objective and scientific realistic mode.

In this study, attempts are made to examine the naturalist aesthetics in Synge’s *Riders to the Sea* and *The Playboy of the Western World*. Also, the study engages aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis to unveil the

psychological implications of the actions and reactions of the individuals in the plays. This is in an attempt to show that individuals' attitudes in certain contexts are conditioned by the forces of the environment they inhabit.

Naturalism in Dramatic Literature

Dramatic literature is a work of art, which tells story through action and dialogue. Dramatic literature is a mimetic art and a performed art (Simon Cooper & Sally Mackey:vii). Ademola Dasylva also emphasizes that drama, by its nature and form, is performative in the sense that it is primarily realized through performance or enactment (2004:29). Emeka Nwabuwze sees drama as a way of telling story by portraying life through character, action and dialogue for the purpose of edification and entertainment (2011:17). Although not all dramatic works are written with the intention of stage performance (closet drama for instance), they all tell us something about humanity and conflict. Cooper and Mackey comment that:

Drama addresses humanity; it tells us about ourselves. More than that, it concerns humanity and conflict. If the human race lived in a world of moral, social and political harmony, there would be little for dramatists to draw upon (viii).

If drama is a creative representation of humanity and conflict, then this representation has taken different dimensions in the historical development of drama. Different dramatic movements and traditions have presented humanity and conflict from different perspectives. Humanity and conflict have been presented from the realistic and *post*-realistic modes such as expressionism, absurdism, surrealism, etc. However, attempts would be made to examine how humanity and conflict have been represented in the naturalist mode, as this is very crucial to the critical examination of dramatic texts selected for this study.

Naturalism is an outgrowth of realism and in fact a reaction to realism. It is a movement in art as well as a form of art or narrative that offers natural explanations for cosmic phenomena. Naturalism, Jeremy Hawthorn notes, is "a method founded upon belief that there is a natural

(rather than supernatural or spiritual) explanation for everything that exists or occurs" (2001:158). Olutoyin Jegede (2003:26) simply sees naturalism as a scientific extension of realism. This is because naturalism is influenced by the theories of science, especially the Darwinian scientific discoveries that human beings are human 'beasts' and their being and existence is determined by the forces of heredity and environment. The laws of nature are basic determinants of human character. Paul Draper contends that naturalism is "the hypothesis that the natural world is a closed system" in which "nothing that is not a part of the natural world affects it" (Qtd by Keith Augustine, 2012). Naturalism is the application of the principle of scientific determinism to literature: it is a form of "scientific realism that attempts to determine how humans respond the forces of nature, which often lead them to stresses and drives that permeate the interiority of the individual" (Nwabueze, 2011: 127-128). Ian Ousby opines that the desire to describe the ordinary lives of ordinary people is the central inspiration of a naturalist work and this description is often cast in documentary mode (1979: 157). Jegede submits that naturalism is an exaggerated realism, which "becomes a photographic and formless representation of life" (26).

Paul Reuben (2012), citing Donald Pizer (1966), states that naturalism as a continuation of realism is characterized by pessimistic and materialistic determinism. Neil Lazarus (2007: 340-341), combining the ideas of Njabulo Ndebele and George Lukcas observes that naturalist writing presents blunt facts and maintains objectivism, takes the 'reportage' mode in order to unveil bleak and unalterable circumstances because it presents "the spectacular" and the defeatism of naturalism is that it lacks revolutionary aesthetics, which is peculiar to realism. That is why the "picture of life that emerges from naturalist fiction is sordid and depressing. Characters drift about aimlessly, fail or simply remain trapped in oppressive environments" (Ousby, 158). This is a form of "brutal realism" that present people "caught within forces of nature or society that are beyond their control...characters' actions are determined by uncontrollable social and physical factors" (George Kearns et. al, 1984:297). Naturalist fiction reports life of people whose live in harsh realities that the unfulfilled and unhappy.

Naturalism thrives on the theory that drama should be objective and empirical in its presentation of humanity and conflict. What

differentiates naturalism from realism is its inclusion of an amoral attitude to the objective presentation of life. Naturalists hold the notion that human behaviour is controlled or “determined” by “intrinsic emotion, or social and economic conditions, and reject freewill, adopting instead, in large measure, the biological determinism of Charles Darwin and the economic determinism of Karl Marx” (Encarta Encyclopedia, 2009). Opposed to the fact that freewill is rejected in naturalists’ representation, Nwabueze presents a paradigm of naturalist determinism that permits freewill a space in the cosmological order:

Determinism, in naturalism, has a bi-partite classification. Hard determinism insists that man is incapable of extricating himself from external forces while soft determination maintains that characters are free to exercise free will despite the situations they find themselves into (128-129).

Nwabueze’s model of determination encourages contest between fate and freewill, which is characteristic of an existentialist conception of the being and existence of humanity.

The first explicit advocate for the adoption of naturalism in dramatic representation is the French writer, Emile Zola. Other dramatists that align their art to this school are the Swedish playwright, August Strindberg, and the Russian playwrights, August Chekhov and Konstantin Stanislavski to mention just a few. The remaining part of this paper would examine how Synge has aligned his dramatic art to this school of dramatic representation.

Naturalist Aesthetics in John Millington Synge’s Selected Plays

There is no doubt that the Dublin Naturalists field club, which Synge joins while studying at Trinity College influences his writing. The club exposes him to the works of Charles Darwin, which has a lasting effect on not only his writings but his psyche. It is recorded that:

Darwin's work resonated deeply with Synge and the playwright began to doubt his Protestant, creationist upbringing. He is quoted as saying, "Soon after I had relinquished the kingdom of God I began to take up a real interest in the kingdom of Ireland. My politics went round ... to a temperate Nationalism" (A Noise Within, 2009/10:5).

In the same vein, Yeats' advice, while they work together with Lady Gregory at the Abbey Theatre, that Synge should engage himself in writing plays that reflect the ordinary life of the Irish peasants in their natural environment went a long way to shape his naturalistic outlook on life as presented in his plays. As recorded by Robert Di Yanni (1994: 1254):

At Yeats' suggestion, Synge brought his knowledge and experience of the Irish peasantry, especially from his visits to the Aran Islands, into the language and dramatic situations of his plays. Yeats convinced Synge to abandon writing criticism and to write plays about simple people whose language reflected an intimate contact with earth, sea and sky.

These two influences determine the direction of Synge's dramatic art and philosophy.

Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, written in 1902, first produced at Molesworth Hall, Dublin, on the 25th February, 1904 and later produced same year in the Abbey Theatre, is a one act play, which presents a tragic vision of life. The play is set on an island West of Ireland:

...where centuries of isolation have produced a unique and rugged culture dependent on wrestling a livelihood from the sea. The sea pervades the lives of the islanders and the

prevailing atmosphere is that of despair. The details of the play are utterly naturalistic (Ingy Aboelazm, 2011:295-296).

T.R. Henn suggests that “if we are to understand the inwardness of the play, we must try to reconstruct imaginatively something of the life of the islanders as Synge knew it at the turn of the century” (1963:33). Henn gives the description of the island, which Synge objectively recreates in his play, in order to establish the Darwinian relationship between human beings and the forces of nature:

The Aran Islands form a small group of three, Inishmore, Inishmaan, and Inishee, set far out in the Atlantic between the coast of Galway and Clare. The land is poor and stony; small fields intersected by stone walls which retain this shallow soil, itself formed in part from rotted seaweed. There is not timber or turf for fuel, or grass for the horses in the winter months. Prolonged storms meant that the islands were inaccessible for long periods at a time, and for lack of the fishing, might bring families near to starvation (Henn, 33).

This picture of the place and life of the people dwelling in the island reveals the harshness of their realities.

The play details the struggles of the dwellers of the island against the forces of nature, which are beyond their control. The people cannot do without the sea, even though the sea holds disaster for them. The paradox is that the sea is their major means of survival and at the same time, their death trap. Maurya, an old woman, loses her father-in-law, husband and sons to the sea, and the wind and the dark night. Maurya recounts the memory of pains that conditions her realities in a surrealistic mode:

I've had a husband, and a husband's father
and six sons in this house - six fine men,

though it was a hard birth I had with every one of them and they coming into the world - and some of them were found and some of them were not found, but they're gone now the lot of them... (103).

Maurya loses two of her six sons, Stephen and Shawn, to the great wind. They are later found in "the Bay of Gregory of the Golden mouth" (103) and both of them are borne on one plank to her doorstep. Besides, Sheamus, one of her sons, her husband and her husband's father lost their lives in a dark night and no one sees their corpse. Her fourth son, Patch, is drowned in the sea, when his "curragh" (boat) capsizes. He is also brought to her doorstep dripping water. Michael, her fifth son has been downed for the past mine days and no one has found his corpse. A young priest later presents Nora, Maurya's younger daughter, a bundle containing a shirt and a plain stocking believed to be Michael's. Cathleen and Nora try to hide the bundle from their mother, Maurya, who has got a restless sleep amidst the grief her missing son. They later confirm that the cloths are Michael's after comparing them with his cloths at home. Nora also confirms that the stitches on the stocking are her handiwork. The revelation brings grief into the ladies' heart. Cathleen in agony and shock comments that "isn't it a bitter thing to think of him [Michael] floating that way to the far north, and no one to keen him but the black bags that do be flying on the sea?" (101) This question reveals the nothingness of human existence, since death is an ultimate reality and human cannot shy among from. Michael's death is such an inglorious one after his entire struggle for survival in his harsh environment; he dies with no one to "keen him" (lament or mourns his death) but sea creatures. Nora's response solidifies the nothingness of human struggle and existence: "And isn't it a pitiful thing when there is nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking?" (101)

Bartley, Maurya's last son insists on going to Connemara to sell their horses in order to keep up their living. But Maurya discourages Bartely from embarking on the journey since that same journey brings death to Michael. It should be noted that the Synge uses journey motif in the play. Maurya's lost husband and her sons all embarked on the

journey for survival, which eventually turns out to be their journey into death. The journey motif reveals that life is a journey, whose destination is death. Maurya notes that "No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied" (106). This is a tranquil acceptance of human's fate in his or her journey of life, which is death. That is why the "living and the dead intermingle even in their possessions" (Henn, 39). The living Bartley wears the dead Michael's shirt, when going on his journey to the Galway fair: "I'm thinking Bartley put it [Michael's shirt] on him in the morning for his own shirt was heavy with the salt in it" (101). Also, the stick used by Maurya to support herself, when she goes after Bartley to give him the bread Cathleen and Nora forget to give him and perhaps, her blessings, belongs to Michael. It is the "stick Michael brought from Connemara" (100).

Bartley displays an amoral act of disobedience and acts out his will to go in the sea against all odds. He disobeys his mother, who dissuades him from going on the sea and refuses to give him her blessing but accompanies him with "dark word": "He's gone now, and God spare us, and we'll not see him again. He's gone now, and when the black night is falling I'll have no son left me in the world" (99). This expression carries some measure of pessimism and of course performs a prophetic function. Bartley will and insistence to go on the sea is motivated by the family's economic condition; the family is in need of money and sailing to Connemara to sell their horses is an avenue through which the family's needs could be met. On the other hand, Maurya's resistance is conditioned by her fear and despair as a result of her grave experiences with the sea, the experiences that permeate her pessimistic and tragic vision of life. Maurya experiences acute psychological trauma, which makes her see life in its negativity and dark, tragic and painful realities. The psychological trauma engenders her tragic vision, when she goes to the spring well, which "itself" Henn claims is "a life image" (40):

... and I stood there saying a prayer to myself.
Then Bartley came along, and he riding on the
red mare with the grey pony behind him...I'm
after seeing him this day, and he riding and
galloping. Bartley came first on the red mare,
and I tried to say "God speed you," but

something choked the word in my throat. He went by quickly; and 'The blessing of God on you,' says he, and I could say nothing. I looked up then, and I crying, at the grey pony, and there was Michael upon it - with fine clothes on him, and new shoes on his feet (103).

The vision is symbolic and prophetic in its function. It foreshadows the death of Bartley and symbolizes the inseparability of the living and the dead since "life is a closed system of disappointment [and despair] from which only death offers an escape" (David Lodge, 1979:196). Aboelazm (2011:296) is of the opinions that the plot of *Riders to the Sea* is centred on the "clash of wills - narrowly, Maurya's attempt to dissuade Bartley from going on the sea and, in a broader sense, Maurya's struggle against the sea for the live of her sons." It is obvious that her struggle leads to failure and doom. The sense of futility, bleakness and depression pervades the text. The characters "are trapped in a maze of unhappiness, from which there is no escape - except death" (Lodge, 194). That is why the tone is grave and the atmosphere is heavy with sorrow and pain of loss. "Perhaps the most powerful effect the play creates," Aboelazm continues, "is an evocation of mood, a mood of despair and acquiescence to a harsh fate, but tempered by a kind of nobility rising from mankind's perseverance despite death" (296).

It is important to note that the sea is a symbol of life and its ordeals. Aboelazm suggests that the sea symbolically represents the evils of life that surround the island dwellers. The sea "is the enemy, the destructive principle, and destroyer of human and family continuity" (296). Paradoxically, the sea is also the route to the people's survival even though it holds the people's death. This accounts for reason Henn sees the sea in its ambivalence as "the giver and taker of life" (39). Moreover, the new white boards standing by the wall are "a continuously operative symbols of the presence of death" (Aboelazm, 296). The boards which are intended for Michael's coffin are used for Bartley instead, when his corpse is brought dripping water.

The struggle of the family against the sea signifies the struggle of the peasants in their harsh environment. When Nora queries that "Didn't

the young priest say the Almighty God won't leave her [Maurya] destitute with no son living?" Maurya responds that "It's little the like of him knows of the sea..." (103). This shows that the peasants are the only ones vulnerable to disaster. The play ends with total submission to fate. The characters could not achieve happy and fulfilled life. Maurya painfully comments, when the corpse of the last of her son is brought on a plank: "They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me... They are all together this, and the end is come" (105-106). Maurya kneels at the head of the table, where Bartley's body is laid. The kneeling is a symbolic act of submission to fate; it is an act that she performs three times during the religious rites she does for her dead son.

Rider to the Sea is a tragic play; it perfectly blends "a Sophoclean sense of tragic fate" (Lodge 195) with naturalism. Henn posits that the play contains "miniature elements of the Greek tragic pattern" (38). The elements of the Greek tragic patterns include: "the foreboding of Maurya, the ritual elegies for the single and the many dead; the keening women as a chorus; the release of tension in the resigned acceptance of defeat" (Henn, 38). The play is also patterned in the tradition of the Aristotlean unities of time, place and action. The play takes place in a single location (the island), starts and ends the same day, and the action revolves around the tragic fate of Maurya's family, which is of universal significance. But there is a subvention of the concept of the tragic hero. The tragic hero(es) here belongs to the peasant class without any nobility. However, the tragedy carries some measures of universal significance. The emotion imbued in the play "touches a well spring of common humanity and [the] experience of death is so universally the human experience that an audience identifies with" (Aboelazm, 296). The structure, lyrical language, imagery, supreme economy and symbol elevate the play to tragedy (Henn, 38).

The Playboy of the Western World, written and performed in the Abbey Theatre in 1907, is Synge's most complicated and controversial play. The production of the play on the 26th January generates the "playboy" riots. The Irish nationalists consider the play an indictment on the Irish personality at a critical period when the nation is struggling for independence. The situation is worsened by the fact that the play is written by a so-called "Protestant". This is because there is a politico-

religious rift between the Catholic and the Protestant¹ and of course, Catholicism is dominant in Ireland. Lady Gregory reports the riot thus:

The first act got its applause, and the second, though one felt that the audience were a little puzzled, a little shocked at *the Wild language*. Near the end of the third act there was some hissing.... "Audience broke up in disorder at the word *shift*" (Qtd in Henn, 6. Emphasis added).

The use of the wild language in the text repulses the audience. Here is the expression of Christy Mahon that triggers off the uproar: "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 [underwear] itself, maybe, from this place to the eastern world?" (226) The audience accuses Synge of presenting the image of Irish women as whores. The Dublin Freeman's Journal describes the play as an "unmitigated, protracted liberal upon Irish peasant men and worse still, upon Irish peasant girlhood" (Hlavsa, 4). However, Synge claims that the raw material of the play is got from the story told him by an old man on the Aran Island. The old man reveals to him that: "If any gentleman has done a crime we'll hide him. There was a gentleman that killed his father, and I had him in my own house six months till he got away to America" (Qtd in Henn, 60). This shows Synge's knack for scientific and brutal realism in his dramaturgy; his play are direct product of the cues he picks from the Irish society.

It should be noted that, as Synge himself has proclaimed, there are "several sides to *The Playboy*" (Maurice Bourgeois, 1913:208). While Henn sees Synge's representation of the Irish peasantry as drunk, violent folks, dull people, swearing, priest fearing as his "conflict with outraged Irish morality" (59) and thus an attack on the Irish moral ethos and custom, Hana Khasawneh (2011) argues that such comic representation is to liberate the Irish people "from the burdens of responsibility." Khasawneh further explains that:

¹ In 1641, in reaction to the Irish rebellion against colonial structures in Ireland, the English military forces, led by Oliver Cromwell, massacred multitudes of Catholics and seized their land. The land was offered to the Protestant colonists, which included Synge's family (see Hlavsa, 3).

The general condition of life presented in the Irish comedy is tragic but it is through the releasing energy of comedy that this ominous mood is tempered. The comic impulse of modern Irish drama constructs and releases unconscious aspirations and emotions that are frustrated in the conscious world.

The amoral tendency in naturalist art is engendered by the stifling condition of the character's environment. The play is set in country Mayo, which Declan Kiberd describes as "a colony in the throes of a land war, as the last phase of the campaign against feudalism, in Ireland is enacted" (1995:166). The country Mayo is a poverty-ridden place that inhabits the peasants, who try to make ends meet through their agrarian duties. The world of the play, Khasawneh posits, "demonstrates a violent environment and the texture and the form of the play celebrate readiness of the citizens to accept murder under certain conditions as an act of heroism." Of course, the amoral tendency can also be seen as an act of resistance of the English/colonial law. The environment is saturated with boredom, fear and insecurity. Christy Mahon surfaces when the society is in need of a hero, and he is accepted and worshipped irrespective of the fact that he murders his father and runs away. Pegeen Mike really needs someone to stay with her in the shebeen till the dull doldrums of the night are over: "He is surely, and leaving me lonesome on the scruff of the hill....I'm asking only what way I'll pass these twelve hours of dark, and not take my death with the fear" (176-177). Pegeen is left "lonesome" by her father, Michael and his friends for Kate Cassidy's wake. It is significant that the action of the play starts in the night; it is symbolic of the gloom and loneliness, and the dark realities that characterize the people's lives. A hero is needed at this critical period. Pegeen expresses the need for a hero thus:

Where now will you meet the like of Daneen Sullivan knocked the eye from a peeler [police]; 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? (177)

Shawn Keogh, who is Pegeen's fiancé, refuses to stay with her. His refusal is conditioned by his "religious" ethos; hence his several allusions to absent Father Reilly, who is a symbol of religious order, give presence and consciousness to religious codes.

Christy, the Playboy comes in at the critical period with his tall tale of parricide: "I did not, then, I just viz the loy and let fall the edge of it on the ridge of his skill, and he went down at my feet like an empty sack, an never let a grunt or groan from him at all" (184). The people are impressed by the tale, especially Pegeen, and register their acceptance of the playboy as a pot-boy:

JIMMY: Bravery's a treasure in a lonesome place,
and a lad would kill his father, I'm thinking,
would face a boy 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 loosed
khaki cut-throats, or the walking dead (184).

The presence of the "loosed Khaki cut-throats, or the walking dead" is symbolic of the oppression and violence. The colonial condition of the people dictates their need for a daring hero that can face the devil (the colonists).

The characters in the play are worn out by the state of their environment. Their life is dull and poverty stricken, hence their stereotypical description. In order to cope with their disordered world, the poor people take to reckless and monotonous life; Michael and his friends are used to going to wakes for the "best stuff" of drinks. Christy describes the way he lives his life before he kills his father: "... I there drinking, waking, eating, sleeping, a quiet, simple poor fellow with no man giving me heed" (187). It is this Irish condition that Synge records in journalistic objectivity in the play.

Journey motif is also characteristic of the play. The play is woven around the Oedipal journey of Christy from crime to bliss and from bliss to exile. Christy describes his journey thus: "... eleven long days I am walking the world, looking over a low ditch or a high ditch on my north or south, into stony, scattered fields, or scribes of bog, where you'd see young, limber girls, and fine, prancing women making laughter with the men" (187). This journey captures the vicissitude of life through the "low ditch" and the "high ditch". Christy gains a momentary glory in Mayo before the surprising arrival of his father, the Old Mahon. The arrival disrupts Christy's transient fulfillment and leads to his Oedipal exile. Christy in desperation complains: "And I must go back into my torment is it, or run off like a vagabond..." (224). The journey is the one that ends in nothingness and "destroys" the sojourners. This reflects the "terror" of Christy's fate (228).

Moreover, the Oedipal motif is noted in the play. Christy is an emblem of Irish Oedipus. He expresses his hatred for the Father Figure (Old Mahon) and his love for the Mother Figure (Pegeen). He expresses his displeasure for old Mahon:

Then you'd have cursed mine [Father], 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 skill (189).

He kills his father, which is a crime committed not in ignorance as in case of Oedipus, but his attempt to marry Pegeen is unfulfilled. Christy never finds fulfillment in his journey of life and he let go his love for Pegeen at the end.

The hard life of the characters quickens them to rage and violent acts. Rage is a hereditary weakness that forces the characters to violence. The stifling environment bubbles their temper. Old Mahon is a man used to "raging all times" (188). His son, Christy, also shares his father's rage. Widow Quin's rage leads her into a murderous act - she kills her

husband and children. Even Pegeen is living with her repressed rage, which often erupts beyond her control.

Christy becomes a sexual symbol in county Mayo. His heroic presence awakens the neurotic drives of the women. Pegeen becomes sexually attracted to Christy. Widow Quin feels they (Christy and her) have both done "dirty deeds" that make them match each other. Sara Tansey, Susan Brady, Honor Blake and Nelly also come with their gifts like the wise men in order to attract Christy. Other village girls are sexually attracted to the man who kills his "da". But their sexual urge is left unquenched. Christy comments that "It's great luck and company I've won me in the end of time - two fine women fighting for the likes of me" (192). Christy, in the same vein, nurses his sexual drive for Pegeen. When the re-appearance of Old Mahon topples Christy's romantic adventure with Pegeen, Christy's quest for love and acceptance motivates him to kill his father again. Pegeen's presence in Christy romantic imagination serves as an external force that interacts with his internal force - Oedipus complex - which pushes to him re-slay his "da". According to Jegede (2011:228), when "the ego is demented, it affects his management of aggression and adaptation to reality." The presence of Old Mahon really affects Christy's ego and erupts his aggression towards his father. Christy finds himself struggling to please Pegeen, in particular and the Mayorites in general, in order to regain their love and acceptance. His recommitting the parricide, using the words of Lodge (197), makes reality principle break in upon the illusion or fantasy of the Playboy's tale of the murder of his father. The gap between fantastic tale and reality is captured in Pegeen's observation:

I'll say a strange man is a marvel, with
his mighty talk; but what's a squabble in
your backyard, and the blow of a loy,
have taught me that there's a great gap
between a gallous story and a dirty deed
(227).

It is worthy of note that none of the characters finds fulfillment and a happy life. Christy's struggles to regain Pegeen's love ends in her repulsion for him. Widow Quin's efforts to gain Christy's love results in

failure. Shawn's marriage proposal to Pegeen, his bride-to-be, also fails. Christy also experiences a reversal of fortune; he falls from being a loved and honoured fellow to being an exile. Pegeen in the end laments wildly for her loss of Christy: "Oh, my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only Playboy of the Western World" (229). The people are drowned in their grief, failure, and harsh realities.

Synge achieves the naturalistic feat of using the typical language of the Irish peasantry to express the typical Irish condition in his plays. T.S. Eliot's view on Synge's language is worthy of quote: "The plays of John Millington Synge form rather a special case, because they are based upon the idiom of a rural people whose speech is naturally poetic, both in imagery and in rhythm" (Qtd in Henn, 10). He uses the "peasant speech" (Henn, 11), which is an Anglo-Irish form that is rooted in the Gaelic structures. The speeches of the characters in the play are laced with the imagery, symbols and rhythm. The Irish imagination imbued in the language shows that the play could not have been written by anyone but an Irish.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Synge in his plays describes and records the Irish condition in its nervous state using a scientific realistic mode. While *Riders to the Sea* presents a tragic vision of the Irish life, *The Playboy of the Western World* mixes the comic with the tragic vision to indicate the complexity of the Irish condition. Both plays adopt journey motif; life is seen as a journey, which often "destroys" the sojourners - human beings. Even though the plays in their naturalistic mode report a sordid and harsh picture of life laced with frustration, rage, pessimism, disappointment, failure, and above all, death, the sole purpose is to bring about reformation through satire. As Kearns *et.al* have observed, naturalist writings sometimes aim at "bettering the world through social reforms," although they describe "the world with some brutal realism" (299). Synge's presentation of the grim realities of the Irish peasantry is a dramatic exposure imbued with the "desire for improvement (Kearns *et.al*, 297). From the study of the plays, it is crystal clear that Synge's dramaturgy is a stage, where art and life in its wild realities co-exist.

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