
THE IRISH VICTORY OF COMIC DEFEAT: SYNGE AND O'CASEY

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Resumen

El principal argumento de este artículo se centra en la representación cómica del pueblo irlandés como un pueblo borracho, tosco, temeroso de la clase religiosa, voluble e irresponsable. La característica más visible del teatro de esta época converge en la convención del irlandés como un personaje cómico o campesino, cuyas características distintivas son su dialecto indignante, proclive a una disposición combativa. De este modo, el artículo señala que existe una relación directa entre esta tradición cómica y el desarrollo de Irlanda como Estado colonial / poscolonial. La violencia colonial no es un asunto baladí. La comicidad no está del todo ausente del teatro colonial de Irlanda, sino más bien la ausencia de humor la revisión colonial parece más una inversión de la recurrencia sorprendente de la comedia con el discurso colonial. Por tanto, el impulso cómico libera los deseos privados y las aspiraciones de la nación oprimida, el centro del drama irlandés, un lugar salvaje y remoto apartado del mundo civilizado. A través de la creación de mitos cómico, realidades reprimidas como la Irlanda han encontrado una válvula de escape a sus miserias.

Palabras clave: Declive, Comedia, Cultura nacional, Colonialismo, Identidad irlandesa, negación expectativa.

Abstract

It is the argument of this article that the comic representation of the Irish people as drunken, swearing, priest-fearing and fickle liberates them from the burdens of responsibility. The most visible feature of drama was the convention of the stage Irishman as a humorous character either gentleman or peasant whose distinctive features were his outrageous dialect, proclivity to Irish bulls and pugnacious disposition. The article observes that there is a direct link between the Irish comic literary tradition and the development of Ireland as a colonial/postcolonial state. Colonial violence is not a laughing matter. Laughter is not wholly

absent from the Irish colonial scene, but rather the absence of humor within colonial analyses would seem more like an inversion of the striking recurrence of comedy with the discourse of colonialism. Thus, the comic impulse releases the private desires and aspirations of the oppressed nation. At the centre of the Irish drama is the concept of Ireland as a wild and remote place set apart from the civilized world. Through the comic mythmaking, repressed realities find a liberating outlet.

Key words: Comic fall, Comedy, National culture, Colonialism, Irishness, Denial of expectations.

Artículo

It is the argument of this article that the comic representation of the Irish people as drunken, swearing, priest-fearing and fickle liberates them from the burdens of responsibility. The most visible feature of drama was the convention of the stage Irishman as a humorous character either gentleman or peasant whose distinctive features were his outrageous dialect, proclivity to Irish bulls and pugnacious disposition. This endearing caricature has many variants such as soldier, priest, gentlemen and fortune hunter. The best description of this figure is provided by Maurice Bourgeois when he states that:

The stage Irishman ... has an atrocious Irish brogue, makes perpetual jokes, blunders and bulls in speaking and never fails to utter, by way of Hibernian seasoning, some wild research or oath of Gaelic origin at every third word; he has an unsurpassable gift of "blarney" and cadges for tips and free drinks (Bourgeois, 1913: 109).

While English audiences had watched this parodic representation with relish, Dubliners were against that insulting intrusion into the image of their historical conscience. 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 the modern Irish drama reconstructs and releases unconscious aspirations and emotions that are frustrated in the conscious world. It is empathy not admiration which moves audience to laugh. If the damned Irish heroes cannot bear the painful reality, it is necessary to resort to the comic laughter as O'Casey, Synge, Joyce and Beckett realized in the midst of despair.

The Irish comic theatre is a major contributor to world literature. It is assuming new meanings and subtle shades of significance in accordance with the development and orientation of the emerging nation which uses it. Comedy is an intrigue strategy to compensate for personal and national frustrations. It serves as a powerful defense against the forces of repression and a catalytic impulse that laughs in order to restore truth and freedom. This tragicomedy is recognizing an oppressive reality of life on one hand and on the other hand comedy is capable of transforming this pessimistic awareness. This is fulfilled through a positive interference that introduces an optimistic perception of life. Comedy serves as an impulse of disobedience

but it is a uniquely an Irish gift. The Irish irreverent playboys, cowards, braggarts and paycocks with their comic prevarications are detached from the oppressive social, political and cultural terrors. They subvert the platitudes about servile and respectable behavior. Through their ability to live resourcefully with defeat, Irish clowns are distinguished from tragic characters who are easily broken and damned by defeat. Their comic faith is a celebration of life and a defiant affirmation of man's ability to survive the repressive forces in general. Irish comedy restores freedom and truth. Albert Cook claimed that "the function of comedy is to adjust the manners of people to the healthy norms of nature, to avoid excesses presented on the stage" (Cook, 1949: 98). Similarly, Northrop Frye asserts that:

[...] comedy normally presents an erotic intrigue between a young man and a young woman which is blocked by some kind of opposition, usually paternal and resolved by a twist in the plot which is the comic form of Aristotle's 'discovery'" (Frye, 1957:121).

Frye concludes that comedy moves towards the incorporation of the hero into the society where he will fit naturally.

The article observes that there is a direct link between the Irish comic literary tradition and the development of Ireland as a colonial/postcolonial state. Colonial violence is not a laughing matter. Laughter is not wholly absent from the Irish colonial scene but rather the absence of humor within colonial analyses would seem more like an inversion of the striking recurrence of comedy with the discourse of colonialism. Brenden Bradshaw states that:

[...] successive waves of conquest and colonization, by bloody wars and uprisings, by traumatic dislocation, by lethal racial antagonisms and indeed by its own nineteenth century version of a holocaust, it is impossible to consider stereotypical representations of Irish identity without noticing the ways in which they have been determined and delimited by comedy (Bradshaw, 1993: 98).

The stereotype of a buffoon and its theatrical analogue of the stage-Irishman is dim-witted, subservient and linguistically incapable figure whose 'paddy-whacky' is coded as other to the rational subject. Comedy and colonial violence have conversed with one another. Irish comedy can be knowing as James Joyce suggested when he marked out Oscar Wilde as 'court jester' to the English. The jester is a servant and a slave of the master's whims but he is also one who criticizes the prevailing order and this testifies a skilful manipulation rather than blundering foolishness. In *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus chafes "Tame essence of Wilde" (Joyce, 1998: 156). What Stephen rejects in this context is the superficial understanding Irish revivalists have for what Wilde represents both to him and to Ireland. Margot Norris has pointed out that Stephen conceives of Wilde as a symbol of colonial oppression. Stephen refashioned Wilde's *Decay of Lying* aphorism into the cracked looking-glass of a servant emphasizing his subjugation to the Crown. For Stephen, Wilde becomes not only that vision of Ireland which prostitutes itself by trading

allegiances and degrading its art but the bizarre spectacle of his trail also becomes a symbol of the Irish-born writer's betrayal by the Crown he serves.

The modern Irish drama reached its glory in the early decades of the twentieth century at the Abbey Theatre with William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory who founded a great theatre that provided inspiration for a native Irish drama written in English. Yeats states that "authors must be free to choose their own way; but in their pilgrimage towards beauty and truth they require companions by the way." (Yeats in Hogan & Kilroy, 1976: 129). The Abbey Theatre was a space of imagining and reinventing Irish culture, politics and drama. It blends naturalism, romanticism and poetry as exemplified principally by the plays of O'Casey during the 1920s. O'Casey was the first Irish dramatist to combine successfully humor, musicality, Irish myth and folklore and the English dialect to be found in the remote regions of Ireland. Although Irish playwrights have a diversity of talents, inclinations and sensibilities, they agreed on the necessity to replace the caricature of Irish life on the stage with serious and authentic drama that would be at once popular yet not ruled by political orthodoxies. The Abbey Theatre placed Ireland's resources of myth, folklore, language and social custom at the service of dramatists whose work is recognizably Irish. Yeats advised aspiring playwrights "Let us learn construction from the masters and language from ourselves" (Yeats in Owens & Radner, 1990: 3). An aptitude for language and humor is a distinctive feature of Irish drama. From its beginnings, Irish drama was primarily of colonial character. Many of the plays performed there embodied an inversion of the most sacred values of a restrictive ideological construct that would be known as 'the Irish nation' by political nationalists. The history of the Abbey was marked by several violent events; these were audience responses to certain plays that were not regarded as suitable modes for Ireland's national theatre. For Yeats, the role of a national theatre was that it could transform 'the mob' into 'the people' and thus it could perform a powerful function in the constitution of the modern state. Thus, the comic impulse releases the private desires and aspirations of the oppressed nation. At the centre of the Irish drama is the concept of Ireland as a wild and remote place set apart from the civilized world. Through the comic mythmaking, repressed realities find a liberating outlet. Reality is the enemy in Irish comedy and the only alternative is the wild dream of an impossible life. Comic characters are defeated in reality but not in their impossible dreams; though it would be misleading to exaggerate the extent of their comic triumphs as they accept illusions for reality and this hinders any association with their condition. The happiness of humor is regarded as its most outstanding characteristic. Happiness aims at changing the relation between the oppressed individual and the oppressing outside world. There is an inevitable correspondence between tragedy and the irresponsible comedy that is maintained through the Irish comic theatre. In order to rise; the comic characters must fall again and again before overcoming obstacles. Comic characters live in a dangerous world of poverty, disease and political oppression and their instinctive ability to remain alive and to laugh in the midst of violence constitutes their victory in defeat.

This article pays particular attention to Synge's *The Playboy of Western World* (1907) and O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* (1924). Both Synge and O'Casey assert that laughter is a powerful defense against the forces of repression. Traditionally located in the comic subplot, their irreverent clowns become the central figures of the main plot in Irish comedy. O'Casey uses sharp irony and anti-climax to deflect the audience's attention away from the main action so there are no happy endings at the final curtain. As most people have difficulty in coping with their realities, they may have a suppressed desire to suspend their worries by sharing the vicarious laughter of Captain Boyle, Fluther Good and Bessie Burgess. These characters laugh at the obstacles of responsibility and respectability. Man is sickened by the reality of violence, fear and pain and O'Casey looks at this dilemma from a double perspective: an ironic viewpoint and a tragicomic point of view. There are two conflicting forces in Mary Boyle's character: one pulling her back, namely the economic conditions and the other propelling her forward and mainly ambition to improve and prosper. This is the energy of O'Casey's theatre: the triumph of the principle of knockabout in situation. It is no wonder that O'Casey's plays do not entail a personal failing but a heroic and radical social intervention. An essential difference should be marked between O'Casey and Synge. Synge wrote at a time when Ireland was in transition from colonial oppression to one of emancipation and accordingly he created a world more stable and unified than was the case after 1910. Synge proposed an evasion of history, an escape from the horrors of bourgeois life into an alternative world leading to certain death. On the other hand, O'Casey was a writer in response to an age of social and political turmoil. He embraced history and consequently dramatized a history of disorder and breakdown which allows little action for the ordinary people of whom he writes.

For colonial and postcolonial Ireland, the idea of normal politics is anomalous and the theatre possesses a highly charged political valency. O'Casey is responding to a comic impulse in creating his irreverent clowns whose unconscious desires and wishes emerge as a comic compensation for harsh reality. Finding humor in a tragic situation and exploiting it created 'the Irish acting tradition' that reveals a desire to avoid the suffering characterizing the colonial and the postcolonial Irishman. In modern Irish drama, the main joke with its comic strategy and its aggressive comedy undo restrictions and retrieve freedom and joy; although this dionysian ritual of comic renewal has been greeted with omnipotence, violence and suspicion. Staging with gusto and embellishment must be viewed as a relished art form. There is an element of salvation, as well as damnation in this type of dark humor. O'Casey describes the Irish comedy as 'a world of chassis' making the best of a bad situation. The Irish comedy reinforces the awful absurdity and the chaos. Wylie Sypher asserts that the comic impulse is wild, "A mechanism for releasing powerful archaic impulses always there below the level of reason.... This uncivilized but knowing self Nietzsche once called Dionysian, the self that feels archaic pleasure and archaic pain. The substratum of the world of art, Nietzsche says, is 'the terrible wisdom of Silenus, and Silenus is the Satyr-god of comedy leading the ecstatic 'chorus of natural beings who as it were live ineradicably behind every civilization (Sypher, 1956: 10).

The modern Irish drama is enshrined as the new national culture. As Loren Kruger puts it in her discussion of national theatres, “The literal place of performance or exhibition (the stage or the museum, the building and its geographical location) plays a role in the cultural recognition of theatre as art” (Loren, 1992: 12). In establishing an alternative to the stereotypical and colonial representation of the Irish, the Irish drama established a tradition of an agrarian Celtic twilight. At the turn of the twentieth century, the modern Irish theatre was a political movement made up of the artist who is an activist wanting to use theatre for imagining an Ireland dependent of English control. O’Casey and Synge have had a common interest in creating an image of the Irish people opposite to the Irish stereotypes of loud, drunken and brawling buffoon and in promoting positive images of the Irish people, their history and their unique culture. Modern Irish dramatists came to the conclusion that the Irish theatre needed to be made in Ireland by the Irish, for the Irish and for the Irish consumption. Lady Gregory’s letter soliciting funds for the project of The Irish Literary Theater can best illustrate this theme of Irishness when she states that:

We propose to have performed in Dublin, in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome and that freedom to experiment which is found in theatre of England, and without which no movement in art or literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. (Gregory, 1913: 8-9).

Since most previous Irish playwrights from Richard Sheridan to George Bernard Shaw ended working in London rather than Ireland the idea of developing a theatre community at home and about home was an exciting endeavor. It also served to counter the English imperialism that perceives the Irish culture as dependent on English influence and support. Theatres, playwrights and audiences often dispute over what kind of theatre was the best. Lady Gregory and Synge controlled the Irish National Theatre Society and with the aid of an English patron transformed the democratic nationalist theatre made of individuals from different classes and religious backgrounds into a professional theatre run by Anglo-Irish directors proclaiming the Irish National Stage. The Irish Revival resisted English domination through playing Irish games, wearing Irish fashion and speaking and learning the Irish language which were serving as means of subverting and deconstructing the cultural and the economic imperialism while reaffirming Irish civilization as an ancient, unique, sophisticated and most important autonomous cultural tradition of people deserving self-rule. Luke Gibbons asserts that “to engage in cultural activity in circumstances where one’s culture was being effected or obliterated

or even to assert the existence of a civilization prior to conquest was to make a political statement if only by depriving the frontier myth of its power to act as an alibi for colonization” (Gibbons, 1996: 189).

Theatrical performance that is created collaboratively by text, audience, actors, space, historical and cultural context must be recognized as a complex means for creating and contesting a national identity. Synge being a fluent Irish speaker who spent time gathering stories and other cultural materials translated some Irish idioms into English to capture the aural and visual qualities of the Irish tongue. He tries to improvise a theatrical discourse that captures the spirit of the Irish language and thought while also illustrating the dualities inherent in the life of many characters who maintain their Irish identity, customs and beliefs within a colonial system that imposes a different language and culture. Synge wrote plays about peasant characters who are real and talk poetry. This enterprise is import to Synge to make his readers believe in the reality of the speakers of the dialect. He relies on the energy and vitality of popular speech and that is why he recognizes his readers as his collaborators. He gave direction and form to the peasant speech that because of its unfamiliarity he could expect his readers’ attention to words and registers for their own sake and for their according to poetry. It is in this sense that Synge’s language is poetic and his own creation. The vividness of popular speech has been explained by the restrictions of its rural community where the majority of people are rarely literate. Many of Synge’s comic effects depend on uses of language which are unfamiliar to his readers and audience. Synge devoted his energies to developing a modernist Irish idiom through his plays articulating a fascination with Celtic folklore. He is having a tendency to use the Irish dialect for lyrical, comic and fantastic effects. He exploits a single word or phrase that is having a multiple significance that transcends its immediate context. Such single words are key words around which the meaning crystallizes. In certain contexts, Synge makes use of the word to evoke uneasiness in the human situation. The word ‘queer’ is used to mean eccentric as when Nora says to the Tramp Dan. Occasionally, the same word stands for madness as when Michael Dara asks about Patch Darcy. The most striking example of this sort of multiple meaning is the title itself, ‘the playboy of the western world.’ ‘The Playboy’ is an Irish admiring word for a tricky rascal but throughout the play it varies in significance. Christy is first called a playboy by Widow Quin with ironic respect when she discovers that the father is still alive. In act III, the playboy becomes ‘the champion playboy’ of the western world. However, the champion is deflated by the reappearance of his father. Synge’s drama emerged out of a larger cultural revolution such as the inclusion of Ireland into the United Kingdom and the subsequent immigration of one and half million in the following decade that created a cultural crisis. Synge publicly announced his desire to revive the oppressed Irish language, “Damn the bloody Anglo-Saxon language that a man can’t swear in without being vulgar!” (Synge in Greene & Stephens, 1959: 15). Another attractive feature of the Anglo-Saxon dialect that attracted Synge was its wealth of abuse terms. Irish dramatists perceive their mission to fight the negative images of Ireland in the British media, as well as to fight the increasing ‘Anglicization’ of the Irish people according to

Douglas Hyde. They are the metaphorical enthronement of excess, abnormality and marginality. Noticeably, the concept of femininity developed by Synge is specific. Synge's women constitute a libel on Irish womanhood. His women are inhabitants of a fictional world in which the reversal of some unquestionable values of Irish nation's idiosyncrasy sets them apart from tradition. *The Playboy* represented a clash of form and content and resulted in an aggressive reception by the audience that had to face the author's demystified presentation of the Irish peasantry. The audience found it hard to identify with the image of Irishness. The feminine conversational exchanges reveal that the linguistic construction of Synge's women is a challenge. James Kilroy states that:

Mr. Synge's play as a play is one of the worst constructed we have witnessed. As a presentation on the public stage, it is a vile and inhuman story told in the foulest language we have ever listened to from a public platform... This hideous story is told in language much of which is too coarse to be printed (Kilroy, 1971: 66).

The conversational exchanges reflect the new social order imposed by Synge's creation. In this new social order, women break all kinds of bounds and stand against the reductionist image that typifies the nationalist premises of that period. Synge endowed these characters with superiority, either physical or verbal. Such verbal superiority is apparent in the use of any device that facilitates the control of language. Thus, women tend to interrupt, to ask or to order more frequently.

It is noticeable that the Irish drama relies on a body of shared truths and preconceptions. Irish people and their political leaders are commonly portrayed as pigs, peasants, mental patients and children. Such comic figures reinforce the dominant prejudices about the people of Ireland and undercut their claims for self government. The pig represented Ireland's status as an agricultural, rustic and backward nation and some of the prejudices against Irishmen are related to the British colonial ideology. As a colonized nation, Irish individuals seem as primitive, stupid, backward and uncivilized. Thus, the Irish comedy is an act of emotional release and the accompanying comic impulse of insurrection fulfills both spiritual and political victory. The artistic representation of this comic faith is an affirmation of life and an alternation to the inevitable despair. Friedrich Dürrenmatt claims that for the modern age tragedy is inadequate to express a world turned upside down. Comedy alone is suitable for the gloomy modernist atmosphere as comedy creates a distance from the subject matter and according to Dürrenmatt "the means by which comedy creates distance is the conceit." (Dürrenmatt, 1970: 1028). A conceit is a kind of joke, a fanciful or an inappropriate image. There are no enduring love matches or moralistic happy endings in the comedy of Synge and O'Casey. The comic world is always presented as a chaotic space without truth that encourages subterfuges, anarchic games and disguises of comic survival. It is the comic ability to survive cheerfully with oppression that distinguishes them from tragic characters who are broken by defeat. Most of the comic characters should be viewed as fortunate victims of failure as in the plays of Synge, Yeats, Shaw and O'Casey. O'Casey states that "A laugh is a great natural stimulator, a pushful entry into life; and once we can

laugh, we can live” (O’Casey, 1956: 226). The image of the migrant, tramp and traveler recurs through the works of many Irish writers not only because displacement is the condition of the uprooted nation but more especially because such a figure is adaptive. Laughter in O’Casey’s plays is a ritualistic escape that asserts the ability to survive the oppressive forces of life. O’Casey moved to rural Ireland that is sustained by peasant clowns. In such comic world, there is a tentative suspension of faith and an aesthetic temporary agnosticism. O’Casey’s comic characters such as Captain Boyle and Joxer Daly fail to perceive the redeeming excesses of their offensive follies. O’Casey underlines the folly and fallibility of such mock-heroic clowns who lack reformation and at the same time maintains our sympathy for their hilarity. In the preface to *The Well of the Saints*, Yeats approached Synge’s grotesque characters in relation to their outward defeat:

Mr. Synge, indeed, sets before us ugly, deformed or sinful people, but his people, moved by no practical ambition, are driven by a dream of that impossible life. That we feel how intensely his *Woman of the Glen* dreams of days that shall be entirely alive, she that is ‘a hard woman to please’ must spend her days between a sour-faced old husband, a man who goes mad upon the hills, a craven lad and a drunken tramp; and those two blind people in *The Well of the Saints* are so transformed by the dream that they choose blindness rather than reality. (Yeats in Synge, 1984: 98).

In Synge’s *The Playboy of Western World*, Christy Mahon’s failure to murder his father saves him from the hypocrisies of Mayo people. Act I ends with Christy’s wry acknowledgement, “Wasn’t I a foolish fellow not to kill my father in years gone by” (Synge, 1968: 93). There is a bizarre humor in this absurd statement and in Christy’s new self-realization and fulfillment after killing his father and more importantly after telling the village folk about it. The joy of story-telling is one element of its comic action and part of delight of the play is to watch Christy’s story progress. His audience listens with approval to the grand story of killing his father and he tells it lovely. The Play is valued as much for his fine words as his savagery. The theme of the play is the proximity of violence. The comic pattern places Christy’s crime on two levels of dramatic situation: Christy’s resentment and his subsequent violence and the reluctance of the Irish peasant community to accommodate him. Christy spends his nights poaching a game and this poaching is an escape of his father’s authority. The oppressive father image is a mosaic of outmoded marriage customs, denial of opportunity for self-expression and personal fulfillment. Synge’s comic world demonstrates a violent environment and the texture and the form of the play celebrate the readiness of the citizens to accept murder under certain conditions as an act of heroism. Pervading the entire formal development of the play is the language which demonstrates the community’s thirst for violence. The play is Synge’s peasant lyricism with a frightening subtext of violent metaphor. Jimmy Farrell’s response typifies the Mayo’s citizen’s view towards violence when Christy accepts the role of pot-boy, “Now, by the grace of God herself will be safe this night, with 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." (Synge, 1968: 45). Such accommodation of violence is a clear indication of the psychic-state of locality. The action pattern of the play is the creation of a hero in a violent archetype. The fact that Synge made his peasants mob farcically drunk does not mitigate their social relevance; rather it emphasizes the absurdity of their violent responses.

The Playboy of the Western World, as well as its theme, main characters and tone all arise directly from the popular oral art form that has close relations to the peasant culture. A major theme in the play and throughout modern Irish drama is the love of the Irish for taking flights of fancy and imagination. Synge captured the harsh truths, the painful lives, the blind faith, the poetry of oral tradition and the humor of the poor folk in rural Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century. His decision to chronicle the Irish oral culture that was disappearing from world literature arose from a deep sympathy with and appreciation for the peasantry and their way of life. This sympathetic attraction affects his work through his preference for material from rural Ireland. The peasantry appears in Synge's writings as a powerless group whose culture is being eroded by the colonizer and the anti-colonial elite. In the preface to *The Playboy*, Synge writes:

In Ireland, for a few years more we have a popular imagination that is fiery and magnificent and tender; so that those of us who wish to write start with a chance that is not given to writers in places where the springtime of the local life has been forgotten and the harvest is a memory only and the straw has been turned into bricks (Synge, 1968, 54).

The abundance of rural sources in his plays has been viewed as a subsuming of folk matter into the larger framework of modernist dramatic structure. Synge's concern is focused on an existing culture not an ancient one; albeit existing only for a few years. The use of folktale as the basis of the play is a strategy that has been demonstrated earlier in *In the Shadow of the Glen* and his book *The Aran Islands*. Seamus Deane wrote of *The Playboy*:

Famine, eviction, military oppression and landlordism, the characteristic facts of late-nineteenth century Irish rural existence for the peasantry are almost entirely repressed features of the text. The peasant society that Synge knew was dying because it had been atrociously oppressed – not because it had lost contact with the heroic energies which its early literature had once exhibited (Deane, 1985: 65).

Synge's fresh use of the Irish English language of farmers and fishermen marks the beginning for the new Irish theatre. The play is a superb blend of tragicomic plots. Synge succeeded in fulfilling his goal of writing in English what seems to be perfectly Irish in essence and eventually he created a form of 'Irish English' that is simultaneously prose poetry. What both O'Casey and Synge have in common is a profusion of phrase and an expansion of expression where realism might demand contraction and concision. Redundancy is a value in *The Plough* as it is not only

the comic characters who use language by accretion and by piling phrases upon phrases but the effect depends on flamboyance, “An’, once for all, Willie, you’ll have to thry to deliver yourself from th’ desire of provoking’ oul’ Pether into a wild forgetfulness of what’s proper an’ allowable in a respectable home.” (Synge, 1984: 177). But whereas Synge uses phrasing to communicate feeling, O’Casey uses it for comic effect that fills the void. O’Casey presents rural and pastoral comedy in his later plays that include *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* and *Purple Dust*. These two plays arrange a conflict between a tame and repressed society and the free spirits, playboys and playgirls who defy the ludicrous repressive society and escape to England. Exile is the only alternative available. It could be said that where Synge developed a rural dialect; O’Casey developed an urban one. Synge found on the Aran islands a bilingualism capable of being transformed into exotic speech spoken nowhere in Ireland. With O’Casey, the language creates a world inhabited by fantasists, a space that is deleted quickly to make a room for another invention and tends towards play, towards filling the void with words. He found in Dublin a sharp and colourful speech that he transformed into sustained pattern beyond realism.

Irish comedy is based on the denial of expectations: losers can be winners and folly can be wisdom. The violation of expectations inspires the varied reactions of relief, horror and humor. Such oxymoronic plays allow the comic characters to insulate themselves from the villainies of the world and to resort to the counterstrategies of disguises, subterfuges, prevarications, verbal exaggeration and mendacities that are necessary illusions for self-preservation. Christy’s character and development are underlined in the play. Christy is neither a comic boaster nor a conscious liar. His lies are unconscious fantasies which mark his own growing sense of self-esteem. In the early drafts, Synge kept the comic denouement with the return to status quo ante, the final text shows a definitive change in Christy by the end of the play. There is a duality that is central to Synge’s vision: the Playboy as a comic type and the daydreamer whose fantasies are exposed by reality and yet he became a mature individual who learned by his mistakes. From the beginning, he is extremely naïve and when asked about the motive of his crime, he replies: “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” (Synge, 1968: 73). Christy evolves from what Old Mahon describes as ‘a dribbling idiot’ to become not only a manly youth but also a sports and a poet hero. The father’s account of his son tells us that “Christy is 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” (Synge, 1968: 121). At the end of Act 1, Christy sums up his position, “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 not to kill my father in the years gone by” (Synge, 1968: 93). In the Second act, Pegeen’s admiration for Christy becomes more to him than merely an instance of ‘great luck and company.’ Because Pegeen can sense his fine words, she occupies the centre of Christy’s mind. By the end of Act 111, Christy is pleading with Widow Quin and he is in love for the first time. In the final act, Christy reaches the peak of self-assurance in his triumph at the sports. It is the terrible shock off her betrayal of him which awakes him from his dreams. His belief in Pegeen is shattered but

it strengthens his belief in himself. In Christy, Synge presents his view of the artist. He develops from a backward boy into a sophisticated poet who discovers a language of imagination which sets him apart from quotidian existence. He accepts a life of imagination and freedom. Christy's speech is rich in figurative tropes and densely textured. Synge recreated Irish-English habit of flexible word order, elaborate turn of phrase and rhetoric exaggeration. In *The Playboy*, Synge described several scenes as Rabelaisian and this stirs in our minds Mikhail Bakhtin and the idea of carnival with its social-political implications. Carnival sums up Synge's use of comedy with its subversive energy. Both tragedy and comedy describe the reckless confrontation with the commonplace. Tragedy celebrates a metaphysical delight between Apollo and Dionysus and Synge found correspondences for these forces in the Irish life and myth. There is both a structural and a verbal denial of expectations in the barbarous Irish comedy. The structural joke involves an inversion of the traditional order of plot and subplot. The unexpected plot becomes the central focus while the action of the main plot is consigned to a secondary position and very often occurs offstage. Our ordinary expectations on the comic fate of Christy are constantly reversed throughout the course of the play. The game of oxymoron functions as the illogic of a Celtic bull that is created out of the collision of antithetical impulses and it is the oxymoron laughter that is released by Mahon who loses and wins only to survive as a comic outcast. While O'Casey contrives to arrange the action on stage in a way that mocks stock responses, it is very likely that he anticipated Brecht's theory of alienation in which the audience is temporarily alienated and liberated from the preconceived ideas by a cathartic denial of expectations. There is an outrageous delight in the comic rejection of one's habitual assumptions. The denial of expectation is usually sudden and violent and the audience needs to continuously adjust itself to the unexpected reversals in the dramatized world. What is important about the anarchic freedom is that it challenges the repressive authority. It is very noticeable that in the barbarous world of Irish comedy that follies are mocked or indulged and that they go on uncorrected. Eventually, misunderstandings remain unresolved. Mahon and Captain Boyle are wise fools for our own sake as they remind us of own frailties. In other sense, clowns persist in their folly in order to become wise.

The revival of the dead is a process that people enjoy witnessing and enacting. The comic effect is derived from the paradox that contradicts the dominant cognitive and social structures. The miracle of resurrection is a familiar motif in Irish folklore; however these practical jokes might seem as improper to those unfamiliar with the structure of traditional Irish wakes. Synge played with the idea of resurrection in *The Playboy* when Mahon seemingly killed his father and the dead father rises from death. Vivian Mercier argues that "the marvelous is but one stage in the development of many an Irish tale. In a later version the same story may appear as a parody" (Mercier, 1962: 12). The wise clowns may be said to possess a tragicomic characteristics that render them worse and better than actual life. There is a remarkable difference between high comedy and low comedy. Comic characters in low comedy cannot be reformed while the playboys of O'Casey, Synge, Beckett and many other Irish writers recognize their redeeming excess through

their follies. The playboys and paycocks resort to mock-heroic hyperbole but there is a self-preserving shrewdness that enables them to avoid the buffoonery of tragicomic characters. They are more attractive, more human, more accessible and more enduring than the heroic characters in Irish literature and history. Synge's characters stand on the margins of convention. They are extraordinary. They build up a new and abnormal order shaking the solid foundations.

To conclude, the Irish comedy may be the answer to the dissociation and disintegration of life. The anarchic society creates its own hilarious antidote in the comic disorder that shakes the sacred foundation. In a disordered modern world in which the dignity of actual life has been discredited, the comic inclination may be better. The spiritual charge of laughter is psychic than actual. It is psychologically important to laugh in order to bear the pain of existence. This is a modern phenomenon that justifies the impulse to create comic subplots that dominate and diminish the tragic main plots. This is Ireland's painful laugh at itself, as well as at England. This creative ability to transform high tragedy into comedy is a dominant aspect of the Irish imagination and particularly in the works of Synge and O'Casey. These literary figures survived as they were the comic mythmakers of their own liberation in literature.

The Irish people resorted to comic strategies rather than physical violence to compensate for their personal and national frustrations. Comedy is the enemy of order and it is noticeable that the Irish modernist comedy parodies authority so that the frustration of human wishes is defeated by the chaos of comic disorder. It is good to refer to Beckett who sums up the comic explosion as 'the principle of disintegration':

Mr. O'Casey is a master of knockabout in this very serious and honourable sense- that he discerns the principle of disintegration in even the most complacent solidities and activates it to their explosion. This is the energy of his theatre, the triumph of the principle of knockabout in situation, in all its elements and on all its planes from furniture to the higher genres (Beckett, 1975: 76).

Beckett perceives the originality of O'Casey's theatre in the use of comedy for tragic purposes and the hilarious presentation of the principle of disintegration; although Beckett did not refer to the political implications of this vision. O'Casey was aware that things were falling apart and in his Dublin plays, he wanted to dramatize this social disintegration.

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