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'THE PLAYFELLOW OF JUDAS'

J.M. SYNGE: PLAYS, POLITICS AND PRE-CHRISTIAN IRELAND

CHRISTOPHER COLLINS

A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE SCHOOL OF DRAMA, FILM AND MUSIC
THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN, TRINITY COLLEGE

2013

DECLARATION

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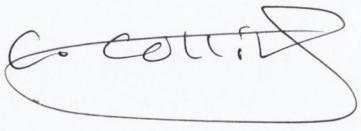
Signed: 

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SUMMARY

This dissertation provides a cultural materialist reading of J.M. Synge's dramatisation of the cultural residue of pre-Christian Ireland in five of his seven plays: *The Shadow of the Glen* (1903), *Riders to the Sea* (1904), *The Well of the Saints* (1905), *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) and *The Tinker's Wedding* (1909). Synge's two remaining plays *When the Moon has Set* (2002) and *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1910) are omitted from concentric analysis. *When the Moon has Set* certainly draws upon the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland but the efficacy of residual culture is secondary to Synge's critique of the decline of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy class into which he was born. *Deirdre of the Sorrows* is set in pre-Christian Ireland and therefore it is unable to engage with residual sensibilities. Nevertheless, both plays are discussed in this dissertation in order to complement how the other five plays draw upon vestigial beliefs that are manifested as cultural praxes of animism, pantheism, folklore, superstition and magical ritual.

The analysis necessitates cultural materialism because the various discursive theories that are concomitant with this strategy of analysis interrogate the relationship between literature and history, which, in turn, explores how Synge's plays were able to intervene within the Catholic, bourgeois ideology that controlled the means of cultural production in the Ireland of the dramatist's time. Of premier importance is Raymond Williams's theory of how a residual culture is able to problematise cultural hegemony. Synge's dramatisation of such residue may have been irreducibly subject to the ideology of the Catholic bourgeoisie, but it also intervened within this dominance by articulating a subterranean culture that was counter-hegemonic to state-orientated Catholic nationalism. Each of the three chapters in this dissertation argues that Synge's plays interrogated the schematics of residual pre-Christian cultural belief and, in doing so, his drama is understood to be in dialogue with a contemporaneous critique of Catholic progressivism. As Ireland embraced modernity, the critique of Catholic progressivism was pervasive and Synge's plays tackle a specific aspect of the critique: progressive historicism. This thesis understands that Synge's decision to dramatise a subaltern past that was suppressed by Catholic cultural imperialism was an attempt to brush the progressivism of Catholic historicism against the grain because it attempted to bring the discontents of Irish cultural history into hegemonic dialogue. Synge's plays dramatise the hostility of pre-Christian

residual culture to the nation's modernising project by positioning pre-Christian residual culture within an alternative temporality of modernity that invited the contemporaneity of the pre-modern and the modern. If the strategy of analysis that is presented in this dissertation is cultural materialism, then its working methodology juxtaposes the content of Synge's plays with his concentric and scholarly knowledge of the vestiges of pre-Christian culture that is found in his unpublished diaries, notebooks and journals. What emanates from these manuscripts is Synge's debt to comparative social science and metaphysics. Of importance is Synge's debt to Arthur Schopenhauer's metaphysics, which allowed him to understand how Nature and music, two entities that Synge believed to be concomitant with pre-Christian sensibility, could transcend the suffering and pain of Catholic, bourgeois materialism. Schopenhauer's influence is explored in the first two chapters in this thesis, whereas comparative social science permeates all three chapters. The efficacy of comparative anthropology in the work of James Frazer, comparative sociology in the work of Herbert Spencer and Celtology in the work of Anatole le Braz and others ensures that Synge's dramatisation of primitivism is Modernist in its grammar.

Synge's Modernist dramaturgy of the vestigial sensibilities of pre-Christian belief attempted to intervene within the discrepancy between religious and political ideology within the Ireland of his time. Catholic Ireland understood patterns of pre-Christian belief to be an index for a materialism that was "pre-modern" and "pre-political". Synge's plays re-articulated the religious persuasion of pre-Christian belief as a sensibility that was unable to be reduced to a "pre-political" ideology. The impetus to renegotiate the difference between religious belief and political ideology can certainly be identified in *Riders to the Sea* (Chapter One) and *The Shadow of the Glen* (Chapter Two). However, the symbolic capital of pre-Christian cultural beliefs in Synge's Ireland was inordinate and the monopolisation of it by either Catholic Ireland or Anglo-Irish Ireland was essential if the battle for socio-political hegemony were to be won. As the dramatist approached his mature drama in *The Well of the Saints*, *The Tinker's Wedding* and *The Playboy of the Western World* (Chapters Two and Three), the Catholic nation also increased its critique of Synge's dramatisation of backward cultural praxes. At this cultural disjuncture, Synge's religious and political allegiance to the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy emerged as an efficacious barricade.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the generous financial assistance provided by the University of Dublin, Trinity College. I am grateful for the following awards: the Postgraduate Research Studentship (2008-2011), the Trinity College Dublin Travel Grant (2010), the Creative Arts, Technologies and Cultures Award (2011) and the Samuel Beckett Postgraduate Studentship awarded by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht / An Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta and the Visual and Performing Arts Fund, Trinity College Dublin (2011).

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And so, to my family: Lesley, Desmond and William Collins. I have been fortunate enough to grow up in a home that is filled with books and discussions on theatre and performance. Whatever I write here will be unable to demonstrate just how grateful I am to all three of you, both individually and collectively. So let me say this: I'll see you in the Harbour.

Sections of the analysis in this dissertation that are already in publication:

Collins, Christopher. "J.M. Synge, W.B. Yeats and the Changeling of the Western World." In *Staging Thought: Essays on Irish Theatre, Scholarship and Practice*, edited by Rhona Trench, 219-34. Bern: Peter Lang, 2012.

Collins, Christopher. "Synge Scholarship: Nothing to do with Nationalism?," *Theatre Research International* 36, no. 3 (2011): 272-75.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Note: All manuscript quotations come with the respective permission of the Keeper of those manuscripts. All quotations from manuscript collections, Synge's *Collected Works* and *Collected Letters* preserve original spelling.

CL, vol. 1 Synge, J.M. *The Collected Letters of John Millington Synge*. Vol. 1, *1871-1907*. Edited by Ann Saddlemyer. Oxford: Clarendon, 1983.

CL, vol. 2 Synge, J.M. *The Collected Letters of John Millington Synge*. Vol. 2, *1907-1909*. Edited by Ann Saddlemyer. Oxford: Clarendon, 1984.

CW, vol. 1 Synge, J.M. *Collected Works*. Vol. 1, *Poems*. Edited by Robin Skelton. London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

CW, vol. 2 Synge, J.M. *Collected Works*. Vol. 2, *Prose*. Edited by Alan Price. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

CW, vol. 3 Synge, J.M. *Collected Works*. Vol. 3, *Plays*, Book 1. Edited by Ann Saddlemyer. London: Oxford University Press, 1968.

CW, vol. 4 Synge, J.M. *Collected Works*. Vol. 4, *Plays*, Book 2. Edited by Ann Saddlemyer. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1982.

IFC MS	Irish Folklore Commission Manuscript.
NLI MS	National Library of Ireland Manuscript.
NYPL MS	The New York Public Library Manuscript from the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection.
RIA MS	Royal Irish Academy Manuscript.
TCD ASMS	The Letters of the Reverend Alexander Synge, June 1851-December 1852.
TCD CMS	The Synge Correspondence Manuscripts from the Library of Trinity College Dublin.
TCD JJP	The Papers of Prof. John Joly from the Library of Trinity College Dublin.
TCD MS	The Manuscripts of the Irish Literary Renaissance. The J.M. Synge Manuscripts from the Library of Trinity College Dublin.
TCD SSMS	The Stephens-Synge Manuscripts from the Library of Trinity College Dublin.

For my cousin

Eibhlin Mary Roche

Without her support this dissertation would just not have been possible.

'THE PLAYFELLOW OF JUDAS'[1]

J.M. SYNGE: PLAYS, POLITICS AND PRE-CHRISTIAN IRELAND

The spirit came and said arise and write these things inspired of God.
The prophet said how shall I know they host the truth.

- J.M. Synge[2]

In six of his seven plays John Millington Synge (1871-1909) interrogated the Roman orthodoxy of Irish Catholicism by dramatising the vestiges and traces of pre-Christian Ireland as a volatile and veracious residual culture. This dissertation provides a cultural materialist reading of Synge's dramatisation of the cultural residue of pre-Christian Ireland in five of his seven plays: *The Shadow of the Glen* (1903),[3] *Riders to the Sea* (1904),[4] *The Well of the Saints* (1905),[5] *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907)[6] and *The Tinker's Wedding* (1909).[7] This dissertation will establish how the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland is manifested in Synge's plays by juxtaposing the content of the plays with the dramatist's scholarship of pre-Christian cultural sensibility that is held within his unpublished diaries, journals and notebooks. It will also identify how his plays were informed by national scandals that summoned the contemporaneity of "pre-modern" beliefs, as well as describing how biographical events peculiar to Synge shaped his work. The thesis argues that Synge understood patterns of pre-Christian belief to exist within an alternative temporality of modernity that brushed Catholic progressive historicism against the grain as

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[1] *CW,* vol. 2: 11.
[2] TCD MS: 4386, f.11r.
[3] *The Shadow of the Glen* was first performed on 8 October, 1903, in Molesworth Hall, Dublin, by the Irish National Theatre Society. Cast: George Roberts (Dan Burke), Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh (Nora Burke), P.J. Kelly (Michael Dara) and W.G. Fay (a Tramp). It was first published by Elkin Matthews (London) in 1905.
[4] *Riders to the Sea* was first performed on 25 February, 1904, in Molesworth Hall, Dublin, by the Irish National Theatre Society. Cast: Honor Lavelle (Maurya), W.G. Fay (Bartley), Sara Allgood (Cathleen), Emma Vernon (Nora), P.J. Kelly, Seamus O'Sullivan, George Roberts (Men) and Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, Maire Ní Gharbhaigh, Doreen Gunning (Women). It was first published in *Samhain: An* Occasional *Review* (Dublin) in 1903.
[5] *The Well of the Saints* was first performed on 4 February, 1905, in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, by the Irish National Theatre Society. Cast: W.G. Fay (Martin Doul), Emma Vernon (Mary Doul), George Roberts (Timmy), Sara Allgood (Molly Byrne), Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh (Bride), P. Mac Shiubhlaigh (Mat Simon) and F.J. Fay (the Saint). It was first published by Maunsel (Dublin) in 1905.
[6] *The Playboy of the Western World* was first performed on 26 January, 1907 in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, by the Irish National Theatre Society. Cast: W.G. Fay (Christopher Mahon) Ambrose Power (Old Mahon), Arthur Sinclair (Michael James), Maire O'Neill (Pegeen Mike), F.J. Fay (Shawn Keogh), J.A. O'Rourke (Philly O'Cullen), J.M. Kerrigan (Jimmy Farell), Sara Allgood (Widow Quin), Brigit O'Dempsey (Sara Tansey), Alice O'Sullivan (Susan Brady), Mary Craig (Honor Blake) and Harry Young, Udolphus Wright (Peasants). It was first published by Maunsel (Dublin) in 1907.
[7] *The Tinker's Wedding* was first performed on 11 November, 1909, in His Majesty's Theatre, London, by the Afternoon Theatre Company. Cast: Jules Shaw (Michael Byrne), Edmund Gurney (a Priest), Clare Greet (Mary Byrne) and Mona Limerick (Sarah Casey). It was first published by Maunsel (Dublin) in 1907.

his plays re-articulated the political and religious agency of the modern Irish subject. The symbolic capital of pre-Christian cultural residue in Synge's Ireland was inordinate and the monopolisation of it was essential if the battle for socio-political hegemony between Anglo-Irish and Catholic Ireland were to be won. Thus, while Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian sensibility articulated a neglected religious and political agency, the residue from this culture could also be used to articulate the socio-politics of two diametrically opposed factions. Synge's two remaining plays *When the Moon has Set* (2002)[8] and *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1910)[9] are omitted from concentric analysis. *When the Moon has Set* certainly draws upon the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland but the efficacy of residual culture is secondary to Synge's critique of the decline of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. *Deirdre of the Sorrows* is set in pre-Christian Ireland and therefore it is unable to engage with residual sensibilities. Nevertheless, both plays are discussed in this dissertation in order to complement how the other five plays draw upon vestigial pre-Christian beliefs that are manifested as cultural praxes of animism, pantheism, folklore, superstition and magical ritual.

Synge scholarship has acknowledged the vestiges of pre-Christian Ireland in Synge's works as such: Nicholas Grene points out that 'Christianity is troubled by the deeply pagan emotion which Synge was always quick to detect beneath the surface of [the] Aran [Islands'] Catholicism';[10] Alan Price contends that Synge was interested in finding 'evidence for the existence of pagan attitudes alongside Christian formulas';[11] G.J. Watson concludes that Synge identified that an 'orthodox Catholicism is the thinnest of veneers laid over a basically deeply pagan sensibility';[12] Declan Kiberd notes that Synge's plays are informed by 'a fiercely defiant paganism underneath a thin film of Christian belief';[13] Shaun Richards advocates that 'a pagan substratum to Irish culture was central to Synge's

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[8] *When the Moon Has Set* is Synge's apprentice play and it is unfinished. On 12 December, 1907, Synge wrote to the journalist Leon Brodzky: 'I wrote one play – which I have never published – in Paris, dealing with Ireland, but not a peasant play, before I wrote *Riders to the Sea*' (*CL*, vol. 2: 103. J.M. Synge to Leon Brodzky, 12 December, 1907). The first known professional production that the play has received was on 5 March, 2002, by the Bachelor of Acting Studies students from the University of Dublin, Trinity College. Cast: Aaron Monaghan (Colm Sweeny), Lisa Lambe (Bride), Judith Roddy (Sister Eileen) and Vicky Burke (Mary Costello). It was first published in *CW*, vol. 3 (Oxford) in 1968. A two-act version of the play that includes "Appendix D" in *CW*, vol. 3 was edited by Mary C. King and published in the *Long Room* (Dublin) in 1982.

[9] *Deirdre of the Sorrows* was Synge's last play and he died before he was able to finish it. It was finished by W.B Yeats, Lady Gregory and Molly Allgood. It was first performed on 13 January, 1910, in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, by the Irish National Theatre Society. Cast: Sara Allgood (Lavarcham), Eileen O'Doherty (Old Woman), J.A. O'Rourke (Owen), Arthur Sinclair (Conchubor), Sydney J. Morgan (Fergus), Maire O'Neill (Deirdre), Fred O'Donovan (Naisi), J.M. Kerrigan (Ainnle), John Carrick (Ardan) and Ambrose Power, Harry Young (Soldiers). It was first published by Cuala (Dublin) in 1910.

[10] Nicholas Grene, *Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 55.

[11] Alan Price, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Drama* (London: Methuen, 1961), 30.

[12] G.J. Watson, *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival: Synge, Yeats, Joyce, O'Casey* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 46.

[13] Declan Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1993), 56.

thinking';[14] Mary C. King argues that 'Christian and pagan beliefs, myths and rites collide and mingle' in Synge's work;[15] Seamus Deane maintains that in Synge 'we have pagan energy expressing itself in a Christian idiom'[16] and Anthony Roche observes that 'the pagan rage that lurked beneath the Christian quietude'[17] permeates Synge's drama. Furthermore, Roche contends that '[o]f all the creative oppositions to be found in John Millington Synge, none more fully unites the man, the Anglo-Irish culture into which he was born, and the native Irish drama he did so much to bring into being than the opposition between Christianity and paganism'.[18]

Following Paul Murphy's interrogation of 'the dialectic between Catholic *petit bourgeois* normality and its malcontents'[19] in Synge's plays, this dissertation explores the sensibilities of residual pre-Christian Irish culture in Synge's drama as a means to reconsider the ideological discrepancy between such sensibilities and the politics of state-orientated nationalism within the Catholic, bourgeois Ireland of the dramatist's time. The Irish nation considered the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland to be a Romantic index for the Celtic Geist and as long as fairies and folklore were wrapped in the exotic shroud of the Celtic Twilight then they could be tolerated by the national-popular consciousness. Joseph Lee advocates that the Catholic bourgeoisie were preoccupied 'with legitimising their aspirations by invoking alleged precedents from the celtic [sic] mists' and, furthermore, that this mercantile class were 'far from being prisoners of the past, [but] modernisers [that] created the past in their image of the future'.[20] Such beliefs were not allowed to exist outside of the strict codes of Romanticism because they were an ideological index for heathendom that placed state-orientated nationalism and the postcolonial project in jeopardy; why should Ireland be granted independence if its populace demonstrated a logic that was supposedly backward? Synge's interest in pre-Christian sensibility is indexical of a persuasion held by an esoteric clique of Anglo-Irish Ascendancy dilettantes that included W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory, but as this dissertation will suggest, Synge's relationship with these sensibilities greatly differed from his fellow directors at the Abbey Theatre. Like Yeats and Gregory, Synge understood that those members of the Irish populace that rationalised material conditions with pre-Christian sensibilities were far from savage. The discrepancy between religious and political ideology lies precisely in the

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[14] Shaun Richards, "*The Playboy of the Western World*," in *The Cambridge Companion to J.M. Synge*, ed. P.J. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 34-35.
[15] Mary C. King, *The Drama of J.M. Synge* (London: Fourth Estate, 1985), 62.
[16] Seamus Deane, "Synge's Poetic Use of Language," *Mosaic: Literature and Ideas* 5, no.1 (1971): 29.
[17] Anthony Valentine Roche, "The Otherworld Drama of John Millington Synge" (PhD diss., University of California: Santa Barbara, 1984), 109.
[18] Anthony Roche, "J.M. Synge: Christianity Versus Paganism," in *A J.M. Synge Literary Companion*, ed. Edward A. Kopper Jr. (London: Greenwood, 1988), 107.
[19] Paul Murphy, *Hegemony and Fantasy in Irish Drama, 1899-1949* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 33.
[20] Joseph Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society: 1848-1918* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1989), 12.

understanding that Catholic, bourgeois Ireland regulated the practice of pre-Christian sensibility by equating it with a pre-modern and pre-political consciousness; 'we can conceive', said the staunch Catholic D.P. Moran, 'and we have full tolerance for a Pagan or a non-Catholic Irishman', but by the same token that same person must 'have respect for the potent facts that are bound up with Irish Nationality'.[21] However, for Synge, these vestigial beliefs were anything but pre-modern and pre-political.

Both Catholic and Anglo-Irish Ireland considered pre-Christian beliefs to be pre-modern and pre-political because they were symptomatic of a consciousness that was recalcitrant to the logic of capitalist modernity. The persistence of pre-Christian sensibilities did not necessarily trouble the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy because a Catholic peasant majority practised pre-Christian beliefs. 'Protestants have given, and continue to give', wrote the Ascendancy apologist Horace Plunkett, 'a fine example of thrift and industry to the rest of the nation' whereas Irish Catholics were, in Plunkett's opinion, 'apathetic, thriftless, and almost non-industrial'.[22] Residual sensibilities were problematical for Catholic modernity because they invited the contemporaneity of feudalism, uneven development and its concomitant backward economic and political logics. As Ireland embraced modernity and capitalism began to articulate the modes of production, a newly enfranchised Catholic bourgeoisie replicated the oppression of colonial rule through their strict codes of Roman orthodoxy, which understood political power and capitalist modernity to be codependent. With respect to Catholic modernity, Lee argues that the Catholic Church 'reflected the dominant economic values of post-famine rural society', which privileged 'the primacy of economic man over the Irish countryside'.[23] Pre-Christian beliefs, then, were deemed pre-modern and pre-political because they were seemingly unable to comprehend the institutional changes to economics and politics, which had been implemented with the transition to capitalism in 1848.[24] These institutional changes witnessed the Catholic Church display 'an obsession with the materialists' as Catholic society displaced 'other worldly values' in favour of 'a very intense "this worldly" concern with social status'.[25] The privileging of economic capital predicated Catholic modernity, which, in turn, ensured that Catholic modernity remained 'politically pragmatic' as it attempted to 'foster a sense of national political consciousness'.[26] But the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland could

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[21] D.P. Moran, "Protestants and the Irish Nation," *Leader*, 27 July, 1901, 343.
[22] Horace Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century* (London: John Murray, 1904), 120-21.
[23] Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society*, 5.
[24] Lee points out that the 'root of the problem in many backward economies lies in agriculture. Food supply is so low that a sufficient surplus to feed a substantial non-agricultural population cannot be generated. This was not the case in Ireland' (Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society*, 9). With the introduction of capitalism, Irish 'commercial farming had superseded subsistence agriculture over three-quarters of the country by 1850, when Ireland had one of the most commercially advanced agricultures in the world' (Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society*, 10).
[25] Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society*, 16.
[26] Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society*, 49, 57-58.

not simply disappear, which is why it was perceived to inhabit the national-popular fantasy space as the consummation of the Celtic Geist, thus creating a curious paradox. Pre-Christian residual culture could be instrumental in the articulation of state-orientated nationalism but if the pre-Christian fantasy of the Celtic Geist materialised as pre-Christian reality then it was promptly removed from cultural hegemony because its apparent pre-political logic was problematical for the habitations of Catholic, bourgeois modernity.

What is significant about residual pre-Christian culture in *fin-de-siècle* Ireland is that as capitalism began to articulate Catholic modernity, members of the Irish populace still rationalised material conditions with pre-Christian sensibilities, which invited the contemporaneity of the pre-modern with the modern and the political with the pre-political. What emerges in this discrepancy between religious belief and political persuasion is the pluralisation of modernity that demands a heteroglossia of the political. Material conditions in Ireland necessarily changed under the impact of capitalism but what remained was the dominance of capitalism without the hegemony of a capitalist culture. If political power and economic capital are treated as two separate categories then the category of the political has the potential to be insurgent towards Catholic modernity because it is no longer oppressive but productive. In distancing itself form pre-Christian sensibilities, Catholic modernity only succeeded in enfranchising the cultural residue as a political power that pluralised modernity through the constellation of the pre-modern and the modern. This is why Synge understood that pre-Christian beliefs could not be regulated to a pre-modern and pre-political consciousness; just because these sensibilities invited the concomitance of pre-capitalist modernity, it did not necessarily follow that those that believed in supposedly pre-modern beliefs could not articulate their suppositions within the realm of the political. Ostensibly for Synge, pre-Christian sensibilities were not the false consciousness of pre-modernity but the cultural articulation of a consciousness that precluded the institutional logic of Catholic, bourgeois modernity. At this juncture, the cultural practice of pre-Christian belief is in itself a political act that necessitates an alternative temporality of modernity where the pre-modern and the modern are no longer incommensurable but inextricable.

This dissertation will complete two objectives. The first objective concerns the dissertation's working methodology, which is to demonstrate how Synge's dramatisation of the cultural traces of pre-Christian Ireland draws strength from Synge's scholarship of comparative social science and metaphysics. And so, the analysis presented in this dissertation also follows the work of Sinéad Garrigan Mattar, which considers Synge's 'intense engagement with scientific comparativism [that] liberated [him] from the

debilitating mists of the Celtic Twilight'.[27] However, whereas Garrigan Mattar juxtaposes Synge's plays and prose with his knowledge of comparative social science, this dissertation is solely concerned with his plays. Furthermore, this dissertation attempts to demonstrate that Synge's knowledge of comparative social science extends further than what Garrigan Mattar postulates and, at the same time, it draws upon Synge's knowledge of metaphysics, a discourse to which the dramatist gave equal credence. Accordingly, if Murphy considers Synge's plays from the perspective of class and gender discrepancy in Irish culture, the analysis that will be presented in this thesis considers how pre-Christian cultural sensibilities interrogated the difference between religious belief and political persuasion in Irish culture. Therefore, the second objective of this dissertation is to understand how a cultural materialist strategy of analysis is able to demonstrate how Synge's scholarship of Irish pre-Christian cultural sensibility was conducive towards an interrogation of the discrepancy between religion and politics. As the dissertation will suggest, Synge's understanding of the difference between pre-Christian and political beliefs was inextricably caught up within a critique of a newly enfranchised Catholic bourgeoisie and, therefore, his critique of ideological discrepancy is problematic because of his alliance with the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy into which he was born.

'I was born in 1871 near Dublin – my father was a barrister and landlord',[28] Synge wrote to Max Meyerfeld (the translator of *The Well of the Saints* into German) in September 1905. Synge's nephew, Edward Stephens, maintained that 'at the day of [Synge's] birth' the family 'had been settled in County Wicklow for almost a century'.[29] Synge's father, John Hatch Synge (1823-72), practised as a lawyer that specialised in the conveyance of land. Synge's mother, Kathleen née Traill (1840-1908) married John Hatch Synge in January 1856. Synge had four siblings: three brothers and one sister. His eldest brother, Robert Anthony Synge (1858-1943) was an engineer that emigrated to Argentina to own and manage estates. The second-eldest son, Edward (1859-1939), managed the Synge family estates in County Wicklow and County Galway. Synge's closest brother in age, Samuel (1867-1951), emigrated to China as a Protestant missionary. The dramatist's sister, Annie Isabella Synge (1863-1949), married Harry Stephens, a solicitor that practised in Dublin.

When Synge was one year old, his father contracted smallpox and died.[30] Mrs. Synge was used to tragedy; three of her eight children had died in their infancy.[31] "Johnnie" was Mrs. Synge's term of endearment for her son and, after the passing of her husband, Johnnie was raised to walk in the ways of the Lord: 'I pray that my dear little child never

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[27] Sinéad Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 130.
[28] NLI MS: 778, f.11r. J.M. Synge to Max Meyerfeld, 1 September, 1905.
[29] TCD SSMS: 6189, f.3.
[30] TCD SSMS: 6189, f.224.
[31] W.J. McCormack, *Fool of the Family: A Life of J.M. Synge* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000), 30.

knowing an earthly father's tender love & care, may be more abundantly cared for by His heavenly father & drawn to know & love Him'.[32] With the passing of Mr. Synge, Mrs. Synge moved her family from 2 Newtown Villas, Rathfarnham to 4 Orwell Park, Rathgar so that she could be closer to her mother, who lived next door. For one hour every Sunday morning at the family home, Mrs. Synge and grandmother Anne Traill instructed the Synge children in Biblical study. In 1881 Synge began preparatory education at Mr. Harrick's Classical and English School at 4 Upper Leeson Street.[33] However, his education was frequently interrupted by ill health and he was often withdrawn from his next school, Aravon House in Bray, County Wicklow due to chronic illness that ranged from influenza to boils and abscesses on the boy's legs. Mrs. Synge, however, was intent that her son received a good education and the stay-at-home student was taught three times a week by his personal tutor, Mr. Cooper.

Victorian Ireland in Synge's formative years was marked by a crisis of consciousness. This was an age of Darwinism. In the year of Synge's birth, Charles Darwin published *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex,* a book which suggested that 'man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin'.[34] Darwin's treatise on evolution gave rise to discourses on comparative social science and Synge, who advocated that 'science gives toleration which much is wanted in this nation',[35] underwent an acute crises of consciousness at the age of eighteen. In September 1889, Synge began to reject his mother's strict diet of evangelical Protestantism. In truth, Mrs. Synge had expected the worst for quite some time; as early as April 1888, she had written a despairing letter to her son Robert in Argentina, maintaining that she could find 'no spiritual life in my poor Johnnie, there <u>may</u> be some, but it is not visible to my eyes, he is very reserved & shut <u>up</u> on the subject, & if I say any thing to him he never answers me, so I don't know in the least! The hate of his mind – it is a trying[,] state <u>very</u> trying'.[36] Something needed to be done. On 17 September, 1889, the Rev. John Dowse, curate of the church on Zion Road, Rathgar, knocked on the door of the family home. Rev. Dowse took his strict instructions from Mrs. Synge in the drawing room before taking the younger Synge into the parlour, whereupon he advised him to accept the Lord as his saviour.[37] The precocious teenager held his ground and, in December, 1889 Synge informed his mother that he would no longer attend church or partake in Biblical study.[38] Turning to his notebook for 1888-89 we can see how Synge substantiated his crisis of consciousness:

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[32] TCD JJP: 2312/582, f.2r. Kathleen Synge to John Joly, 16 April, 1878.
[33] TCD SSMS: 6189, f.279.
[34] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: Penguin, 2004), 689.
[35] TCD MS: 4371, f.30r.
[36] TCD SSMS: 6220, f.15. Kathleen Synge to Robert Anthony Synge, 16 April, 1888.
[37] McCormack, *Fool of the Family*, 77.
[38] See, *CL*, vol. 1: xix.

> The common idea of God, among religious people, is a Being supremely good delighting in virtue and in nothing nothing else. But if God did, as is generally believed make man in the state that he now exists, and if He guides and directs humanity at the present moment, if He gave us our intellects, can we believe that He does not require us to use them? Did He give Shakespeare or Garrick their abilities and not intend them to write and act? If He gives us our minds it is clear, to me at least that He wishes us to use them, if He wishes us to use them it is a sin not to do so, and a virtue to fulfill his wish.[39]

In February 1889 Synge enrolled on a Gentleman's undergraduate degree at the University of Dublin, Trinity College. October of the following year saw Mrs. Synge move her family to Crosthwaite Park West in Kingstown (Dún Laoghaire). Complimented by prizes in Hebrew and Irish, Synge achieved a second-class honors degree from Trinity College in 1892; his real effort was put into the study of music and the playing of the violin that he had taken up with Mr. Patrick J. Griffith in 1887. During his time at university Synge was aloof and, more often than not, he could be found playing in the orchestra or studying musical theory, composition, harmony and counterpoint at the Royal Academy of Music, which he had joined in November 1889. In 1893 Synge followed his passion for music to Oberwerth, an island on the Rhine near Koblenz, Germany. In 1894 the study of music saw him move east to Würzburg before returning to Oberwerth.[40] In 1895 Synge began postgraduate study in Paris. After joining the *Société Fraternelle d'Étudiants Protestants* (Society of Brotherly Protestant Students), Synge began studying comparative phonetics, French literature, medieval literature and Celtology (the scientific study of Celtic civilisation) at different institutions. At the *École Pratique des Hautes-Études* (Practical School of Higher Studies) he studied comparative phonetics with Paul Passy. At the *Université de Paris – Sorbonne* (Paris University – Sorbonne) he studied medieval literature with Louis Petit de Julleville, French literature with A.E. Faguet, early Renaissance literature with Emile Gebhart and Celtology and Old Irish with Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville. At the *Collège de France* (College of France) he studied Celtology with Anatole le Braz and, in his diary, le Braz recalled:

> *La figure de Synge est typique: une tête longue, un peu carrée, aux traits tourmentés et, par moments, quasi douloureux, pas belle, mais singulièrement expressive. La moustache châtaine voile à demi les lèvres épaisses; une manière de goître enfle le côté droit du cou. Il se montre d'une courtoisie charmante, pleine d'aménité, de couveur, légèrement timide. L'intelligence est ouverte, accueillante. L'homme n'a pas cette*

[39] TCD MS: 4371. ff.48r-49r.

[40] Synge arrived in Oberwerth on 29 July, 1893 and stayed with the von Eicken sisters. His cousin, Mary Synge, put him in touch with the von Eickens and he would stay with them until 21 January, 1894. On 22 January, 1894 Synge took accommodation with Frau Süsser at Hanger Ring 16, Würzburg. He left Süsser's accommodation on 1 June, 1894 to return to the von Eickens', where he stayed until 12 June. On 3 November, 1895 Synge returned to stay with the von Eickens, deciding to leave for Paris on 31 December. His final stay with the von Eickens was from 8 October to the 5 November, 1908. See, *CL*, vol. 1: xx-xxvi.

morgue enfantine qui m'a frappé chez beaucoup de ses compatriotes, aucune "pitrerie" non plus, mais un grand sérieux, une foi profonde dans la vitalité du movement Irlandais, un enthousiasme contenu qui, parfois, illumine le regard, affermit la voiz, le sentiment aussi, général chez ses congénères, que ce qui s'accomplit en ce moment en Irlande est un phénomène historique unique au monde et dont les fastes des autres nations ne contiennent pas d'exemple.

[The figure of Synge is typical: a long head, a bit square, with tormented features and, at times, somewhat sorrowful, not handsome, but singularly expressive. His chestnut moustache hides half of his thick lips; something resembling a goitre covers the right side of his throat. He presents with charming courtesy, full of friendliness, shy, a gentle timidity. His intelligence is obvious, welcoming. The man has none of the childish arrogance that has struck me with many of his compatriots, no "tomfoolery" either, rather an air of seriousness, a profound faith in the vitality of the Irish movement, a contented enthusiasm which, sometimes, lights up his countenance, strengthens his voice, this feeling also, which is common amongst his like, is that what is happening in Ireland at the moment is a historic phenomenon unique in the world and in the annals of the nations there is no example.][41]

For the next nine years (1895-1903) Synge made continual returns to Paris, often choosing to stop off at his preferred London lodgings at 4 Handel Street, Russell Park; a brisk walk would have taken Synge to Yeats's accommodation at 18 Woburn Walk in five minutes.[42] Synge took various accommodation in Paris: with the Arbeau family at 94 rue Lafayette (1895), with the Peter family at 2 rue Léopold Robert (1895-97), the Hôtel Corneille at 5 rue Corneille (1896), the Hôtel de l'Univers at 9 rue Gay-Lussac (1896), the Hôtel St. Malo at 2 rue Odessa (1898) before finally settling on a garret at 90 rue d'Assas (1898-1903). Synge enjoyed his time spent in Paris because it presented him with 'a breath of the wickedness'.[43] But life in Paris could be sullen; in June 1896 he wrote to Cherrie Matheson, a family friend who lived three doors down from the family home in Crosthwaite Park West, proposing marriage. She declined Synge's hand in marriage because of the dramatist's agnosticism that bordered on atheism. The upsetting news was relayed back to Mrs. Synge: 'I got a *sad sad* letter from my poor Johnnie from Paris'.[44] Writing to her son Samuel, Mrs. Synge was ashamed: 'Cherrie came in this morning and is quite decided that

[41] Anatole le Braz, quoted in Maurice Bourgeois, *John Millington Synge and The Irish Theatre* (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1913), 65n-66n.

[42] Cumulatively, Synge spent over three years in Paris. Synge first arrived in Paris on 1 January, 1895 staying until 28 June. On 3 January, 1896 Synge returned to Paris and stayed there until 3 February. He returned on 3 June and stayed until 29 June. On 29 October, 1896 Synge commenced what would prove to be his longest stay in Paris, leaving on 13 May, 1897. He returned on 23 January, 1898 and left on 22 April. In that same year he returned again on 18 November and left on 7 May, 1899. On 5 November, 1899 he returned to Paris and stayed there until 23 May, 1900 before returning on 1 November and leaving again on 6 May, 1901. On 28 November, 1901, Synge made his penultimate visit and stayed until 17 May, 1902. He briefly returned on 6 March, 1903 to pack up his scant belongings. He left Paris forever on 13 March. See, *CL*, vol. 1: xx-xxiii.

[43] *CL*, vol. 1: 41. J.M. Synge to Stephen MacKenna. This quote is taken from Ann Saddlemyer's Interchapter, "Return from Exile: Paris and Dublin". The date of the letter is not stipulated.

[44] Edward Stephens, *My Uncle John: Edward Stephens's Life of J.M. Synge*, ed. Andrew Carpenter (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 100. Emphasis in original.

she could not be joined to one of his options and she says she is awfully sorry poor little girl at all the trouble she has unintentionally brought on me – I suffer far more than she does [...] Johnnie has spoke out quite openly to Cherrie and she is quite shocked and says he is much worse in his views than when he went away last autumn'.[45] Three days later she wrote to Samuel, offering indirectly her empathy to her youngest son who was, by then, preparing to return into Parisian exile: 'May God, the God of love and pity have mercy on his blindness and unbelief – He surely will'.[46] Miss Matheson's rejection must have taken its toll on the painfully shy dramatist. Those that met Synge were frequently taken aback by his demeanour. In 1905, on an Abbey Theatre tour to Cambridge, the company were the guests of the Cambridge (Trinity College) professor, Alfred North Whitehead and his Irish wife, Evelyn Whitehead (née Wade). Mrs. Whitehead later recounted:

> 'When the Abbey Theatre first came on tour to Cambridge,' said Mrs. Whitehead, 'I had Alfred give them lunch at the college. Yeats was the *poseur*; tousled hair, adoring females in attendance, one permitted to carry his muffler, another his raincoat. He had written some splendid poetry, but certainly was conceited. There was one young man, shabbily clad, who said almost nothing and coughed dreadfully. After lunch someone took them the rounds of the college, but this young man stayed behind with Alfred and me. And then! Three hours, he talked brilliantly. We hadn't got his name. But after they were gone, we told each other, "No matter who he is, the man is extraordinary." At the time he had published nothing. Later we found out that his name was Synge! We hugged ourselves that we hadn't had to be told.'[47]

The exiled Irish writer, according to George Moore, should never return to Ireland because it is a 'country to which it was fatal to return.'[48] This was not the case with Synge. Concomitant with his life in Paris was his life on the Aran Islands. His accommodation on Aran oscillated from the relatively dignified to the relatively simple; from the Atlantic Hotel on Inis Mór to the Mac Dhonnchadha cottage on Inis Meáin. Synge made five visits to the Islands between 1898 and 1902 and the significance of these visits upon his plays can hardly be overstated.[49] Moore thought that Synge's Dublin was 'no sort of place to live in' because it was 'growing more and more provincial every day. There is no life, intellectual

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[45] TCD SSMS: 6221, ff.1-2. Kathleen Synge to Samuel Synge, 22 October, 1896.
[46] TCD SSMS: 6221, f.4. Kathleen Synge to Samuel Synge, 25 October, 1896.
[47] Lucien Price, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead as recorded by Lucien Price* (London: Max Reinhardt, 1954), 104. Emphasis in original.
[48] George Moore, *Hail and Farewell: Vale* (New York: D. Appleton, 1914), 203.
[49] Synge first arrived on Aran on 10 May, 1898, staying on Inis Mór for two weeks (10-24 May) before travelling to Inis Meáin, where he stayed for just over a week (24 May-9 June) before heading back to Inis Mór, which he left on 25 June. On 12 September, 1899 he returned to Inis Meáin. He left the Islands on 7 October after spending his final days on Inis Mór. On 15 September, 1900 he returned once again to Inis Meáin. He left the Islands on 14 October after spending a few days on Inis Oírr. On 21 September, 1901 he made his final visit to Inis Meáin. He visited Inis Oírr on 1 October and left on 19 October. His final visit to the Islands was on 14 October, 1902, when he stayed on Inis Oírr, before leaving on 8 November. See, *CL*, vol. 1: xxii-xxiii.

or artistic'[50] and, with respect to the Revival, there wasn't one. 'There is only one man', Moore suggested, 'Mr. Synge, and he has written only one really beautiful play, The Well of the Wise'.[51] Yeats may have been the impresario of the Abbey Theatre but there is some truth in Synge's curt conclusion on his working relationship with his fellow artistic director: 'Yeats looks after the stars, and I do the rest'.[52] Never should we mistake Synge's shyness for an apathetic temperament. Synge was acutely perceptive.

It should come as no surprise that corpses litter Synge's plays because death stalked the melancholic corridors of his subconscious; even when the dramatist had fallen head over heels in love with Molly Allgood (Maire O'Neill, 1885-1952), his letters betray the fragility of human existence:

> Glendalough House
> Glenageary
> Wednesday evening (late) 22.5.07
>
> Dearest Heart,
>
> This is no less than *my third* letter to you today. What do you say to me now?
>
> It is a wonderfully still beautiful evening and I feel as if I ought to write verses but I haven't the energy. There is nearly a half moon, and I have been picturing in my mind how all our nooks and glens and rivers would look, if we were out among them as we should be! Do you ever think of them? [...] I used to sit over my sparks of fire long ago in Paris picturing glen after glen in my mind, and river after river [...] and then one goes on to see a time when the rivers will be there and the thrushes, and we'll be dead surely. It makes one grudge every evening one spends duly in a town, what wouldn't I give to be out with you now in this rich twilight coming down from Rockbrook or Enniskerry with strange smells and sounds, and the first starts, and the wonderful air of Wicklow? [...] And you, my poor changling, have to go to Birmingham next week, and I, poor divil, amn't well enough to go out to far-away places for even solitary walks. Write a nice *intimate* letter the next time and tell me how your little mind is feeling in its wandering.
>
> [...]
> Write me a nice letter
> Your old
> Tramp.[53]

Since October 1904 Synge had lived in a room at 15 Maxwell Road, Rathgar and, in February 1905 he moved back home to Crosthwaite Park West. It mattered not that he had to share the house with his mother; Synge met Molly two weeks prior to the move, when the

[50] "Mr. George Moore on Dublin," *Dublin Evening Mail*, 6 December, 1905, 5.
[51] "Mr. George Moore on Dublin," 5. Moore's reference to The Well of the Wise is an index for *The Well of the Saints*.
[52] *CL*, vol. 2: 140. J.M. Synge to Stephen MacKenna, 23 February, 1908.
[53] *CL*, vol. 1: 353. J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood, 22 May, 1907. Emphasis in original.

Catholic girl (fourteen years younger than Synge), from a furniture shop on Dublin's Aston Quay, had been given a walk-on part in *The Well of the Saints*. In February 1908 Synge took rooms at 47 York Road, Rathmines in anticipation of marrying Molly; Synge's doctor was just as surprised as everyone else and he told the dramatist: 'Well you're a great sportsman to go and get married before you've made your name!'[54] Significantly, Mrs. Synge chose to not stand in the way of her son's happiness, pointing out that 'it would be a good thing if it would make [Synge] happier'.[55] Life was good. And just when Synge began to forget about life, mortality intervened.

Mrs. Synge died on 26 October, 1908. She had been ill for quite some time and her unknown illness became terminal in September. Molly offered to visit the dramatist's mother at Glendalough House, Glenageary (Mrs. Synge had moved there in July 1906) but Synge advised against it: 'She is quite too ill to see anyone so she could not see you if you called, but you can call and enquire if you like. She is so ill I don't suppose they would even tell her you'd been there.'[56] On 6 October and feeling the need for evasive action, Synge left Dublin for Oberwerth. Robert's telegram sent by the *Telegraphie des Deutschen Reichs mit Coblenz* (Telegraph of the German State to include Coblenz) informed him that 'mother has passed away[,] funeral Thursday[,] don't come unless strong enough for journey'.[57] Synge received the telegram at a quarter to three in the afternoon and he replied promptly; at three o'clock another telegram arrived from Robert: 'you ought not to come in that case[,] funeral Wednesday.'[58] Synge may not have attended his mother's burial at Mount Jerome cemetery on 29 October but, ostensibly, he was inconsolable. To Molly he wrote: 'People like Yeats who sneer at old fashioned goodness and steadiness in women seem to want to rob the world of what is most sacred in it. I cannot tell you how unspeakably sacred her memory seems to me. [...] I hope you'll be as good to me as she was'.[59]

Four months later (February, 1909) Synge entered the Elpis nursing home at 19-21 Lower Mount Street. The goitre that le Braz identified had turned cancerous. In truth, it had bothered Synge all his life; in November 1889 Mrs. Synge wrote to Robert: 'Johnnie is not well I am very sorry to say he has got those glands swelled & sore again in his groins & boils on his legs, he looks miserable & was awake the last three nights'.[60] In Elpis Synge cut a forlorn figure: pale, emaciated and wandering the corridors, waiting for the end to come. Miss Kitty Clinch (a friend of the niece of the Abbey Theatre's architect, Joseph Holloway)

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[54] *CL*, vol. 1: 346. J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood, 14 May, 1907.
[55] J.M. Synge, *Letters to Molly: John Millington Synge to Maire O'Neill, 1906-1909*, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 1971), 77. J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood, 13 December, 1906.
[56] *CL*, vol. 2: 216. J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood, 25 October, 1908.
[57] TCD CMS: 4425, f.481. Robert Anthony Synge to J.M. Synge, 26 October, 1908.
[58] TCD CMS: 4425, f.482. Robert Anthony Synge to J.M. Synge, 26 October, 1908.
[59] *CL*, vol. 2: 221. J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood, 9 November, 1908.
[60] SSMS: 6220, f.51. Kathleen Synge to Robert Anthony Synge, 11 November, 1889.

was in the room nextdoor to Synge's and she recalled how the dramatist told his nurses: 'What is the use of giving me anything, all's up with me, it is better to let me die'.[61] Molly did what she could. On one of her final visits and 'with tears in her eyes she asked the nurse as she came out in the passage what she thought of him and she answered – "What do you think yourself?"'[62] On 22 March Synge sipped champagne with Robert, who recalled that to begin with 'he was too weak to talk, but the nurse screwed the [corkscrew] tap into the cork of the bottle I had brought and gave him some champagne, and then he seemed a little brighter.'[63] Synge died on 24 March and on 26 March he was buried alongside his mother in Mount Jerome cemetery.

'Fat-Faced, Sweaty-Headed Swine'[64]

During the eighteenth century, 'that one century that escaped from darkness and confusion',[65] the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy 'were prey to fears that England would let them down by breaking their monopoly'[66] on Irish socio-politics by demanding a liberal attitude towards Catholic Ireland. By the early nineteenth century, the Ascendancy's anxiety over their English heritage was palpably increased by the Act of Union (1801), which formally established the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland as parliamentary proceedings were transferred to Westminster; as R.F. Foster points out, '[i]nsecurity and the England-complex remained with them to the end'.[67] Catholic Ireland became enfranchised following Catholic Emancipation (1829), the pact of the Repeal Association with the Liberal Party in Westminster (1840-48) and the Encumbered Estates Act (1849). These events in parliamentary politics were concomitant with the horror of the Great Famine (1845-9) and later, the Land War (1870-82). What emerged from these collective events were huge expanses of land for a new generation of strong Catholic farmers; a class formation that had had particular political clout because of the size of their land. Lee reminds us of the 'alacrity with which Irish purchasers, urban and rural, bought encumbered estates in the 1850s to the value of £ 20,000,000 [which] pointed to the substantial reservoir of capital seeking outlets in landed property. Capital flowed into railways, gas companies, insurance and shipping firms, and bank shares'.[68] During these decades of enfranchisement five of the twelve judges in the Irish Supreme Court were members of the Catholic bourgeoisie, while in other areas of commercial life the administrative power of the banks consolidated Catholic

[61] TCD SSMS: 4815, f.4815.
[62] TCD SSMS: 4815, f.4815.
[63] TCD SSMS: 6197, f.4817.
[64] *CW*, vol. 2: 283n.
[65] W.B. Yeats, *Explorations: Selected by Mrs. W.B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 345.
[66] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1988), 173.
[67] Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 194.
[68] Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society*, 12.

control as this mercantile class filtered the proceeds from the Encumbered Estates court into their monopolisation of the Irish railway system.[69] Cardinal Paul Cullen, whose Devotional Revolution[70] attempted to erase the cultural vestiges of pre-Christian Ireland within the Catholic present because they were considered to be pre-modern and pre-political, neatly summarised socio-political conditions: '*We* are the *Catholic population* of the United Kingdom. A population growing every day in wealth and social importance.'[71] Synge scholarship often chooses to focus on the dramatist's complicated relationship with the 'ruck of fat-faced, sweaty-headed swine'[72] that Synge detected within the Catholic bourgeoisie because, as Shaun Richards suggests, this class exploited 'the peasants it simultaneously idealised as the embodiment of authentic Ireland.'[73] Sometimes Synge's critique of the Catholic bourgeoisie is implicit; with respect to suburban Dublin (where the majority of the Catholic bourgeoisie lived), to his close friend and confidante, Stephen MacKenna, Synge wrote: 'Yes[,] Dublin *c'est le pays du rêve Celtique* [is the country of the Celtic dream], but the realities are crude. The country round here is wonderful just now, but God help the people – the 'near-Dublin' people *surtout* [mainly].'[74] But at other times his critique of the Catholic bourgeoisie is explicit: 'the scurrility and ignorance and treachery of some of the attacks upon me have rather disgusted me with the middle-class Irish Catholic.'[75] The critique of Catholic bourgeois Ireland emanates, in part, from Synge's Ascendancy upbringing; Mrs. Synge was afraid that the family 'would not be free from fleas'[76] upon realising that a Catholic family owned their rented holiday accommodation in County Wicklow.[77] But the critique is also an index for Synge's acute disdain for Catholic cultural imperialism.

While this dissertation cannot (will not) overlook Synge's class background, it postulates that Synge's critique of Catholic, bourgeois Ireland is predicated upon Catholic cultural imperialism that was specifically manifested in the erasure of pre-Christian residual culture. It cannot be denied that Synge certainly fetishised the Irish peasantry[78] but the starting premise of this dissertation takes Synge's fetishisation as evident. Instead, it looks at how the staging of traces of a pre-Christian culture that was unfamiliar to Synge – but all

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[69] Emmet Larkin, *The Making of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland: 1850-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 447.
[70] The phrase 'Devotional Revolution' was coined by Emmet Larkin. See, Emmet Larkin, "The Devotional Revolution in Ireland:1850-75," *American Historical Review* 77, no. 3 (1972): 625-52.
[71] Cardinal Paul Cullen, quoted in Emmet Larkin, *The Making of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland*, 447. Emphasis in original.
[72] *CW,* vol. 2: 283n.
[73] Richards, "*The Playboy of the Western World*," 30.
[74] *CL,* vol. 2: 56-7. J.M. Synge to Stephen MacKenna, 12 June, 1902.
[75] *CW,* vol. 2: 283n.
[76] TCD SSMS: 6191, f.1022.
[77] This was Duff House in Lough Dan. The Synge family stayed there from 5-31 July, 1895. See, *CL*, vol. 1: xxi.
[78] Throughout this dissertation I carefully use the words 'peasant' and 'peasantry,' as an index for a rural class that existed outside of the bourgeois habitations of *fin-de-siècle* and early twentieth century Irish modernity.

too familiar to the newly enfranchised Catholic bourgeoisie that were only a generation removed from folk culture – interrogated modes of cultural production by removing patterns of pre-modern belief and replacing them with 'the rosary, forty hours, perpetual adoration, novenas, blessed altars, *Via Crucis* (Way of the Cross), benediction, vespers, devotion to the Sacred Heart and to the Immaculate Conception, jubilees, triduums, pilgrimages, shrines, processions and retreats'.[79] Synge knew, very well, that the Irish peasantry were predominantly Catholic, but he also understood that their Catholicism was problematised by popular, vernacular belief. However, the thin veil that separates Irish pre-Christian sensibility and Catholic doxology in Synge's drama cannot be considered as Popular Catholicism. Popular Catholicism is not a syncretism between pre-Christian and Catholic beliefs but a substratum of Catholicism that authenticated pre-Christian cultural residue; as Michael P. Carroll points out, 'Irish popular Catholicism was in fact characterized by a set of emphases that were internally consistent but quite different from the emphases characteristic of official Catholicism.'[80] For example, in pre-Christian Ireland wells were considered to be sacred and the Church Christianised them through a process of dedication to a Saint; this is precisely what happened on the Aran Islands with what Synge refers to as the well of 'The Four Beautiful Persons'.[81] MacKenna recalled that: 'Orthodox religion was always ignored by him, Protestantism he detested[,] he often spoke against the superstitious elements in Catholicism' because he disliked 'certain abuses of the Catholic Church'.[82] The superstitious element of the Catholic Church is an index for Popular Catholicism and while some of Synge's plays such as *The Well of the Saints* and *The Tinker's Wedding* occasionally invoke the efficacy of Popular Catholicism, it is only invoked in order to critique the Church's appropriation of pre-Christian belief. For Synge, Popular Catholicism was a corruption of pre-Christian sensibility and those characters in his plays that adhere to its precepts are treated with contempt by the dramatist. For example, in *The Playboy of the Western World*, Shawn Keogh asks 'St. Brigid' to have 'mercy on me now!'[83] but, as Dáithí Ó hÓgáin has suggested, 'St. Brigid has taken over much of the function of a pre-Christian goddess'.[84] For while St. Brigid may be the patroness of Roman Catholic Ireland, her miracles are predicated upon pre-Christian sensibility; she was said to miraculously cure blindness when she washed her eyes with the groundwater from a holy well. Therefore, when the content of Synge's plays draw upon Popular Catholicism, it will be duly noted.

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[79] Larkin, "The Devotional Revolution in Ireland:1850-75," 645.
[80] Michael P. Carroll, "Rethinking Popular Catholicism in Pre-Famine Ireland," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34, no. 3 (1995): 354.
[81] *CW,* vol. 2: 57.
[82] Stephen MacKenna, NLI MS: 13,276, f.12.
[83] *CW,* vol. 4: 65.
[84] Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *The Hero in Irish Folk History* (Dublin: Macmillan, 1985), 18.

However, as a general rule, it should be understood that Catholicism in Synge's drama is confronted by specific manifestations of pre-Christian residual culture.

'The Fight for the Oppressed Past'[85]

Raymond Williams's articulation of cultural materialism distinguishes between three cultural materialities: the dominant, the emergent and the residual. Dominant culture is that which articulates cultural sovereignty. An emergent culture is that which creates 'new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences'[86] but still, a dominant culture is always alert to its emergence and therefore it will quickly incorporate the grammar of an emergent culture into cultural dialogue. Williams considers a 'residual culture [to be] usually at some distance from the effective dominant culture, but one has to recognize that, in real cultural activities, it may get incorporated into it'.[87] It is Williams's concept of residual culture that particularly concerns Synge's dramatisation of the material conditions of pre-Christian Ireland because the residual culture contains 'experiences, meanings and values, which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture'.[88] However, a dominant culture cannot afford cultural reliance on a residual culture precisely because it threatens to destabilise the dominant culture's distribution of ideology that orchestrates material conditions. Throughout this dissertation ideology is equated with material conditions because, as Louis Althusser has suggested, ideology is '*material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals*'.[89] The Catholic bourgeoisie, certainly the dominant culture in Synge's Ireland, could not allow the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland to emerge within Catholic modernity because these ostensibly backward beliefs would destabilise the postcolonial sovereignty of state-orientated nationalism. Therefore, material conditions needed to be regulated by Roman orthodoxy so that Catholic ideology succeeded in precluding consciousness. However, Synge's plays are Modernist and he uses Modernism to critique Catholic modernity by offering a Modernist drama of residual culture. The difference, then, between Catholic modernity and cultural Modernism is essential. If a salient trope of cultural Modernism is what Tom Gibbons considers to be 'anti-democratic political views',[90] then Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian cultural residue critiques Catholic modernity and this critique is conducive towards a consideration of the discrepancy between

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[85] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn and ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), 254.
[86] Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980), 41.
[87] Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, 41.
[88] Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, 40.
[89] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971), 158. Emphasis in original.
[90] Tom Gibbons, "Modernism and Reactionary Politics," *Journal of Modern Literature* 3, no. 5 (1973): 1150.

religious and political ideologies. Catholic modernity in this dissertation is an index for the efficacy of bourgeois symbolic capital that holds its genesis in the Enlightenment. Antithetical to tradition, modernity is understood to corrode hierarchical social structures through the secularisation of power and ideology that articulates the rationality of capitalist logic. However, as this dissertation will point out, political power and rationality were inextricably caught up within the Catholic Church in Synge's Ireland and therefore Irish modernity did not privilege secularisation. And so while Modernist cultural discourse in Synge's Europe was preoccupied with the secularisation hypothesis that suggested modernity was conducive towards the decline of religion, this was not the case in Ireland; Max Weber argued that while belief in the supernatural persisted in 'precisely the irrational element', it was, nevertheless, 'one of the most characteristic elements of our capitalistic culture'.[91] The Catholic Church attempted to naturalise the modern Irish subject into adopting a recalcitrant attitude towards pre-Christian sensibilities by providing access to power and ideology that was concomitant with capitalism. But not all members of the populace were enticed by the logic of capitalism.

Williams contends that a dominant culture will always attempt to incorporate aspects of the residue into cultural activity because the dominant culture cannot afford the residue as deviant praxis to articulate cultural discourse. As Terry Eagleton points out, Modernist aesthetics 'springs from the estranging impact of modernizing forces on a still deeply traditionalist order, in a politically unstable context which opens up social hope as well as spiritual anxiety'.[92] Synge's plays are Modernist because he is fundamentally concerned with the Catholic Church's hegemony on historical time that regulated pre-Christian beliefs as backward and pre-political. The plays negotiate secular modernity precisely because secular modernity simply did not exist in Synge's Ireland and his plays seek to privilege pre-Christian residual belief within an alternative temporality of modernity. And so if Modernism necessitates that '[t]raditional culture provides [it] with an adversary, but also lends it some of the terms in which to inflect itself',[93] then, for Synge, Modernism necessitated the alternative articulation of residual culture so that Catholic modernity could be renegotiated. Synge is able to succeed in doing this because his Modernist dramaturgy is predicated upon the efficacy of metaphysics and comparative social science, which ultimately ensure that his 'anti-democratic political views'[94] were realised in his plays.

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[91] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2001), 38.
[92] Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), 297.
[93] Eagleton, *Heathcliff*, 297.
[94] Gibbons, "Modernism and Reactionary Politics," 1150.

Synge's dramatisation of the cultural vestiges and traces of pre-Christian Ireland bears witness to discourses on primitivism. In May 1898, on his first sojourn to Aran, where 'life is perhaps the most primitive that is left in Europe',[95] Synge felt 'a moment of exquisite satisfaction to find [himself] moving away from civilisation in [a] rude canvas canoe of a model that served primitive races since men first went on the sea'.[96] As a discourse mobilised in his dramaturgy, primitivism often falls prey to tendencies of Romanticism as tramps like Christy Mahon in *The Playboy of the Western World* entice the female bourgeois into a lifestyle where Christy can be found 'romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgement day'.[97] However, Modernism tempers Romanticism in Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian cultural residue as the dramatist creates a synergy of chronological and cultural primitivism. If chronological primitivism is 'a kind of philosophy of history',[98] and cultural primitivism is 'the discontent of the civilised with civilisation or with some conspicuous and characteristic feature of it',[99] then Synge's synergy of primitivism foregrounds pre-Christian residual culture as a material condition of the religious and political subject. Thus, Synge's primitivism is Modernist because, as Sinéad Garrigan Mattar suggests:

> What is idealized is not what is most pure, noble and innately mannered, but what is most brutal, sexual, and contrary. Exploration of the subconscious of both the individual and society may show that these currents permeate civilization at some profound and inescapable level (and therefore are also implicitly 'same'), but the primitive is conceived as alien to the civilized mind defining it, and therefore as being potentially threatening and profoundly enabling [...] [and] the modernist writer moves towards this counter-image through the lens of comparative science.[100]

The employment of comparative social science allowed Synge to dramatise 'a life that has never found expression'[101] without succumbing to Romantic impulse. Synge first engaged with the efficacy of comparative social science in Paris in 1897 when he began studying Celtology with le Braz.[102] The following year (1898) he continued his studies with de Jubainville[103] who taught Synge, as his notebook records, to look for 'modern traces of old

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[95] *CW,* vol. 2: 53.
[96] *CW,* vol. 2: 57.
[97] *CW,* vol. 4: 173.
[98] Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 1.
[99] Lovejoy, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, 7.
[100] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival,* 4.
[101] W.B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 299.
[102] Synge's biographers maintain that Synge first began studying with le Braz in April 1897 (David H. Greene and Edward M. Stephens, *J.M. Synge: 1871-1909* [New York: Macmillan, 1959], 64). And McCormack, *Fool of the Family*, 146. But there is no evidence in Synge's diary to suggest this. If we are to believe Synge's diary then he began studying with le Braz on 3 February, 1898 (TCD MS: 4419, f.11v).
[103] Synge began studying with de Jubainville on 18 March, 1898. See, TCD MS: 4419, f.32v.

Celtic'.[104] In that same year Synge turned his attention towards comparative anthropology in the pioneering work of James Frazer[105] and comparative sociology in the work of Herbert Spencer.[106] These four scholars had a direct impact on Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian cultural residue and of particular importance was Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. Frazer may have been an armchair anthropologist in that he sat in his study at the University of Cambridge (Trinity College) and scoured the world for evidence of the evolution of primitive custom and belief but still, *The Golden Bough* was a book that could 'be used with deadly effect against Christianity'.[107] For its time, *The Golden Bough* was 'neither a safe nor proper book'[108] as a Senior Librarian at the National Library of Ireland would tell an inquisitive Sean O'Casey in years to come. Frazer used comparative anthropology to shed light on one of the most tabooed of all Victorian subjects: primitive religion. Taboos were the palisades of Irish Victorian cultural rectitude and Frazer's polemical text on the 'resemblance of the savage customs and ideas to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity'[109] attracted Synge's interest just days after he first returned from the Aran Islands in September 1898. Sitting alone in the National Library of Ireland, Synge read Frazer's work and he recorded what he considered to be the 'marks of primitive religion',[110] which obeyed four principles:

1) No priests proper
2) No temples
3) Spirits not gods are recognised. Names general not proper.
4) The rites are magical rather than propitiatory[111]

These four principles are an essential tenet when discussing Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian cultural residue and they are frequently invoked in this dissertation. An understanding of comparative social science allowed Synge to use comparative anthropology and evolutionary theory in order to understand the precise schematics of residual pre-Christian belief. Synge was fascinated by comparative social science; 'Synge had certainly the scientific mind', said MacKenna, and 'he had a contempt for those who despised it. He had no patience with poets who ignored matters of knowledge'.[112] Synge's dramaturgy warrants Modernist primitivism because, as Garrigan Mattar suggests, unlike

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[104] TCD MS: 4378, f.54r.
[105] Synge began reading Frazer's work on 12 September, 1898. His diary records: 'Library. The Golden Bough. Frazer' (TCD: MS 4419, f.94r).
[106] Synge first began reading Spencer's work on 7 September, 1895. His diary records: 'To Dublin. Herbert Spencer's First Principles' (TCD MS 4416, f.118r). Three weeks later he was still reading Spencer's *Principles of Psychology* (TCD: MS 4416, f.143r).
[107] E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 15.
[108] Robert Fraser, "Introduction," in James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), ix.
[109] James George Frazer, quoted in Robert Fraser, "Introduction," in *The Golden Bough*, xx.
[110] TCD MS: 4378, f.55r.
[111] TCD MS: 4378, f.55r.
[112] MacKenna, NLI MS: 13,276, f.3.

W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory's Romantic vision of the Celtic Twilight, 'he did not have to use "Frazer *contra* Frazer" to make Frazer *pro* Synge'.[113] As this thesis will demonstrate, in Synge's hands comparative social science had considerable punitive efficacy and ultimately it could be used – for better or for worse – to interrogate how Catholic modernity belied the discrepancy between religion and politics.

Synge's Modernist dramaturgy would also draw considerable strength from his knowledge of metaphysics, particularly the work of Arthur Schopenhauer.[114] While Schopenhauer's philosophy is in a dialogue with German idealism – the diametric opposite to Modernism – Schopenhauer was, in fact, anything but idealist.[115] Schopenhauer may have picked up where Immanuel Kant left off, in that he was concerned with the relationship between the noumenal and the phenomenal, but Schopenhauer postulated the very real possibility of experiencing the noumenal within phenomenal existence as intense suffering and, therefore, his philosophy espouses a distinct form of idealism. Furthermore, Synge's appropriation of Schopenhauer's philosophy necessitates Modernism because he would apply it in order to understand how the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland was a materialism that had the potential to collide and collude against the habitations of Catholic modernity.

Kant argued that reality, as we know it, certainly exists but there is another reality (not another world) that exists independently of our mental capacities. Kant's philosophical achievement, then, was to distinguish between the phenomenal and the noumenal world. According to Kant the phenomenal is all we can ever know because we are forced to apprehend reality through our physical and mental capacities because phenomena 'cannot exist in themselves, but only in us. What may be the nature of objects considered as things in themselves is quite unknown to us. We know nothing more than our own mode of perceiving them, which is peculiar to us, and which, though not of necessity pertaining to every being, does so to human beings.'[116] For Kant, no epistemological object can independently exist because it demands the rarefaction of human thought to be brought into existence. The question pertains towards the supposed reality of realism because Kant proposed the existence of a noumenal reality within this phenomenal reality where material objects exist independently, without human experience. The noumenal, then, is 'a thing which must be thought not as an object of sense, but as a thing in itself (solely through the pure understanding), [it] is not self-contradictory, for we are not entitled to maintain that

[113] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 131.
[114] Synge first read Schopenhauer on 6 April, 1893. See, TCD MS: 4414, f.49v.
[115] See, Dale E. Snow and James J. Snow, "Was Schopenhauer an Idealist?," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29, no. 4 (1991), 633.
[116] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Alexander Meiklejohn and ed. Vasilis Politis (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), 61.

sensibility is the only possible mode of intuition'.[117] However, it is impossible to appreciate this reality because to experience the noumenal within the phenomenal would entertain, for Kant, a philosophical contradiction; the noumenal would cease to exist because it would become phenomenal. Thus, according to Kant, our ability to contemplate reality is fundamentally limited. It is this fundamental limitation that concerned Schopenhauer.

Like Kant, Schopenhauer advocated that the material world of sensory data has two temporalities: phenomenal representation (the ways in which things appear) and noumenal existence (the world beyond mere appearance that humans find hard to contemplate). The world as it is represented to us always seems orderly because to experience the phenomenal world the subject always has to juxtapose representation (*vorstellung*) against *a posteriori* suppositions; that which exists cannot exist without a reason (*grund*). However, Schopenhauer questioned this by identifying noumenal existence as *wille* (will). *Wille* is Schopenhauer's version of Kant's thing in itself, that is to say, it is a substratum of metaphysics that cannot be understood nor perceived by the average form of consciousness and it is characterised by human desire, striving and wanting; the more we exercise *wille*, the more we suffer. By way of analogy, Schopenhauer's understanding of *wille* is akin to the Christian belief that the soul is the essence of the human body; it cannot be seen, it cannot be touched, but as far as Christians are concerned, the soul is believed to exist.

Schopenhauer advocated that the noumenal as *wille* is an utterly depressing force that is hardwired into our material being; we constantly attempt to improve our existence even though it is only conducive towards suffering. *Wille* is a blind process that governs our phenomenal existence but it is not that *wille* can be identified by any self-admittance of selfishness, greed or desire because for Schopenhauer this is what *wille* wants us to believe. This is why Schopenhauer opens his first volume of *The World as Will and Representation* by postulating that '[t]he world is my representation: this is a truth valid with reference to every living and knowing being'.[118] But he is quick to qualify this supposition by suggesting that if the noumenal is understood then the world is no longer a representation of phenomenal existence but rather, 'the world is my will.'[119] In this way, the only way to transcend *wille* is to ascend to a higher form of consciousness (Schopenhauer was strongly influenced by Hinduism and Buddhist teaching), but to actually succeed in doing this is quite rare. It is important to point out that *wille* in itself is not a form of consciousness because we can never know it, we can only glimpse it through the experience of it. Perhaps

[117] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 213.
[118] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 3.
[119] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1: 4.

more importantly, *wille* is found in music and Nature,[120] which have no innate consciousness. To get to a state of mind where we can understand *wille* would involve the complete and utter rejection of sufficient reason because then, and only then, existence would cease to be a manifestation of *wille* and become a manifestation of the Idea and so, as Schopenhauer suggests, 'the person who is involved in this perception is no longer an individual, for in such perception the individual has lost himself; he is *pure* will-less, painless, timeless *subject of knowledge*'.[121] As far as Schopenhauer was concerned, to transcend *wille* was to become a pure subject of knowledge that understands the Idea of all existence because 'the subject has passed out of all relation to the will, what is thus known is no longer the individual thing as such, but the *Idea*, the eternal form, the immediate objectivity of the will'.[122] Ideas, for Schopenhauer, do not depend on the mind for existence because they are the consummation of the noumenal; they exist in and of themselves. If we recall that Kant postulated the existence of epistemological objects beyond human experience then, for Schopenhauer, both *wille* and the Idea are those epistemological objects and it was inconceivable to experience the Idea without transcending the objectivity of *wille*. For Schopenhauer, the most expedient way to transcend *wille* is to contemplate music and Nature, the consummation of the Idea. These two entities were always at the forefront of Synge's mind; as a young man if Synge was not working himself 'into a sort of mystical ecstasy with music',[123] he could be found relishing 'the beauty of nature as a particular quality – an expression of divine ecstasy'.[124]

Ostensibly, Synge drew two conclusions from Schopenhauer's philosophy of *wille*. The first is that he aligned *wille* with those qualities that he keenly associated with the Catholic, bourgeois 'groggy-patriot-publican-general-shop-man who is married to the priest's half-sister and is second cousin once-removed from the dispensary doctor':[125] desire, striving and wanting. But he also appropriated Schopenhauer's understanding that the noumenal could be identified within the phenomenal, that is to say, the possibility that a pure subject of knowledge can use Nature or music to transcend *wille* and enter into a pure realm of Ideas. Therefore, Synge's understanding of *wille* allowed the dramatist to understand that this world as it is represented is a consummation of suffering but it could be negotiated by Nature and music. After reading Schopenhauer, Synge concluded in his notebook that 'drama' was, quite simply, 'ideas with form'[126] and this dissertation will suggest that, for Synge, the Natural landscape and music are Schopenhauer's Ideas

[120] Throughout this dissertation the geography and topography of the Natural landscape and the Natural order, as opposed to the nature of humans, is demarked by the use of a capital 'N'.
[121] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1: 179. Emphasis in original.
[122] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1: 179. Emphasis in original.
[123] *CW*, vol. 2: 12.
[124] *CW*, vol. 2: 13.
[125] *CW*, vol. 2: 283n.
[126] TCD MS: 4349, f.20v.

manifested in dramatic form. Thus, Nature and music, so essential to Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian residual culture, have the potential to transcend the suffering of Catholic, bourgeois existence.

Schopenhauer also invoked *wille* as he critically reflected on magical ritual. Schopenhauer consistently defended magic against being 'associated with the principle of evil and as opposed to all virtue and holiness' because magic is simply 'based on the metaphysical unit of the will [...] in order to make one's own individual will effective beyond its natural limits'.[127] As far as Schopenhauer was concerned, the efficacy of magic, so essential to pre-Christian residual culture, was solely dependent upon the ability of the pure subject of knowledge to transcend *wille* and therefore acquire the knowledge of how it operates within phenomenal existence. Schopenhauer advocated that if this were achieved then the pure subject of knowledge would have the requisite Idea to control the *wille* of other objects be they animate or inanimate. For Schopenhauer, the essence of pre-Christian magical ritual is the ability to transcend *wille* in order to manipulate it. Therefore, what Synge took from Schopenhauer's postulation of *wille* was that it was only conducive towards suffering, unless Nature or music were contemplated and, if this were the case, then the pure subject of knowledge would grasp the Idea of phenomenal existence and, accordingly, he/she would be able to make divinations, charms, spells and sorcery that summoned the efficacy of Nature and music. In this way, for Synge, those that understood the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland were far from savage or heathen but consummate masters of the Idea and, in fact, it was those with 'a rampant, double-chinned vulgarity'[128] that were predisposed to ignorance of the Idea and the morbid fascination with self-laceration that *wille* invites.

The dialectic between comparative social science and Schopenhauer's metaphysics is evidenced in two of the three chapters (Chapter One and Chapter Two) in this dissertation. The synthesis of this dialectic – the scientific understanding of how pre-Christian sensibilities such as magical ritual are predicated upon the acceptance of the Idea and the transcendence of *wille* – allowed Synge to understand how the cultural schematics of pre-Christian Ireland opposed Catholic bourgeois modernity. By degrees, this dialectic that predicates his Modernist dramaturgy ensures that his plays are insurgent towards Catholic modernity because all of a sudden, pre-Christian residual culture does not Romantically emerge as the consummation of primitivism but as a subterranean culture that is not backward, nor pre-political, but with an ability to intervene within the very foundation of Catholic modernity: progressive historicism. It is true that historicism 'emerges in

[127] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Manuscript Remains in Four Volumes*, vol. 4, *The Manuscript Books of 1830-1852 and Last Manuscripts*, trans. E.F.J. Payne and ed. Arthur Hübscher and (Oxford: Berg, 1990), 182.
[128] *CW*, vol. 2: 283n.

reaction to the practice of deducing from first principles truths about how people are obliged to organize themselves socially and politically',[129] but the fundamental premise of Catholic progressive historicism, as this dissertation suggests, is its progressivism. As Catholic historicism moved forward it left culturally disjunctive narratives – such as pre-Christian cultural residue – to rot as the detritus of cultural history, precisely because these narratives failed to harmonise with the Church's version of events. This dissertation suggests that the only way to apprehend the progressivism of Catholic historicism is, as Friedrich Nietzsche suggested, to create monumental history, because it 'is the cloak under which [the] hatred of power and greatness masquerades as an extreme admiration of the past' so that 'the dead bury the-living .'[130]

If, as Walter Benjamin argues, historicism 'rightly culminates in universal history'[131] then Synge's plays identify those subterranean pasts that have been defeated in the name of progress so that history 'involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well.'[132] A positive identification of the discontents of historical time is conducive towards what Benjamin considers to be 'a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past'.[133] Synge's plays foreground the ideological aspects of past events that Catholic historicism had forgotten so that a unique experience with history can be afforded. If progressive historicism has an experience of the past then Synge's engagement with pre-Christian praxes has an experience with the past and, in doing so, the pre-Christian past in Synge's drama ceases to be a cognitive artefact of the historical narrative because it exists problematically within the present. The past becomes a participant (rather than an object) of historical experience in Synge's plays by a means of performance that is not Hegelian in its synthesis of reconciliation, but rather a shock (*verfremdung*) that ensures that neither the past nor the present can be contained in a coherent experience as modernity is pluralised. The provenance of this fracture of history is Marxist in its grammar. For Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, history cannot be singular precisely because it is a collection of past struggles that include issues of class discrepancy that emanate from capitalist material conditions that ultimately produce ideological domination. However, to simply suggest that a change in the economic base necessitates the alteration of the cultural superstructure is far too deterministic. Analysis of Irish pre-Christian sensibility in Synge's plays, then, deviates from a historical materialist reading of the relationship to the base and superstructure because it considers economics and culture in a dialectical manner.

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[129] Paul Hamilton, *Historicism* (London: Routledge, 2002), 2.
[130] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, trans. Adrian Collins (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), 17.
[131] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 254.
[132] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 254.
[133] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 254.

'A Radical'[134]

In October 1896, Synge's mother wrote a despairing letter to Samuel Synge, lamenting how 'poor Johnnie' had 'gone back to Paris to study socialism, [because] he wants to do good, and for that possibility he is giving up everything.'[135] In 1895 Synge had attended two lectures in Paris by the anarchist Sébastien Faure and now, returning to Paris, Synge was determined to tackle Marx and Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*, all the while telling his mother that he was 'not selfish or egotistical but quite the reverse.'[136] Mrs. Synge, however, was of a different persuasion: 'In fact he writes the most utter folly – I was very unhappy all that evening and grieved greatly for him'.[137] In 1895 Synge may have found Faure's lectures '*très interessant, mais fou* (very interesting, but crazy)'[138] but now he had returned to Paris to be in an environment that was conducive towards a consideration of socialism as a schema of historical materialism.[139]

In *The Communist Manifesto* Synge would have read how certain modes of production naturalise human consciousness in relation to their material conditions.[140] Synge would have understood that this process can be evidenced throughout history through class struggle, as Marx and Engels suggested:

> The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes. [...] The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.[141]

Advocating the disestablishment of capitalism as the bourgeois mode of production, the socialism that Synge studied in Paris was predicated upon the abolishment of class conflict and the simplification of economic base and cultural superstructure. The abolition of class

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[134] TCD SSMS: 6193, f.1663.
[135] TCD SSMS 6221, ff.5-6. Mrs. K. Synge to Samuel Synge, 8 November, 1896. For Synge's arrival in Paris see, TCD MS: 4417, f.2v.
[136] TCD SSMS: 6221, f.6.
[137] TCD SSMS: 6221, f.6.
[138] Synge attended Faure's lecture on 15 June, 1895. See, TCD MS: 4416, f.77r.
[139] Synge also read other socialist authors such as Anatole Baju's, *Principes du Socialisme* (Synge read this on 30 October, 1896. TCD MS: 4417, f.39v) and Gabriel Pierre Deville's, *L'Etat et le Socialisme* (Synge read this on 5 December, 1896. TCD MS: 4417, f.44v).
[140] For Synge's notes on Marx see, TCD: MS: 4379, ff.68r-67v. Interchanging between German and English, his notes demonstrate that he understood Marxist rubrics: '[t]he product changes from being the simple work of one to be the social work of many' (TCD MS: 4379, f.67r).
[141] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6, trans. Jack Cohen (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), 484-85.

conflict would ultimately bring the end of history because, as Marx and Engels suggested, the 'bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instrument of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society.'[142]

W.B. Yeats, however, was of the opinion that Synge was 'unfitted to think a political thought'[143] and he wasn't the only one who thought this. Shortly after Synge's untimely death, Poet Laureate John Masefield would recall that Synge:

> never played any part in politics: politics did not interest him. He was the only Irishman I have ever met who cared nothing for the political or religious issue [...] his mind was untroubled [...] He would have watched a political or religious riot with gravity, with pleasure in the spectacle, and malice for the folly.[144]

Synge's first biographer, Maurice Bourgeois, would substantiate Masefield's recollection: 'Synge was a man of practically no opinions in an opinion-ridden country. Had he taken an interest in politics, it would have been the interest of the man who watches a dispute for the fun of the thing'.[145] There is negligence in these comments and one need look no further than the letters of John Quinn who, just like Masefield, orbited the periphery of Synge's life: 'Synge was a keen observer of political conditions, although he never talked politics.'[146] Synge was known to be reticent on most topics, choosing to never comment directly on even his closest colleagues' work.[147] Even Masefield commented on Synge's placid attitude at dinner parties as the dramatist 'sat smoking, pushed back a little from the circle, gravely watching [...] Sometimes I heard his deep, grave voice assenting 'Ye-es, ye-es,' with meditative boredom.'[148] Furthermore, MacKenna advocated that he would 'die for the theory' that Synge was intensely political 'but one thing kept him quiet – he hated publicity, cooperation and lies. [...] The lying that gathered round the political movement seemed to him to soil it utterly, and all that had part in it'.[149] By his own admission, Synge was unable to 'believe in trying to entice people by a sort of political atmosphere that has nothing to do with our real dramatic movement'.[150] So while Synge would stop short of the social anarchism that Faure invited by excusing himself from Maud Gonne's *L'Association Irlandaise* (Irish League) in April 1897 by maintaining that his 'theory of regeneration for

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[142] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6, 487.
[143] Yeats, *Explorations*, 319.
[144] John Masefield, *John M. Synge: A Few Personal Recollections, with Biographical Notes* (Dublin: Cuala, 1971), 6.
[145] Bourgeois, *John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre*, 87.
[146] NYPL MS: 2513. John Quinn to F.J. Gree, 1 April, 1909.
[147] Yeats admitted: 'I never knew if he cared for a work of mine, and do not remember that I had from him even a conventional compliment, and yet he had the most perfect modesty and simplicity in daily intercourse.' See, Yeats, *Explorations*, 330.
[148] Masefield, *John M. Synge*, 3.
[149] Stephen MacKenna, "Synge," *Irish Statesman*, 3 November, 1928, 171.
[150] *CL*, vol. 1: 81-82. J.M. Synge to F.J. Fay, 10 April, 1904.

Ireland differs from [hers]',[151] he was certainly proud to be 'a radical', which he defined as a 'person who wants change root and branch'.[152] Synge's socialism, then, had to take a direction other than what he considered to be Gonne's 'plotting over tea-cups and cakes'[153] and it would be channelled into aesthetics.

In Paris, Synge wrote to his mother and advocated that 'Ireland will come to her own when socialist ideas spread in England'.[154] Synge was encouraged to believe that socialism would spread in England as agitation for Home Rule became heightened in parliamentary politics between 1885 and 1887. One of the principle proponents for Home Rule was William Morris's Marxist Socialist League and Synge had read Morris's work in 1897.[155] An artist by trade and a socialist in sentiment, Morris advocated socialist discourse in relation to aesthetics:

> I can well understand this state of things being a cause of gratulation [sic] amongst those who do not know that the hope of art really is, and how closely it is bound up with the general condition of society, and especially with the lives of those who live by manual labour and whom we call the working classes [...] My reason for this hope for art is founded on what I feel quite sure is a truth, and an important one, namely that all art, even the highest, is influenced by the conditions of labour of the mass of mankind, and that any pretensions which may be made for even the highest intellectual art to be independent of these general conditions are futile and vain; that is to say, that any art which professes to be founded on the special education or refinement of a limited body or class must of necessity be unreal and short-lived. ART IS MAN'S EXPRESSION OF HIS JOY IN LABOUR.[156]

If Yeats maintained that the plays of the Irish Literary Theatre should be performed 'in a theatre for ourselves and our friends, and for a few simple people who understand from sheer simplicity what we understand from scholarship and thought,'[157] then Synge, right from the start of his career, had set his face against Yeats's understanding of a theatre because Morris would have encouraged Synge into a reconsideration of class allegiance and alliance. This reconsideration would ultimately bring about an anarchism that would

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[151] *CL,* vol. 1: 47. J.M. Synge to Maud Gonne, 6 April, 1897. In privacy to Stephen MacKenna the dramatist admitted that 'he resented that Mdme Gonne should sometimes exaggerate the sufferings of Ireland before an audience of Frenchmen[.] '"What," he said, "must they think of us as a race if they think we submit quietly to such treatment and are too cowardly to rebel"' (MacKenna, NLI MS: 13,276, f.14).

[152] TCD SSMS: 6193, f.1663.

[153] MacKenna, NLI MS: 13,276, f.14

[154] J.M. Synge, quoted in *J.M. Synge: 1871-1909*, ed. David H. Greene and Edward M. Stephens (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 63.

[155] Synge first read Morris's work on 17 April, 1897 (TCD MS: 4418, f.28r). For Synge's notes on Morris see, TCD MS: 4379, f.65r.

[156] William Morris, *William Morris on Art and Socialism*, ed. Norman Kelvin (New York: Dover, 1999), 108, 114. Emphasis in original.

[157] W.B. Yeats, "The Theatre," *Beltaine: The Organ of the Irish Literary Theatre: An Occasional Publication*, vol. 2-3, *1899-1900* (London: At the Sign of the Unicorn, 1970), 20.

destabilise capitalist foundations and, significantly, the anarchistic process could be conducted through the integrity of artistic practice.

However, Synge's socialism is pseudo-Marxist in its political teleology because while it did not attempt to overthrow capitalism it still problematised the bourgeois mode of cultural production through a staging of a pre-Christian cultural residue that was considered to be pre-political and pre-modern. Murphy, then, is correct to point out that 'Synge's dramatization of peasant life simply does not reflect the socialism he had evidently read about'[158] because Synge's drama is not in a dialogue with the material conception of history that he had read. That is not to say that Synge was unaware of the influence of capitalist modernity in Ireland. To the contrary, he celebrates the 'intelligence and charm' of the Aran islanders because there was the 'absence of any division of labour'.[159] However, Synge's decision to set his face against the alienation of labour does not suggest that he had adopted a recalcitrant attitude towards modernity; it is just that his understanding of modernity is not that articulated by capitalism, but a modernity where pre-modern and pre-capitalist logic is given cultural credence as a discourse that invites the concomitance of the plethora of vestigial beliefs from pre-Christian Ireland. His drama, then, does not attempt to intervene in historical materialism because while his critique of the cultural superstructure implies a critique of the economic base; his drama does not assume that capitalism can be overthrown. However, Synge's plays do presuppose that capitalist modernity can be pluralised by its spectral double: pre-capitalist modernity.

Synge's plays are problematic for strict Marxist socialism because of the appellations of pre-capitalist, pre-modern and pre-political that characterised patterns of pre-Christian belief; for Marx and Engels there was no place for the pre-modern within a revolutionary temporality of modernity. Marxist historians like Eric Hobsbawm have advocated that peasant rebellions that invoke superstitious beliefs can only ever be primitive because the consciousness of the peasantry fails to display the requisite logic of modernity; according to Hobsbawm, nineteenth-century rebels were just 'pre-political people who have not yet found, or only begun to find, specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world.'[160] Synge's engagement with patterns of pre-Christian residual belief within the temporality of capitalist modernity provides an alternative ideological account of the modern Irish political subject. The traditional political subject, as Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests, 'is often justified as a story of human sovereignty acted out in the context of a

[158] Murphy, *Hegemony and Fantasy in Irish Drama,* 39.
[159] *CW,* vol. 2: 132.
[160] E.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), 2.

ceaseless unfolding of unitary historical time.'[161] The recalcitrance of material conditions towards the homogeneity of Catholic progressive historicism that Synge identified within pre-Christian residual culture negates the supposition that the modern subject that adhered to pre-Christian sensibility was backward or pre-political. In reception, Synge's plays may have been conditioned by dominant specularity but contestation for dominance necessarily engages within the realm of the political. His drama, then, is akin to Jacques Rancière's dialectic of politics as aesthetics: 'Politics is aesthetics in that it makes visible what had been excluded from a perceptual field, and in that it makes audible what used to be inaudible.'[162] According to Rancière, all literature is political in that it challenges 'the distribution of the sensible'.[163] When the sensible is challenged, political discourse can begin because 'those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account'.[164]

'Your uncle', wrote Samuel Synge to his daughter (Edith), 'did not care to read books of history, but preferred to read the original letters or records if possible', and when asked about historical narrative 'he replied that [it] was probably wrong'.[165] However, according to Yeats, a 'dramatist is not a historian'[166] and Synge's biographer, W.J. McCormack, also advocates that 'Synge never evolved, nor was he possessed by, a philosophy of history'.[167] A cultural materialist reading of Synge's drama, however, refutes this hypothesis because it considers the material realities of pre-Christian residual culture within the Catholic present as an articulation of the discontents of Irish historical time that necessarily rearticulates the agency of the political and religious subject. Cultural materialism is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between literature and history and how this relationship functionally constitutes and is constituted by material (and therefore ideological) conditions. In this way, as Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield have suggested, cultural materialism 'insists that culture does not (cannot) transcend the material forces and relations of production. Culture is not simply a reflection of the economic and political system, but nor can it be independent of it'.[168] The premise of cultural materialism, then, is to place the theatrical text (both as literature and performance) within a material

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[161] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 15.
[162] Jacques Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, trans. Andrew Parker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 226.
[163] Jacques Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2006), 15.
[164] Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 27.
[165] Samuel Synge, *Letters to My Daughter: Memoires of John Millington Synge* (Dublin: Talbot, 1933), 121. Samuel Synge to Edith Synge, 3 October, 1922.
[166] W.B. Yeats, quoted in "Abbey Theatre Scenes," *Freeman's Journal*, 30 January, 1907, 7.
[167] McCormack, *Fool of the Family*, 93.
[168] Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, "Foreword," in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), viii.

context. That is to say, within a socio-political and historical context in order to demonstrate how cultural texts are irreducibly subject to dominant ideology, but also to demonstrate how cultural texts are able to intervene within this ideological dominance. The critique is materialist, precisely because its concern is with how the text reconsiders and reimages social, political and historical discourses and this is why Williams argues that cultural materialism 'is the analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, within the actual means and conditions of their production.'[169] Cultural materialism has been dubbed the discourse of the hysteric because it asks pertinent questions with respect to the agency of the political subject.[170] As Slavoj Žižek suggests, '*hysteria/history* is more than a trivial word game – hysteria is the subject's way of resisting the prevailing, historically specified form of interpellation of symbolic identification'.[171] Synge's dramatisation of the residue of pre-Christian Ireland privileges the religious and political agency of the Irish subject by articulating the hysteria of a cultural discourse (to appropriate Žižek's methodology) that was beyond the purview of Catholic progressive historicism. Religion, politics and the legitimacy of cultural/historical discourse constantly collide and collude throughout Synge's plays and, as Pierre Bourdieu reminds us, the 'theory of knowledge is a dimension of political theory because the specifically symbolic power to impose the principles of the construction of reality – in particular, social reality – is a major dimension of political power.'[172]

If, as Marvin Carlson has suggested, the theatre must always be considered as 'the repository of cultural memory'[173] and, by means of performance, cultural memory is perennially reconsidered, then the performance of cultural memory necessitates the privileging of the agency of the religious and political subject because it contests ideology and power as it proceeds to radicalise cultural memory's politics of truth. The politics of truth were never far from Synge's mind, and in his essay entitled "Historical or Peasant Drama," he argued:

> The moment the sense of historical truth awoke in Europe, historical fiction became impossible. For a time it seemed otherwise. Antiquarian writers, fools now exploded [...] Hence Hist. Fiction insincere. It is possible to use a national tradition a century or more old which is still alive in the soul of the people [...] It is impossible to use a legend [such] as Faust which from

[169] Raymond Williams, *Writing in Society* (London: Verso, 1984), 210.
[170] Scott Wilson, *Cultural Materialism: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 122.
[171] Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), 101.
[172] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 165.
[173] Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 2.

> the outset defies historical reality – in the making of an absolutely modern work.[174]

A cultural materialist reading of Synge's plays, then, asks that Synge's texts are read as participants (rather than passive objects) in ideology; as John Brannigan argues, the cultural materialist critic understands that 'no cultural artefact of practise is outside this political sphere'.[175] The impetus of cultural materialism is always towards a subversion of the processes of cultural domination. However, as Dollimore maintains, the subversive act 'cannot be guaranteed a priori, independent of articulation, context and reception'.[176] To presuppose that Synge's negotiation of a pre-modern cultural discourse is subversive simply because his plays were controversial, is in effect to impute Synge's authorial intention and to offer a naively homogenous reading of Synge's audience. It is true that Synge considered himself 'a radical'[177] but his own consciousness is a product of the material conditions of the very culture to which the act of subversion is implied. Ultimately, the question of whether Synge's plays were subversive in their intent is secondary to the question of whether or not they were subversive in effect. This dissertation will suggest that Synge's treatment of pre-Christian sensibilities conflates intent and effect as it proceeds to problematise the religious and political agency of the Irish subject.

'A Great Variety of Morbid Symptoms'[178]

Cultural materialism identifies subversion in the emergence of those residual cultural activities that cannot be incorporated within dominant cultural discourse. And in order to demonstrate how residual culture is subject to a process of inclusion and exclusion, it is necessary to turn towards Antonio Gramsci's understanding of the hegemonic process in order to realise the efficacy of William's understanding of residual culture. If Marx and Engels advocated that the 'ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, the dominant material relations grasped as ideas',[179] then Gramsci used the notion of hegemony to understand the 'historical unity of the ruling classes' in Italy by pointing out that 'it would be wrong to think that this unity is simply juridical and political.'[180] The ruling classes did not simply establish power through coercive force but through the promotion of their common sense (*senso commune*: specific

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[174] TCD MS: 4396, ff.61r-60r.
[175] John Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 12.
[176] Jonathan Dollimore, "Introduction: Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism and the New Historicism," in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, 13.
[177] TCD SSMS: 6193, f.1663.
[178] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. and ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 276.
[179] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5, trans. Clemens Dutt, W. Lough and C.P. Magill (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), 59.
[180] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 52.

ideologies, values and belief systems). However, hegemony is not synonymous with total domination. Rather, the hegemonic process involves a deep saturation of the ideology of the ruling class into the consciousness of the nation under the auspices of fair exchange and this process is covertly conducive to homogenous dominance. The distribution of common sense promotes political and cultural hegemony but significantly, while hegemony acts in a dialectical manner it still maintains control over subordinate classes so that, as Gramsci suggests, the marginalised and oppressed 'are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up'.[181]

Specifically privileging the peasant's consciousness, Gramsci advocated that peasant formations should be studied not from desires driven by antiquarianism or sentimentality but from an acceptance that the peasantry were the fulcrum upon which the ruling classes balanced their hegemony. With respect to peasant consciousness, then, Gramsci understood that it was a mix between official and unofficial beliefs and, therefore, peasant consciousness was not 'something negligible and inert within the movement of history'.[182] Turning his attention to Italian peasant religion, Gramsci suggested that while it was 'crassly materialistic' and 'pagan', it was a 'specific way of rationalising the world and real life'.[183] And so, with respect to Popular Catholicism he concluded that:

> Every religion, even Catholicism (indeed Catholicism more than any, precisely because of its efforts to retain a "surface" unity and avoid splintering into national churches and social stratifications), is in reality a multiplicity of distinct and often contradictory religions: there is one Catholicism for the peasants, one for the *petits-bourgeois* and town workers, one for women, and for intellectuals is itself variegated and disconnected.[184]

Popular Catholicism is a consummate example of the hegemonic process and, significantly, it is able to achieve hegemony with respect to pre-Christian residual culture because of what Williams considers to be the significance of hegemonic dialogue – selective tradition:

> an effective dominant culture, is always passed off as '*the* tradition', '*the* significant past'. But always the selectivity is the point; the way in which from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis, certain other meanings and practices are neglected and excluded. Even more crucially, some of these meanings and practices are reinterpreted, diluted, or put into forms which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture.[185]

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[181] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 55.
[182] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 419.
[183] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 419, 420, 457, 337.
[184] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 420.
[185] Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, 39. Emphasis in original.

The hegemonic process, then, is able to invent tradition and make it seamlessly fit into a dominant culture and even though the culture will necessarily reinvent itself, its traditions will also be reinvented. What complicates the hegemonic process is the emergence of a pre-Christian residual culture that has the power to disrupt the hegemony of Popular Catholicism.

If Marx and Engels believed that the 'production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men' so that it is not 'consciousness that determines life, but the life that determines consciousness',[186] then this would suggest that the modes of production in Synge's Ireland were such that the lives of the populace were functionally constituted by Roman Catholicism. While this was certainly the case, Roman Catholicism acted in a far subtler manner:

> as a system of representations, but in the majority of cases these representations have nothing to do with 'consciousness': they are usually images and occasionally concepts, but it is above all as structures that they impose on the vast majority of men, not via their 'consciousness'. They are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them.[187]

Thus, the Irish populace did not consciously appropriate Roman Catholicism, it was not an ideological discourse that a subject consciously chose after critical reflection but a persuasion that surrounded lived experience as second nature, precisely because, to borrow Louis Althusser's supposition, '[*their*] *ideas are* [*their*] *material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals*'.[188] The Catholic Church in Synge's Ireland operated as an Ideological State Apparatus because it interpellated the ideological persuasion of the subject so that he/she 'behaves in such and such a way, adopts such and such a practical attitude, and, what is more, participates in certain regular practices which are those of the ideological apparatus on which "depend" the ideas which he has in all consciousness freely chosen as a subject'.[189] For Althusser, the Ideological State Apparatus is conducive towards what he considers to be the Priests and Despots theory of ideology that is constituted by a spurious relationship between the State and the exploited classes, in which Priests and Despots,

> 'forged' the Beautiful Lies so that, in the belief that they were obeying God, men would in fact obey the Priest and Despots, who are usually in

[186] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5: 36, 37.
[187] Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1977), 233.
[188] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 158. Emphasis in original.
[189] Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), 41.

> alliance in their imposture, the Priests acting in the interest of the Despots or *vice versa*, according to the political positions of the 'theoreticians'.[190]

However, Althusser's supposition is equally applicable to the material conditions of the Irish peasantry, who looked towards the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland in order to rationalise their immediate reality. For while these members of the populace were Catholic in the normative sense of the word, the turn towards animism, pantheism, folklore, superstition and magical ritual were 'perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects'[191] of communal discourse that acted 'functionally on men via a process that escapes them.'[192] From this perspective, the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland had an ability to substantiate material conditions precisely because the praxis of residual culture necessitated that '*material actions* [were] *inserted into material practices governed by material rituals*'.[193]

More often than not, the material actions of animism, pantheism, folklore, and superstition required the performance of a residual pre-Christian magical ritual. Ritual necessitates performance because it involves the presentation of rehearsed and restored behaviour that is predicated upon a dramaturgy of tradition and custom. Not only do performances of ritual impose an order on lived experience, they also change the state and the status of lived experience. In this way, whenever ritual is referred to in this dissertation it should be understood that ritual is regarded from the perspective of functionalism because residual pre-Christian magical rituals in Synge's drama concern the function of ritual within the lived experience of social and cultural discourse. Monroe W. Strickberger has suggested that the 'development of ritual occurs when magical ceremonies are repeated to help ensure their efficiency.'[194] The magical element of ritualised behaviour in Synge's drama was informed by his reading of Frazer's work. 'Among the ignorant and superstitious classes of modern Europe', Frazer argued, 'the system of sympathetic magic remains everywhere' and those that believed in it were akin to 'the lowest savages surviving in the remotest corners of the world'.[195] For Frazer, sympathetic magic 'plays a large part in most systems of superstition'[196] and its efficacy could be identified in the understanding that 'like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause'.[197] Frazer divided sympathetic magic into two categories: homeopathic magic and contagious magic. Homeopathic magic involves a ritual performance where 'the magician infers that he can produce any effect he desires merely by

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[190] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 153.
[191] Althusser, *For Marx*, 233.
[192] Althusser, *For Marx*, 233.
[193] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 158. Emphasis in original.
[194] Monroe W. Strickberger, "Evolution and Religion," *BioScience* 23, no. 7 (1973): 418.
[195] James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 54.
[196] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 24.
[197] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 26.

imitating it',[198] such as stabbing a voodoo doll with the desire that the person who is representative of the doll will be afflicted. Contagious magic understands that whatever the magician 'does to a material object will affect equally the person with whom the object was once in contact, whether it formed party of his body or not'. A good example of contagious magic would be to burn a lock of hair with the desire that the hair from which it originally came from would subsequently be torched. However, as far as Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian ritualised behaviour is concerned, the rituals in his plays are always homeopathic. Homeopathic magical ritual in Synge's plays, then, is understood to be a social phenomenon that invites a performance that sacralises social structure and communal bonds. Significantly, the performance of magical ritual solidifies residual pre-Christian sensibility because beliefs are the effects of rites, which in turn ensures that the ideology of pre-Christian residual culture precedes the understanding of ideological consciousness.

'Naked Hideousness'[199]

As a young boy, Yeats spent many an afternoon with an old shoemaker who was fed up with Irish literature because it only 'sentimentalized the people'.[200] What the shoemaker longed for was a work that would show up the people 'in their naked hideousness'.[201] With the shoemaker's words in his mind, Yeats concluded that the 'sentimental mind is the bourgeois mind',[202] and Synge's brilliance held its provenance in the fact that the dramatist could eschew sentiment: 'Synge was the rushing up of the buried fire, an explosion of all that had been denied or refused, a furious impartiality, an indifferent turbulent sorrow. Like Burns, his work was to say all the people did not want to have said.'[203] However, in his attempt to dramatise the Irish populace in their naked hideousness, Synge presupposes the complicity between subject and object. Synge, always an interloper amongst the peasantry, proceeded to dramatise specific material conditions of the peasant's cultural history and he brought these aspects into a dialogue with the nation. Such a use of strategic essentialism in a political interest is in accordance with Synge's desire to reconsider the political and religious agency of the Irish subject. There is, of course, a danger in celebrating in an Irish cultural context what Colin Graham classifies as the 'ethics of oppression, which purports to speak for victims' but ultimately renders the Irish peasantry as 'a theoretical site of

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[198] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 26.
[199] W.B. Yeats, "Notes and Opinions," in *Samhain: An Occasional Review*, ed. W.B. Yeats (Dublin: A.H. Bullen and Maunsel, 1905), 6.
[200] Yeats, "Notes and Opinions," 6.
[201] Yeats, "Notes and Opinions," 6.
[202] Yeats, "Notes and Opinions," 6.
[203] W.B. Yeats, *The Death of Synge and other Passages from an Old Diary* (Dublin: Cuala, 1971), 27.

disempowered purity',[204] and Synge's plays certainly speak for those Irish peasants that utilise pre-Christian residual culture. But the peasants also spoke for themselves by practising beliefs that were naturalised into material conditions, which escaped ideological realisation. Synge's alliance with Irish folk culture may smack of a fetishism for disempowered purity but it is also much more than this; it is the dramatist's attempt to give the discontents of Irish cultural history a platform from which it can intervene in official discourse. And the reconsideration of a cultural history from the perspective of the Irish peasant's residual pre-Christian material conditions is indexical of the work of the Subaltern Studies historians.

The Subaltern Studies historians acknowledge that a condition of subalternity was that the Indian subaltern was denied its own political agency and that, significantly, the supernatural could not be written into the archive as a constituent part of peasant rebellion. The task of the Subaltern Studies historians was to identify 'the politics of the people'[205] that circumvented both 'colonial elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism'.[206] In this way, their analysis deviated from the strict Marxist understanding of the cessation of subalternity as being realised in state formation and that peasant religion cannot be a constituent part of an active rebellion. The historians agreed that, more often than not, the 'very nature of peasant consciousness, the apparently consistent unification of an entire set of beliefs about nature and about men in the collective and active mind of a peasantry, is religious.'[207] In particular, Ranajit Guha (the mentor of the Subaltern Studies historians) analysed over one hundred peasant rebellions in British India between 1783 and 1900 and concluded that the rebellions against the semiotics of suppression were firmly predicated upon peasant systems of belief that incorporated the presence of the supernatural, which actively took part in the rebellion with the peasant.[208] With respect to these subaltern rebellions, Guha advocates that '[i]nversion was its principal modality. It was a political struggle in which the rebel appropriated and/or destroyed the insignia of his enemy's power and hoped thus to abolish the marks of his own subalternity'.[209] From this perspective, the semiotics of suppression that the peasants rebelled against was concomitant with the ideological discrepancy between pre-capitalist and capitalist modernity in India. To rebel against the semiotics of suppression was to dismantle the insignias of bourgeois ideology that were visibly manifested in buildings and institutions that were replete with colonial décor (colonial homes, railway

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[204] Colin Graham, *Deconstructing Ireland: Identity, Theory, Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 106.
[205] Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of Historiography of Colonial India," in *Subaltern Studies*, vol. 1, *Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 4.
[206] Guha, "On Some Aspects of Historiography of Colonial India," 1.
[207] Partha Chatterjee, "Agrarian Relations and Communalism in Bengal, 1926-1935," *Subaltern Studies*, vol. 1, *Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 31.
[208] See, Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).
[209] Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, 75.

buildings, schools, post offices, courts and churches) in the hope that a degree of political agency could be achieved by the subaltern. But the semiotics of suppression went much further than the visibility of bourgeois buildings; the punitive effects were ideological. The semiotics of suppression, then, was inextricable from the suppression of the subaltern's subject-position and the connotation of those ideological indices and symbols that were indexical of bourgeois class and colonial rank. These signs of ideological suppression were pervasive and, more often than not, the semiotics were predicated on the hostility between the cultural materialism of the peasants and the bourgeoisie who used very different tenets to ratioanlise their immediate reality; Chakrabarty points out that '[t]he semiotics could not be separated in the Indian case from what in English we inaccurately refer to as either *the religious* or *the supernatural*.'[210] Similarly, Synge's Modernist dramaturgy of pre-Christian sensibilities foregrounds the agency of subaltern subjects that resort to the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland in order to rationalise their material reality. It is this understanding of bourgeois cultural dominance without cultural hegemony that defines Synge's dramatisation of a culture of subalternity that opposed the semiotics of suppression which permeated the ideology of Catholic, bourgeois Ireland.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has argued that, 'everybody thinks the subaltern is just a classy word for oppressed, for Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie', but, in fact, the subaltern is 'everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism'.[211] When reference is made to the category of the subaltern in this dissertation it is indicative of those members of the Irish populace whose attachment to residual pre-Christian culture meant that they could not be represented by the mechanics of oppression articulated by Catholic progressive historicism. Identification of subaltern figures in Synge's drama is dependent upon an attachment to cultural activity that has a past that is antithetical with Catholic Irish modernity and, in this way, what necessitates the categorisation of the subaltern is not the subaltern's economic or social welfare but their cultural activity that exists beyond the purview of state-orientated nationalism. In Synge's drama, residual pre-Christian cultural activity that is always inextricably bound to the past is considered subaltern because the emergence of such a residual cultural materiality into the realm of the political necessitates that the subaltern's material conditions are relocated within an alternative temporality of modernity. From this disjunctive cultural space, residual pre-Christian materiality is able to haunt modernity with the memory of its apparent defeat in the name of Catholic progressive historicism. Synge's subaltern, then, is not dependent

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[210] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 10. Emphasis in original.

[211] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, quoted in Leon de Kock, "Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 23, no. 3 (1992): 45-46.

upon power as evidenced in the history of Catholic, bourgeois capitalism and it is this slippage of what Guha considers to be an 'index of an important historical truth, that is, the *failure of the bourgeoisie to speak for the nation*'[212] that informs categorisation of the subaltern in Synge's plays.

It is true, as Murphy has suggested, that in Irish literature 'the subaltern is *already* essentialised within hegemonic discourse'.[213] However, Synge's subaltern problematises essentialisation because subalternity can be identified within the cracks and the fissures of the architecture of Catholic progressive historicism. Within this disjunctive space, Synge's subaltern necessitates the differentiation between history as power evidenced in narrative and past as artefact evidenced in knowledge. This cultural disjuncture gives rise to what David Lloyd (in reference to Irish cultural history) classifies as the 'subalternity effect', which is 'not some sociological datum of an objective and generalizable kind, but it is an effect emerging in and between historiographical discourses'.[214] Accordingly, Chakrabarty characterises subaltern cultural history as 'pasts that cannot enter academic history as belonging to the historian's own position'.[215] Therefore, cultures of subalternity 'constantly challenge our "modern" distinctions between the secular and the sacred, between the feudal and the capitalist, between the nonrational and the rational'.[216] Synge's plays take up this challenge and while Murphy correctly argues that what Synge is 'really opposed to is a modernity based on the ethic of Catholic bourgeois nationalism', to suggest that the dramatist failed to offer 'a credible alternative other than a fetishization of life on the peasant periphery'[217] deserves reconsideration. Synge's drama as an articulation of subaltern pasts negates this supposition because if the residue from pre-Christian culture could be incorporated into hegemonic dialogue then a significant cultural materiality of the peasant periphery would cease to be peripheral.

Nevertheless, to cognitively establish the pre-Christian consciousness of the Irish peasant is a positivistic project that can only ever be reductive; as Spivak suggests, any attempt to speak on behalf of the Other is always 'subject to the cathexis of the élite, that it is never fully recoverable [...] that it is effaced even as it is disclosed.'[218] This is why Spivak has suggested that the subaltern is unable to speak because the subaltern's voice is

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[212] Guha, "On Some Aspects of Historiography of Colonial India," 5-6. Emphasis in original.
[213] Paul Murphy, "Yeats, Pearse and the Sublime Subaltern," in *Beyond Borders: IASIL Essays on Modern Irish Writing*, ed. Neil Sammells (Bath: Sulis, 2004), 152. Emphasis in original.
[214] David Lloyd, "Discussion Outside History: Irish New Histories and the 'Subalternity Effect,'" in *Subaltern Studies*, vol. 9, *Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 263.
[215] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 105.
[216] Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*, xx.
[217] Paul Murphy, "J.M. Synge and the Pitfalls of National Consciousness," *Theatre Research International* 28, no. 2 (2003): 138.
[218] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *Subaltern Studies*, vol. 4, *Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), 339.

irreducibly discursive; the voice of the voiceless cannot appear without the intervention of the elite. However, Spivak maintains that if the cultural historian uses 'a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest'[219] then such a methodological approach would allow 'the object of their criticism [to be] irreducible'.[220] Spivak considers this affirmative deconstructive approach to historiography as the only way in which the subaltern's consciousness can be meaningfully revealed. However, such an approach is predicated on the knowledge that 'the historian then breaks his theory in a scrupulously delineated political interest'[221] rather than attempting 'the restoration of the subaltern's subject-position in history [...] as the inalienable and final truth of things'.[222] As this dissertation will suggest, Synge's ability to break 'his theory in a scrupulously delineated political interest'[223] will be complicated by his class background, but he did succeed in interrogating the ethics of subalternity because, just like the Subaltern Studies historians, he 'proved with meticulous care [...] that the nationalist narrative of decolonization is like a vaccine that did not take with the subaltern, precisely because the subaltern had no access to the culture of imperialism'.[224] And while, of course, the collective concentrate on the decolonisation of India, the critical impetus is applicable to colonial Ireland because the historiography of subaltern pasts is recalcitrant to a progressive history of nationalism that characterises a bourgeois class as pioneers that brought the nation out of pre-political conditions of pre-modernity into a bourgeois modernity.

In Synge's playlet, *National Drama: A Farce*[225] the character Jameson debunks national drama by suggesting 'that the Irish drama should hold up a mirror to the Irish Nation and it going to mass on a fine springdayish Sunday'[226] could only ever be reductive. Ever since the hostile reaction that greeted Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* (1899), the

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[219] Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," 342. Emphasis in original.
[220] Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," 342.
[221] Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," 345.
[222] Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," 345.
[223] Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," 345.
[224] Spivak, quoted in de Kock, "Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa," 46.
[225] Synge began writing *National Drama: A Farce* in the wake of the hostile reception that greeted the premiere of *The Shadow of the Glen* in October, 1903. See, TCD MS: 4391, ff.18r-25v and ff.35r-35v. References to publications in the playlet made by the character, Fogarty substantiate this supposition: 'FOGARTY: [...] How to be a Genius, by a Gaelic Leaguer. The Pedigree of the Widow of Ephesus [...] The Plays for an Irish Theatre, abridged and expurgated by a Catholic critic' (*CW,* vol. 3: 221). Later, Fogarty responds to the question, '[w]hat is an Irish Drama? (*CW,* vol. 3: 222) with the following: 'Is it more Ephesian Drama you want?' (*CW,* vol. 3: 223). The Gaelic Leaguer, Arthur Griffith, spearheaded the criticism of *The Shadow of the Glen*, claiming that it was merely 'a staging of a corrupt version of the old-world libel on womankind – the "Widow of Ephsesus," which was made current in Ireland by the hedge-schoolmaster' (Arthur Griffith, "All Ireland," *United Irishman*, 17 October, 1903, 1). W.B. Yeats, however, claimed that it was written in response to the disturbances that were concomitant with *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1907. However, *The Shadow of the Glen* received a staging at the Abbey Theatre from 7 January-11 February, 1905 and, in September, 1905 Yeats wrote to Synge explaining how the Society was 'rather hard up for new short pieces, and you have such a bad reputation now [...] bring the Satire on your enemies, and indeed anything you have' (W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats,* vol. 4, *1905-1907*, ed. John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], 173-4. W.B Yeats to J.M. Synge, 9 September, 1905).
[226] *CW,* vol. 3: 224.

directors of the Abbey Theatre had to adopt a considered approach to their dramatisation of pre-Christian residual culture as a critique of Catholicism. Synge, however, anything but considered, felt it necessary to deviate from a 'purely fantastic, unmodern, ideal, springdayish [and] Chuchlainoid' theatre because Irish drama should not discriminate between the 'modern or un-modern'.[227] Žižek reminds us that a nation can only achieve hegemony by providing access to ephemeral 'Nation Thing'.[228] But what if the essence of the 'Nation-Thing' is recalcitrant to the nation's modernising project? What hegemony fears, most of all, is not a rationality that is heathen, but a rationality that operates within a differential temporality of modernity. Gramsci's oft-quoted postulation on Italy's Southern Question (a proposed alliance between the Italy's Northern bourgeois classes and the Southern proletariat) is pertinent here: 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.'[229] Following Jacques Lacan's categorisation of the symptom (*sinthome*) as a codified index of the symbolic register that detains the subject to a constant process of *jouissance* (painful pleasure), Žižek contends that the 'symptom is not only a ciphered message, it is at the same time a way for the subject to organize his enjoyment – that is why even after he completed interpretation, the subject is not prepared to renounce his symptom; that is why he "loves his symptom more than himself"'.[230] For Žižek, the symptom is akin to fetishisation because it offers both pain and pleasure but, significantly, the symptom is an 'inert stain resisting communication and interpretation, a stain which cannot be included in the circuit of discourse, of social bond network, but is at the same time a positive condition of it.'[231] With respect to the dominance of bourgeois society, Žižek advocates that the symptom has the possibility to 'subvert the [bourgeois] ideological appearance' in order to facilitate 'the point of emergence of the truth about social relations'.[232] However, Synge's residual pre-Christian symptom could not be disclosed within Catholic hegemony even though it provided the subject with *jouissance* precisely because it was a fantasy object of the Real that resisted incorporation into the symbolic order. The pre-Christian symptom could only be enjoyed as long as the logic of the symptom escaped the subject and, as Murphy has suggested, the theatrical texts of the Revival constantly returned to the symptom even though they disrupted 'the structural integrity of the competing ideologies which inhabit that national fantasy space'.[233]

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[227] *CL,* vol. 1: 74. J.M. Synge to Stephen MacKenna, 28 January, 1904.
[228] Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 201.
[229] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 276.
[230] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 74.
[231] Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 75.
[232] Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 26.
[233] Paul Murphy, "Yeats, Pearse and the Sublime Subaltern," 42.

According to Gramsci, if the morbid symptom emerges from Marx's point that 'tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living',[234] then Synge's plays descend into the world of the morbid symptom because they offered both pain and pleasure to the Abbey spectator. The nexus of the symptom revealed a genealogy that Catholic progressive historicism belied and, as Michel Foucault points out, the genealogy is a distinct form of historiography because it pursues the logic of power as a 'complex, strategical situation in a particular society'.[235] If power is not an index of oppression, but a productive-network that induces feelings of pleasure, then Synge's plays afford the cultural residue distinct power because, as Foucault suggests, '[p]ower is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere'.[236] Foucault's schematics of power do not privilege the logic of counter-hegemony as a process that reproduces power as an oppressive force and neither do they privilege a logic that cannot be acknowledged within the bourgeois episteme, but, rather, they consider power to renegotiate dominant culture. Therefore, Synge's plays reconsider the residual culture from pre-Christian Ireland as a genealogy that was inherently counter-hegemonic to the dominant culture but, significantly, because the genealogy provided the perceiving subject with his/her symptom of cultural nostalgia (the Catholic bourgeoisie were only a generation removed from folk culture), Synge's spectator was unable to disassociate him/herself from the productive-network that was symbolically central to the Abbey Theatre. Synge's plays attempt to expose cultural atavism as a symptom manifested as dramatic anachronism because pre-Christian cultural residue was unable to harmonise within the temporality of modernity that circumvented Catholic progressive historicism. Synge maintained '"Atavism" expresses sentiment in a world',[237] and while atavism warrants the contemporaneity of Romantic primitivism, Synge's primitivism is fundamentally Modernist, which allowed the dramatist to critique the fetishisation of the symptom of pre-Christian cultural residue as fantasy object that summoned both feelings of pleasure and pain in the Catholic bourgeoisie.

'Insula Sacra'[238]

If Christianity had spread west from Palestine to Roman Britain then its journey and naturalisation into Ireland was laboured. As late as 750 A.D. Ireland was still essentially

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[234] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 11, trans. Jack Cohen (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), 103.
[235] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 93.
[236] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: 93.
[237] TCD MS: 4373, f.23r.
[238] Donnchadh Ó Corráin, "Prehistoric and Early Christian Ireland," in *The Oxford History of Ireland*, ed. R.F. Foster (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1.

pre-Christian and only the slightest of foundations for the eventual spread of Christianity had been established. As J.N. Hillgarth advocates: 'If pagan idols had been overthrown, pagan customs and beliefs were only beginning to change. What was emerging in [Ireland] was less the clear victory of the Christian Creed than a mixture or fusion of the old and the new.'[239] Irish religious syncretism between pre-Christian and Christian holds its provenance in a system of belief that was held by the early Irish Christians in the fifth century and in this syncretism we can begin to see the origins of Popular Catholicism. To these Christians, demons of an indiscriminate religious nature were said to be 'in the air you breathed, the water you drank, and the meat you ate'.[240] Thus, patterns of pre-Christian belief harmonised with Christianity right from its introduction into the south of Ireland in the fifth century.

The first Bishop to the Irish Christians was the Auxerre cleric, Palladius, and by the beginning of the sixth century the Church had spread north throughout the country as separate dioceses began to form. These dioceses struggled to exercise control on the material conditions of pagan Ireland and, therefore, they struggled to implement reform because pre-Christian materialism had been naturalised during the Iron Age. As Kathleen Hughes points out, sixth-century Irish society 'was still largely pagan, and the church had not yet been recognised by secular law. The clergy held whatever status they had as private individuals, and their status was not affected by their ecclesiastical order.'[241] And so, while the sixth-century Christian scribes referred to Ireland as '*Insula sacra* (holy island)',[242] the complete and homogenous transformation to Christianity was continually disrupted even after St. Patrick had ceased the pre-Christian celebration of the *Teamhur Feis* (the Rites of Tara) in 558 AD. Matters were made worse in the eighth century when the Vikings raided and plundered Ireland and Britain; the venerable Alcuin would later record how the monastery on Lindisfarne was attacked:

> [...] when the pagans desecrated the sanctuaries of God, and poured out the blood of saints about the altar, laid waste the house of our hope, trampled on the bodies of the saints in the temple of God, like dung in the street. What can we say except lament in our souls with you before Christ's altar, and say: 'Spare, O Lord, spare thy people and give not thine inheritance to the gentiels, lest the pagans say, "Where is the God of the Christians?"'[243]

The same desecration of Irish Christianity took place in Ireland and by 823 A.D. the Vikings had rounded the whole of the Irish coastline in hit-and-run attacks. In 914 A.D. the

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[239] J.N. Hillgarth, *Christianity and Paganism, 350-750: The Conversion of Western Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), xiii.
[240] Hillgarth, *Christianity and Paganism*, 12.
[241] Kathleen Hughes, "The Church in Irish Society, 400-800," in *A New History of Ireland*, vol. 1, *Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. Dáibhí Ó Crónín (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 311.
[242] Ó Corráin, "Prehistoric and Early Christian Ireland," 1.
[243] Alcuin, quoted in Ó Corráin, "Prehistoric and Early Christian Ireland," 31.

Vikings began colonising Ireland, choosing Waterford harbour as their staging post. Synge understood that 'the early civilization of the country was altered by the coming of Christianity and [by] the Northern pirates'.[244] By 919 A.D. Dublin had fallen. Donnchadh Ó Corráin suggests that the Vikings' pagan influence was keenly felt within the cloisters of Christian piety with the occurrence of 'lay abbots, married clergy, hereditary succession to church offices, pluralism, and growing violence towards the church'.[245] It should come as no surprise, then, that the Christian literature written in Irish during these centuries identified with 'the heroes of the pagan past [that] continued to be revered in a way which would, again, be hard to parallel elsewhere in Western Christendom.'[246] The introduction of Christianity into Ireland demanded a reconsideration of history because pre-Christian religion was considered heathen and therefore backward. Nowhere was the ideological imposition of progressive historicism more apparent than in the pre-Christian history of *dindsenchas* (lore of places) that was firmly rooted in folklore of space and place. According to Dáibhí Ó Crónín, 'with Christianity came a chronology of world history [...] and the result was a remarkable construction that sought to recreate the mythical prehistory of the early Irish and synchronise it with the great events of world history.'[247]

With the implementation of Christianity what emerged for a short period of time was Celtic Christianity, which was associated with the *Céli Dé* (Culdees) monastic movement.[248] Originating in Munster and led by Abbot Ferdácrích of Darinis, Abbot MacOige of Lismore and Abbess Samthann of Clonbroney, the *Céli Dé* was a reforming monastic movement that existed in Ireland in the eighth and ninth centuries. The movement attempted to reform the pre-Christian habits of both the clergy and the laity and of significance were their attempts to cease meetings at Tara, the symbolic home of pre-Christian cultural discourse in Ireland. Celtic Christianity in Ireland was clearly visible in cultural discourse in the eighth and ninth centuries as it proceeded to espouse Druidic teaching alongside Christian doxology; the laity was encouraged to embrace 'a sense of the nearness of the spirit world [and] a belief that the natural world is good and real'.[249] As James P. Mackey points out, '[i]n Celtic Christianity God's gracious power, God's spirit, one might say God's grace, is everywhere in the natural world and in all our dealings in it [...] there is no real dichotomy between spirits and material things'.[250] Celtic Christianity, then, was still largely dependent on pre-Christian patterns of belief, such as pre-Christian

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[244] J.M. Synge, "An Epic of Ulster," *Speaker*, 7 June, 1902, 284.
[245] Ó Corráin, "Prehistoric and Early Christian Ireland," 34.
[246] Hillgarth, *Christianity and Paganism,*120.
[247] Dáibhí Ó Crónín, "Ireland, 400-800," in *A New History of Ireland*, vol. 1, *Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. Dáibhí Ó Crónín (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 185.
[248] Phyllis G. Jestice, *Encyclopaedia of Irish Spirituality* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2000), 60.
[249] Jestice, *Encyclopaedia of Irish Spirituality*, 62.
[250] James P. Mackey "Introduction: Is there a Celtic Christianity?," in *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity*, ed. James P. Mackey (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 13.

pantheism and, as Chapter Two suggests, Synge dramatised this cultural residue in several of his plays. Celtic Christianity, however, slowly declined as Irish society became increasingly metropolitan. With the decline of Celtic Christianity Yeats correctly suggested that what permeated the material conditions of the Irish peasant was 'a vague, though not altogether unphilosophical, reconciliation between his Paganism and his Christianity'.[251] This is Popular Catholicism; however, the reconciliation took place in the Middle Ages, not in the *fin-de-siècle* Catholic present, as Yeats postulated. This syncretism between pre-Christian sensibilities and Catholic teaching pitted the oral and the vernacular against a Latin culture of grammar and literature and, ultimately, this syncretism was conducive to the implementation of Popular Catholicism into material conditions.

Until the Middle Ages, pre-Christian culture was not residual but emergent. The classification of pre-Christian materialism as a residual culture did not officially take place until the Council of Trent (1545-1563); a meeting of the Heads of the Catholic Church that was held in Trento, Italy. Nevertheless, the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland still proceeded to blur the boundaries between the canonical and the customary and the efficacy of this residual culture was keenly felt within the habitations of the Catholic laity because of their simplified material condition as peasants. As David W. Miller has pointed out, many Irish priests at the beginning of the nineteenth century were said to have magical powers that enabled them to 'cure diseases, magically overcome landlords, miraculously escape from pursuers, and so on [...] [i]n other words, popular custom assigned to the priest a supplementary role, in addition to that defined by the Church.'[252] This supplemental role is Popular Catholicism precisely because, as Carroll suggests, 'these popular practices were experienced as Catholic because they were legitimated by the local clergy'[253] and as Chapter Two suggests, these supplemental roles were writ large into two of Synge's plays: *The Well of the Saints* and *The Tinker's Wedding*. The Church was unable to hold a monopoly on the historical record because patterns of belief from the pre-Christian past continued to puncture and punctuate Catholic progressive historicism; as long as Popular Catholicism existed within material conditions, so did pre-Christian cultural residue. Upon arriving in the parish of Newport-Pratt in County Mayo in 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville was informed by the parish priest that "[t]he people have a strong and living enthusiasm for religion. In this parish with more than ten thousand Catholics, I know only one adult who doest no confess'.[254] However, analysis of the 1834 census indicates that the weekly

[251] W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 2, *1896-1900*, ed. Warwick Gould, John Kelly and Deirdre Toomey (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 213. W.B. Yeats to the Editor of the *Outlook*, 23 April, 1898.
[252] David W. Miller, "Irish Catholicism and the Great Famine," *Journal of Social History* 9 (1975): 89.
[253] Carroll, "Rethinking Popular Catholicism in Pre-Famine Ireland," 360.
[254] David W. Miller, "Irish Catholicism and the Great Famine," 90.

attendance rate at mass in this parish was 38.7%.[255] Ostensibly, the laity did not feel the need to attend church on a regular basis because the secular and the sacred were conflated and confused as they practised Popular Catholicism. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the pre-Christian substratum of Popular Catholicism was the perfect rationalising tenet for the simplified materialism of pre-Famine Ireland because while Catholicism gave the Irish populace a structure (confession, communion and a church), pre-Christian cultural residue gave the populace an anti-structure (fairies, superstitions and magical rituals) and this cultural dialectic was conducive towards communal harmony. Carroll points out that during the seventeenth century the Catholic Church in Ireland was not 'concerned with the degree to which priests or laity were participating in the popular devotions associated with holy wells, patterns, or pilgrimages'.[256] And yet, as the Church embraced modernity, there was an increasing need to eradicate Popular Catholicism because it was an index for pre-modernity and its discursive traits of backwardness. And what Popular Catholicism could not contend with was disaster.

'The Good People are Leaving us Fast'[257]

Until the eve of the Great Famine, the vestiges and traces of pre-Christian belief were as equally centralised in their orthodoxy as Catholicism, precisely because of Popular Catholicism. During the Famine an anxious William Wilde surveyed Ireland as something else besides flesh that was rotting: ghosts, fairies, miraculous cures and charms were also disappearing from Ireland. Wilde concluded that, depopulation aside, the establishment of the National System of Education that taught its pupils in English had catalysed the cultural haemorrhage; a seismic shift in literacy levels (47% of the populace in 1841 to 90% in 1911) meant that oral culture was slowly eclipsed.[258] Waiting in the wings was the Catholic Church, which was fully prepared to eradicate the residue from pre-Christian Ireland once and for all. Wilde's informant, Darby Doolin, put the situation in apposite terms:

> The good people are leaving us fast: nobody ever hears now the tic-tac of the leprechaun. Sure, the children wouldn't know anything about the pooca [...] The warning voice of the banshee is mute, for there are but few of the "rare old stock" to mourn for now; the sheogue and the thievish are every year becoming scarcer; and even the harmless linane shie is not talked about nowadays.[259]

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[255] Miller, "Irish Catholicism and the Great Famine," 90.
[256] Carroll, "Rethinking Popular Catholicism in Pre-Famine Ireland," 361.
[257] Darby Doolin, quoted in William Wilde, *Irish Popular Superstitions* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1979), 13.
[258] Angela Bourke, "The Baby and the Bathwater: Cultural Loss in Nineteenth-Century Ireland," in *Ideology and Ireland in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Tadhg Foley and Seán Ryder (Dublin: Four Courts, 1998), 79.
[259] Doolin, quoted in Wilde, *Irish Popular Superstitions*, 13.

The impact of the Great Famine on pre-Christian residual sensibilities was catastrophic. The Church ensured that divine retribution was the causal link between catastrophe and cultural haemorrhage; that such an ideology was readily accepted is evident from the accounts collected by the Irish Folklore Commission, in which informants such as John McCarthy of Enniskean, County Cork, recalled that '[t]he famine was the will of God.'[260] McCarthy's wife (Hannah) recalled that, during the Famine years, her parish priest, Father O'Donnocan, 'denounced the soupers and they were a busy lot when hunger and suffering was all over the land'[261] because the Church could not afford to let members of the populace, who were just beginning to abandon pre-Christian sensibility, transpose their faith to Protestantism. Mrs. McCarthy recalled that O'Donnocan's criticism was so irate that the soupers[262] 'used to remain around watching for the priest for nights' so that they could 'made an attack on his life'.[263]

What emerged from the Famine was the decimation of the cottier classes as shop-keeping and small farmers received rural embourgeoisement. Ironically, this newly enfranchised class was not as devout in its supplication as the cottier classes were; its interests lay in the acquisition of economic capital. However, Cardinal Paul Cullen capitalised on the hunger for financial gain by promoting familism, a process that was conducive towards the creation of the Orthodox Catholic subject.[264] Catholic familism necessitated severe regulation of codes of behaviour between the opposite sexes; celibacy outside marriage was commonplace and marriages were often postponed until the father of the farm had relinquished his control of the estate to his chosen heir. Synge was fully aware of the debilitating effects of familism on Catholic Ireland; to MacKenna he wrote of the plethora of 'sex horrors' that he had encountered, which would 'wither up your blood'.[265] For familism to successfully operate it was essential that the Catholic Church was accepted as a patriarchal influence across the nation, from the city to the country. At parish level, the priest, who was often from a "strong" tenant farmer family, was the patriarch. In turn, the priest reported into the Bishop, who reported to the Archbishop, who, in turn, reported back to Cullen, who masterminded the Devotional Revolution.

Beginning with the Synod of Thurles in 1850, Cullen's Devotional Revolution's super objective was to brace the Church for modernity and in order to do this pre-Christian

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[260] John McCarthy, "The Famine in Cork, Clare and Waterford," IFC MS: 1071, f.276. County Roscommon. While McCarthy's folklore was recorded in County Roscommon, the family had moved there from Enniskean, County Cork.
[261] IFC MS: 1071, f.283.
[262] Often adhering to Protestantism, soupers were members of a non-Roman Catholic Bible society. The phenomenon, known as 'souperism', offered children shelter and food (soup) in exchange for religious instruction, creating a regrettable binary: starvation and the very real prospect of death, or Roman Catholicism.
[263] IFC MS: 1071, ff.283-84.
[264] For more on familism see, Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society: 1848-1918* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1989), 5.
[265] *CL,* vol. 1: 76n. J.M. Synge to Stephen MacKenna, 1 February, 1904.

residue needed to be erased from Irish culture because it was ostensibly pre-modern. Cullen went about his goal by increasing the numbers of the clergy. Members of the clergy steadily graduated from the Maynooth Seminary in the years after the Famine; at the First Vatican Council (1867-1870) 30% of the 730 bishops were Irish, or could claim Irish descent.[266] In *fin-de-siècle* Europe the Irish priest to people ratio was the lowest in the world; there was one priest for every 560 members of the population, whereas fifty years previously there had been one priest for every 3,000 people;[267] the number of nuns had increased from 120 in 1800 to 8,000 in 1900.[268] As Cullen ensured that the clergy were handsomely rewarded for their work,[269] supplication was slowly orchestrated into an orthodox pattern of behaviour. In the decades after the Famine the laity increased their attendance at Mass as Cullen halted the recourse to Popular Catholicism by introducing Catholic jubilees, pilgrimages, processions, shrines and retreats that were all designed to replace pre-Christian patterns, pageants and effigies. In short, Cullen's Catholicism marched Ireland towards modernity; its symbolic capital was inordinate and consequently not only did it monopolise civil society, it also exerted a stranglehold on the cultural-historical archive. By the time that Synge was born in 1871, only 146 people in Ireland claimed to have no religious affiliation[270] and by the beginning of the twentieth century the residue from pre-Christian Ireland had been almost eradicated as a pious and mercantile class began to assert its claim for sovereignty.

Bourdieu's sociology of religion suggests that within any given society the pejorative religious consciousness – what he classifies as the religious habitus – is a form of symbolic capital. Bourdieu advocates that, similar to the hegemonic process, the habitus 'governs practice, not by the processes of a mechanical determinism, but through the mediation of the orientations and limits it assigns to the habitus's operations of invention'.[271] In this way, the habitus is regulated 'in the form of durable dispositions, in the organisms (which one can, if one wishes, call individuals) lastingly subjected to the same conditionings, and hence placed in the same material conditions of existence.'[272] Bourdieu advocates that while there is a general habitus in any given society (i.e. do not murder), there is a distinct denominational habitus, that is an idiosyncratic way of being religious, that differentiates, for example, the Protestant from the Catholic habitus. In Synge's Ireland, Protestantism still exercised a significant amount of capital but it remained an Ascendancy habitus that was visibly reinforced through the ubiquity of superior churches, houses,

[266] Kevin Whelan, "The Cultural Effects of the Famine," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 140.
[267] Larkin, "The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-75," 627.
[268] Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 338. Also see, Whelan, "The Cultural Effects of the Famine," 140.
[269] Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 76.
[270] Whelan, "The Cultural Effects of the Famine," 140.
[271] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory Of Practice*, 95.
[272] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory Of Practice*, 85.

schools and hospitals. In order to accommodate this discrepancy, the Catholic habitus became a lot more spiritual and, in turn, their application for social-betterment was ameliorated. Not only does religious habitus regulate human disposition, it can be used to barter for other forms of capital within the social sphere, be that economic, social or political capital, as Bourdieu suggests:

> Symbolic capital, a transformed and thereby *disguised* form of physical "economic" capital, produces its proper effect inasmuch, and only inasmuch, as it conceals the fact that it originates in "material" forms of capital which are also, in the last analysis, the source of its effects.[273]

After the Great Famine, the Catholic habitus had succeeded in becoming the dominant form of religious capital and therefore the Catholic habitus was heavily invested in the realm of the political. Catholicism, then, was the symbolic capital to be reckoned with as the Church could use its capital to barter for different capital and, in this way, the efficacy of Cullen's Devotional Revolution extended far beyond the eradication of pre-Christian culture to other materialisms that included political ideology. The Catholic Church was forced to politicise its interests in order to maintain its symbolic capital as support for the Ascendancy renegade, Charles Stewart Parnell, increased. With the establishment of the Irish National Land League in 1879, Michael Davitt, Parnell's right hand man, ensured that the Catholic bourgeoisie were a force to be reckoned with; as Eibhlin Roche has suggested, '[t]he sheer numbers involved in the Land League made it difficult for the process servers and eviction parties to carry out their work'.[274] Parnell's stewardship of the Irish Parliamentary Party drew strength from events that were instrumental to the enfranchisement of Catholic Ireland: Emancipation, the Repeal Movement and the Land War. In so doing, he encouraged the transformation of the clergy into consulates. Up until this point Cullen had avoided affiliating the Catholic Church with political forces, but as Parnell stormed through the country unifying the predominantly Catholic populace, the Church was forced into lending its support to parliamentary proceedings. All of a sudden, the clergy became much more than agents of the Holy See; they became political officers. The significance of this was that while class and politics had become inextricable from Catholicism, pockets of pre-Christian residual culture continued to complicate the Catholic habitus, thereby pluralising the religious and political agency of the modern Irish subject. As Tom Inglis points out:

> [...] any detailed ethnography of religious life in Ireland, particularly in rural areas, would find evidence of pagan practices and beliefs, particularly among the elderly. These beliefs and practices have been central to the Irish religious consciousness for hundreds of years. It is embodied in the

[273] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory Of Practice*, 183. Emphasis in original.
[274] Eibhlin Mary Roche, "The Ladies' Land League in Kerry, 1881-1882," (M.A. diss., University College Cork, 1999), 6.

> landscape, the home, the language and the habitus of the Irish religious field. It is a cultural residue which does not go away either in the society or the individual and which can be reenacted at any time in any place.[275]

The symbolic capital of the Catholic Church, then, did not affect the entire Irish populace. Mary Fogarty,[276] after witnessing a whole host of pre-Christian belief by the maids on her father's farm in County Limerick, would complain to her mother: "Why do you let the maids be so silly? [...] The nuns say we must never miss a chance of curing people of pagan superstition!" to which her mother simply replied: "You can try".[277] It is this attachment to the residue from pre-Christian Ireland that problematised Catholic modernity that certain members of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy (Yeats, Gregory, George Russell) turned their attention to because it appeased the spectre of history by allowing the Ascendancy to form an alliance with the politics of the people. But with Synge, this alliance is problematic because of his peculiar relationship with the Ascendancy.

'Between a Ghoul and a Voltaire'[278]

Synge was born into an Ascendancy family that held ties to landed estates in County Wicklow and County Galway. However, at the time of Synge's birth (1871), his family, like most Anglo-Irish families with Ascendancy backgrounds, was a bourgeois class formation of genteel poverty; as Synge's nephew suggested, the 'landlord class to which [Synge] belonged had retained all its self esteem, some of its education, but very little of its moneyed influence'.[279] The decline of the Ascendancy aristocracy from its heyday during the "long" eighteenth century was slow; in 1856 Friedrich Engels would write to Karl Marx about the Ascendancy:

> The land-owners, who everywhere else have become bourgeoisified, are here reduced to complete poverty. These fellows are droll enough to make your sides burst with laughing; of mixed blood, mostly tall, strong, handsome chaps, they all wear enormous moustaches under colossal Roman noses, give themselves the false military air of retired colonels, travel round the country after all sorts of pleasures, and if one make an

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[275] Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998), 206.

[276] Born in 1858, Mary Fogarty recounted her childhood memories to Mary Carbey in 1904 but they were not put into a transcript until 1935. As Carbey suggests, Fogarty's memories are a rich account of the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland: 'She told me about the notable banshee Ainë and her brother Fer Fi, the dwarf; of fairies in the hollow hills; of a drowned city in the Enchanted Lake; of giants and ghosts, saints' wells and fairy thorns.' See, Mary Carbey, "Author's Message," in *The Farm by Lough Gur: The Story of Mary Fogarty* (Cork: Mercier, 1973), viii.

[277] Mary Carbey, *The Farm by Lough Gur: The Story of Mary Fogarty*, 161-162.

[278] NYPL MS: Berg Coll MSS Gregory. Lady Gregory to John Butler Yeats, 9 January, 1906.

[279] TCD SSMS: 6189, f.3.

> inquiry, they haven't a penny, are laden with debts, and live in dread of the Encumbered Estates Court.[280]

The fading of the Ascendancy was painful to most of its class; George Moore is apposite when he recalls how, during the Hugh Lane fiasco in 1904, Yeats 'with a paunch, a huge stride, an immense fur overcoat rose to speak'[281] whereupon he,

> began to thunder like Ben Tillet himself against the middle classes, stamping his feet, working himself into a great passion, and all because the middle classes did not dip their hands into their pockets and give Lane the money he wanted for his exhibition. It is impossible to imagine the hatred which came into his voice when he spoke the words 'the middle classes'; one would have thought that he was speaking against a personal foe; but there are millions in the middle classes! And we looked round asking each other with our eyes where on earth our Willie Yeats had picked up such extraordinary ideas.[282]

As Moore concludes, 'we asked ourselves why Willie Yeats should feel himself called upon to denounce the class to which he himself belonged essentially'.[283] Synge, however, appears indifferent to the decline of the Ascendancy, especially when one considers that what truly defined this class in *fin-de-siècle* Ireland was its staunch and often evangelical dedication to Protestantism.[284]

Synge was brought up under strict laws of evangelical propriety that emphasised the piety of the Plymouth Brethren. His grandfather, Robert Traill, was the Protestant rector of Schull, County Cork, and he spent his life waging 'against popery in its thousand forms of wickedness'.[285] Synge scholarship is replete with discourse on Synge's evangelical upbringing[286] and it is well known that the dramatist reacted against Protestantism, much of the embarrassment of his family. Matheson would later recall that 'sometimes he talked about religion' but he 'felt disgusted with orthodox religion'.[287] Synge once encountered 'a splendid woman and a most devout Christian' who worked tirelessly for her Protestant church for years, whereupon it was discovered that she was a Baptist, and the Church 'literally turned her out of everything, and even cut her in the street.'[288] 'I remember', Matheson continues, 'Synge's wrath as he shouted: "that man calls himself a Christian!"'[289] Synge's reading of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural*

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[280] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Ireland and The Irish Question*, ed. R. Dixon (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 85.
[281] George Moore, *Hail and Farewell: Vale*, 170.
[282] Moore, *Hail and Farewell: Vale*, 170.
[283] Moore, *Hail and Farewell: Vale*, 114.
[284] For more on this subject see, Christopher Collins, "Synge Scholarship: Nothing to do with Nationalism?," *Theatre Research International* 36, no. 3 (2011), 272-75.
[285] TCD SSMS: 6189, f.192.
[286] See, for example, McCormack, *Fool of the Family* and Nicholas Grene, *Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays* and Mary C. King, *The Drama of J.M. Synge*.
[287] C.H.H. "John Synge as I knew Him," *Irish Statesman*, 5 July, 1924, 532.
[288] C.H.H. "John Synge as I knew Him," 532.
[289] C.H.H. "John Synge as I knew Him," 532.

Selection at the age of twenty-four consummated his suspicion towards Christianity[290] and after reading Darwin's implicit critique of the Lord as the Divine Creator he began to 'read works of Christian evidence at first with pleasure, soon with doubt, and at last in some cases with derision.'[291] Refusing to attend Bible classes or discuss Protestantism with his family, Synge was truly isolated not just from his family but also from his own class. However, while Synge claimed that Christianity remained 'a difficulty and occasioned terror to me for many years'[292] and that he had no time for talk of 'tedious matters of theology',[293] caution should be heeded over reductive claims that Synge completely rejected Protestantism. As Synge was dying on his own – albeit surrounded by his nurses – the Bible was firmly pressed against his chest and he repeated a mantra over and over again: 'God have mercy on me, God forgive me.'[294]

Nevertheless, with respect to the Ascendancy, as Nicholas Grene points out, Synge 'saw nothing but repressiveness, hatred and decadence.'[295] In 1902 he would publish an essay entitled "The Old and the New in Ireland" in the *Academy and Literature* where he concedes that 'religious questions, also, are beginning to put less restriction on Irish culture. Everywhere the Catholic population are becoming more alive to intellectual matters, and the harder forms of Protestantism are losing ground.'[296] Reflecting on the apparent decline of the Ascendancy from a class with aristocratic virtue to a bourgeois class, all Synge could muster to differentiate Anglo-Irish and Irish-Irish Ireland was 'the influence of Trinity College' and he publicly admitted that 'as a class they have too often shown their kinship with the early reformers'.[297] In Synge's eyes, the early reformers were considered far too narrow in their treatment of Irish culture, which is why he ended the article quoting Erasmus:

> *Evangelicos istos, cum multis aliis, tum hoc nomine praecipue odi, quod per eos ubique languent, fugent, jacent, interuent bonae literae sine quibus quid est hominum vita?*
>
> [I dislike these gospellers on many accounts, but chiefly because, through their agency, literature everywhere languishes, disappears, lies drooping, and perishes and yet, without learning, what is a man's life?][298]

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[290] Synge claimed that when he 'was about fourteen [he] obtained a book of Darwin's' (*CW*, vol. 2: 10). This is a retrospective analysis. Synge's diary for 30 September 1895, reads 'Began the Origin of Species' (TCD MS: 4416, f.129v).
[291] *CW*, vol. 2: 11.
[292] *CW*, vol. 2: 11.
[293] *CW*, vol. 2: 11, 56.
[294] McCormack, *Fool of the Family*, 383.
[295] Nicholas Grene, *Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays*, 4.
[296] *CW*, vol. 2: 386.
[297] *CW*, vol. 2: 386.
[298] *CW*, vol. 2: 386.

In his notebook he continued the essay in its unpublished form: '[f]ew knew that the old form of protest to which a certain passage of Erasmus may well be applied was beginning to lose hold on an increasing share of the upper classes, and that with this release a new culture was beginning'.[299] Synge, the possible exception to Ascendancy rule, would elaborate this point further in his prose essay for the *Manchester Guardian*, "In A Landlord's Garden in County Wicklow" (originally titled "The Garden of the Dead") in which he lamented the decline of the Ascendancy but ultimately concluded that 'this class, with its many genuine qualities, had little patriotism, in the right sense, few ideas, and no seed for future life, so it has gone to the wall'.[300] Synge evidently thought that the Ascendancy's fall from grace would have made excellent dramaturgical material and he concluded his essay with the following supposition: 'if a playwright chose to go through the Irish country houses he would find material, it is likely, for many gloomy plays that would turn on the dying away of these old families'.[301] And these themes of Ascendancy decline and demise are exaggerated as death and decay in Synge's apprentice play, *When the Moon has Set*.[302]

In 1901, Yeats maintained that 'Moses was little good to his people until he had killed an Egyptian; and for the most part a writer or public man of the upper classes is useless to this country till he had done something that separated him from his class.'[303] *When the Moon has Set*, submitted to Yeats and Gregory in the same year that Yeats gave this injunction (1901), is Synge's attempt to distance himself from his own class through the use of satire; 'Synge as we know', wrote Gregory to John Butler Yeats, 'is something between a ghoul and a Voltaire'.[304] The play was rejected because the plot was thought to be too contrived; it was written as Synge indulged himself in Henrik Ibsen's naturalism and it contains those salient Ibsenite dramaturgies: a brooding landscape, a lover scorned and a discharged gun. However, it is also possible to conjecture that the rejection proceeded from Synge's debunking of the Ascendancy; written in Synge's notebook is the conclusion that the character Colm makes as he comes to terms with the death of his Ascendancy uncle:

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[299] TCD MS: 4393, f.4r.
[300] *CW*, vol. 2: 231n.
[301] *CW*, vol. 2: 231.
[302] Synge's brother-in-law, Harry Stephens, told the dramatist how their Ascendancy ancestor from Wicklow, Samuel McCracken, had conducted an affair with a member of his staff whom he employed on his estate. On 6 August, 1768, McCracken was found on the floor of his bed chamber 'with his brains blown about and a discharged pistol by his side' and the archive suggests that he was forced to take his own life (NLI MS: 11,333). This piece of familial history is interesting because it curiously mirrors the dramaturgy of *When the Moon has Set* as those tell-tale signs of Ascendancy anxiety are mobilised in both the real and the literary world. McCracken frequently complained to his family that the big house was receiving unwelcome attention. In the dead of night the house was being stalked, which caused McCracken to write a despairing letter to his Dublin cousin, John Hatch, containing the statement: '[w]hen this comes to your hand I am no more' (NLI MS:11,328). For a detailed account of the case of McCracken see, TCD: SSMS: 6189, ff.11-26.
[303] W.B. Yeats, "Windlestraws," in *Samhain: An Occasional Review*, ed. W.B Yeats (Dublin: Sealy Bryers and Walker and T. Fisher Unwin, 1901), 9.
[304] NYPL MS: Berg Coll MSS Gregory. Lady Gregory to John Butler Yeats, 9 January, 1906.

'What a life he has had. I suppose it is a good thing that this aristocracy is dying out. They were neither human nor divine.'[305]

However, aristocratic virtue was never far from Synge's mind and it could easily be summoned; as long as Synge held a lingering attachment to evangelical Protestantism it meant that he still held an attachment to his Ascendancy upbringing. And so, Synge, who once canvassed against Home Rule[306] could, if pushed, fall back on his Ascendancy background:

> I believe in Ireland. I believe the nation that made a place in history by seventeen centuries of manhood, a nation that has begotten Grattan and Emmet and Parnell will not be brought to complete insanity in these last days by what is senile and slobbering in the doctrine of the Gaelic League.[307]

Grene argues that even though Synge may have repressed his Ascendancy background, he still clung to hope that 'the Ascendancy would continue to provide an intellectual and political élite for the new nationally independent Ireland'.[308] Indeed, if we are to believe Yeats then, quite alarmingly, Synge drafted a play about the 'Rebellion of '98' where two women, one Protestant and one Catholic, sought 'refuge in a cave, and there [they] quarrell[ed] about religion, abusing the Pope or Queen Elizabeth and Henry VIII, but in low voices, for the one fears to be ravished by soldiers, the other by the rebels'.[309] According to Yeats, the play ended with 'one woman [deciding to go] out because she would sooner any fate than such wicked company.'[310]

Synge's Ascendancy background is nowhere more apparent than in his ethnography of life on the Aran Islands, where he admits that '[i]n some ways these men and women seem strangely far away from me. They have the same emotions that I have, and the animals have, yet I cannot talk to them when there is much to say, more than to the dog that whines beside me in a mountain fog.'[311] The dream of 'the noble and the beggar-man'[312] looms large here as Synge compares the islanders 'to the finer types of our aristocracies',[313] a supposition that forces him to confront a pressing question: 'How much of Ireland was formerly like this and how much of Ireland is today Anglicized and civilized and brutalized [...] Am I not leaving in Inishmaan spiritual treasures unexplored whose presence is a great

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[305] TCD MS: 4389, ff.13v-14v.
[306] Synge canvassed against Home Rule on 28 February, 1893. See, Samuel Synge, *Letters to My Daughter: Memoires of John Millington Synge* (Dublin: Talbot, 1933), 193. Samuel Synge to Edith Synge, 9 February, 1926.
[307] *CW*, vol. 2: 399.
[308] Nicholas Grene, *Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays*, 9.
[309] Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 319.
[310] Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 319-20.
[311] *CW*, vol. 2: 113.
[312] Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, 603.
[313] *CW*, vol. 2: 66.

magnet to my soul?'[314] Shaun Richards and David Cairns point out that '[t]he debilitating effect of a materialism which Synge associated with Anglicization, suggest an Ascendancy preference for the halt of progress'.[315] However, these scholars identify in Synge's dramaturgy a deviant praxis that was critical 'not only of the restrictive and moralistic materialisms which underpinned the nationalist movement, but also of all repression which denied the individual a right to such self expression'.[316] *When the Moon has Set* advocates that the recourse to cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland compels the individual into unconventional expression; the play ends with Sister Eileen rejecting her Catholic vows as she marries Colm in a wedding replete with pre-Christian cultural residue that summons the blessing of the 'the Summer, and the Sun, and the Whole World.'[317] Thus, in Synge's eyes the discourse from pre-Christian Ireland does not halt progress but pluralises it. Pre-Christian sensibilities were, for Synge, a material condition of a residual culture that necessitated recalcitrance towards the structures and strictures of bourgeois existence, but it also warranted the employment of aristocratic virtue that was symptomatic of the Ascendancy's negotiation of historical time. In this way, Synge's understanding of pre-Christian cultural residue was not very far removed from Yeats's, because it was an efficacious barricade against the crippling effects of history and without historical assurance the memory and identity of the Ascendancy were left lacking.

The vestiges from pre-Christian Ireland, an unhappy reminder to the Catholic bourgeoisie of the simplified materialism of folk culture, were anathema to their project of civil modernity. In an age of Darwinism pre-Christian culture was all the evidence that was needed to keep the Irish heathen under colonial rule. Max Beerbohm, after seeing *In The Shadow of the Glen* and *Riders to the Sea* (in London), was particularly taken by,

> the sight of a strange and remote race expressing through our own language things most strange to us and remote from us. Well, we are as far removed from the Irish people as from the niggers, and our spiritual distance seems all the greater by reason of our nearness in actual mileage. I admit that it was, in a way, more pleasant to see those niggers than to see these Irish folk. When we contemplate niggers one clear impression comes through our dim bewilderment: we are assuredly in the presence of an inferior race.[318]

Synge may have been of the same persuasion as Beerbohm; after visiting the Ballsbridge International Exhibition in Herbert Park, County Dublin, he commented that the 'war-song

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[314] *CW*, vol. 2: 103n.
[315] David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 79.
[316] Cairns and Richards, *Writing Ireland*, 79.
[317] *CW*, vol. 3: 177.
[318] Max Beerbohm "Some Irish Plays and Players," *Saturday Review*, 9 April, 1904, 456.

the niggers were singing was exactly like some of the keen on Aran'.[319] Nevertheless, to certain members of the Ascendancy the vestiges and traces of pre-Christian Ireland provided a curious portal into the annals of Irish history, where historical grievance over the Union could be displaced in favour of a sense of Irish historical stability. The Ascendancy's fascination with pre-Christian Ireland extended from erudite analyses of Irish antiquities to esoteric occultic practice and, in whatever way it was explored, it allowed the Ascendancy to treat history as myth and metaphor because the Ascendancy was in contact with what Yeats characterised as 'our proper dark'.[320] With Parnell's fall from grace, the race for socio-political leadership increased in Catholic Ireland's favour and so the Ascendancy repeatedly made a recourse to pre-Christian culture in order to negotiate solipsism; Lady Gregory once confided in Yeats how she had longed 'to turn Catholic, that I might be nearer to the people, but you have taught me that paganism brings me nearer still.'[321] Parnell was the Ascendancy's trump card in the battle for socio-political dominance, which is why Yeats admitted that '[t]he modern literature of Ireland, and indeed all that stir of thought which prepared for the Anglo-Irish war, began when Parnell fell from power in 1891'.[322] After Parnell's infamous implosion, Anglo-Irish Ireland felt the sense of social exile more than ever and so, in the literature of the Revival, Anglo-Irish writers like Yeats, Gregory and Synge repeatedly drew upon pre-Christian cultural sensibilities because 'that tapestry filled the scene at the birth of modern Irish literature'.[323] However, Synge's knowledge of the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland was radically different from that of his Revivalist colleagues precisely because it was pervaded with critical and cultural scholarly discourse. With respect to the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland Synge was caught between a critique of Catholic cultural imperialism and the fetishisation of residual culture that belied the Ascendancy's class insecurity, a disposition about which Synge was not insecure. Nevertheless, the dramatist would eventually have to make a choice.

'A Very Useful Scholour'[324]

In February 1889, Synge enrolled on an undergraduate degree at the University of Dublin, Trinity College. With his mother's cousin (Anthony Traill) as a tutor, the proviso of Synge's enrolment was that upon graduation he would take up orders with the Church of Ireland like his older bother (Samuel) had done. Nothing, however, could have been further

[319] *CL*, vol. 1: 343-44. J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood, 13 May, 1907.
[320] W.B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1989), 611.

[321] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955), 400.
[322] Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 559.
[323] Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 515.
[324] Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 2: 359. W.B. Yeats to Lady Gregory, 14 February, 1899.

from Synge's mind. Trinity allowed Synge to conduct a concentric study of the history of pre-Christian Ireland.[325] Authors such as William Frederick Wakeman taught Synge that the study of pre-Christian antiquity was a matter of national pride and it would prove to those 'strangers to the country, men whose knowledge of the Irish, previous to their visit, appears to have been derived from the stage' that Ireland was not the home of 'fighting, drinking, bulls, blunders, and superstition'.[326] If stage-Irishness was classified by the founders of the Irish Literary Theatre as 'buffoonery and easy sentiment',[327] then after reading Wakeman's work Synge understood that pre-Christian antiquity was conducive to that much sought after commodity that defined the theatre practice of Yeats and Gregory: 'ancient idealism'.[328] Synge read and respected the opinion of the Rev. G.T. Stokes, who was Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the College during his attendance. Stokes began one lecture by telling a 'University audience', that he 'need scarcely remind them that a Celtic Christianity, with its peculiar national faults and characteristics, finds place even in the New Testament'.[329] Of equal importance to Synge was the work of Sir George Petrie, whose studies on Irish round towers and high crosses prompted Synge to roam the Irish countryside to study the towers and other antiquities.[330] While walking and/or cycling the Wicklow countryside studying megalithic monuments, Synge must have recalled his college notes that he had made from Richard Chenevix Trench's *English Past and Present*. Trench had taught Synge about the etymology of the word "pagan" which had come from the Latin, *pagus* (village) and in his notebook Synge wrote that 'Pagani were countrymen as opposed to townsmen.'[331] Synge graduated from Trinity in 1892. For the next three years he flirted with being a professional musician and by and large he would forget about his studies in Irish pre-Christian antiquity until they were awoken by his postgraduate studies in comparative social science.

On New Year's Day 1895, Synge arrived by train in Paris – a city famous for its integration of the sacred and the profane.[332] Living in various rented bedsits, Synge lived the life of a Parisian down-at-heel scholar, rolling his own cigarettes and boiling eggs in

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[325] Synge augmented his knowledge of pre-Christian antiquities with George Petrie's *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland* (Synge read this on 15 April, 1892. TCD MS: 4413, 17r) and G.T. Stokes's *Ireland and the Anglo-Norman Church: A History of Ireland and Irish Christianity from the Anglo-Norman Conquest to the Dawn of the Reformation* (Synge read this on 13 July, 1892. TCD MS: 4413, 61r).

[326] William Frederick Wakeman, *Archæologica Hibernica: A Hand-Book of Irish Antiquities, Pagan and Christian, Especially of Such as are Easy of Access from the Irish Metropolis* (Dublin: James McGlashan, 1848), vii. Synge read Wakeman's work on 18 March, 1892 (TCD MS: 4413, f.3r).

[327] Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1972), 20.

[328] Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre*, 20.

[329] Stokes, *Ireland and the Celtic Church*, 2.

[330] On 15 April, 1892, after reading Petrie's scholarship on round towers, Synge concluded: 'Round Towers (including some Irish) the earliest authentic record of the building of a tower is 6th [century]. Towers were not uncommon in the 6th' (TCD MS: 4413, ff.17r). The following day, Synge visited Maynooth (TCD MS: 4413, f.17v) and on 8 May, 1892, Synge spent the day walking the Wicklow countryside (TCD MS: 4412, f.28v). Certainly, on 2 September, 1892, Synge visited the round tower at Glendalough (TCD MS: 4412, f.79r).

[331] TCD MS: 4373, f.31v.

[332] TCD MS: 4416, f.2v.

paper bags as he survived solely on his mother's annual allowance (£40) and a small income from teaching English.[333] The constant return to Paris would provoke Mrs. Synge to write that 'poor Johnnie is my failure' because 'Johnnie is vegetating in Paris. He calls himself very busy, but it is a busy idleness, in my opinion. Poor boy.'[334] McCormack, whose reflection on those years in Parisian exile concluded that 'he read and wrote, with little to show for it',[335] also shares her opinion. This can hardly be the case. Synge's various postgraduate studies[336] are detectable within his Modernist dramaturgy, be it through Baudelaire and Mallarmé's pessimism evident in *Riders to the Sea* or the celebration of the human spirit of Chaucer and Rabelais in *The Playboy of the Western World*; Passy would teach Synge about patois and in this we can see the foundation of Synge's Hiberno-English dialect. But it would be Celtology, and more specifically the work of de Jubainville and le Braz, that would have the greatest influence on Synge's Modernist pre-Christian dramaturgy. Le Braz drove the point home to Synge that the residue from pre-Christian Ireland could be detected in a plethora of Christian rituals and, in Léon Marillier's introduction to le Braz's *La Légende de la Mort en Basse-Bretagne*, Synge read:

> *Aujourd'hui encore la vie bretonne est toute remplie d'usages qui paraissent étranges parce qu'ailleurs ils ont péri, mais qui étaient naguère des usages universels. Il est peu de circonstances de la vie qui ne soient marquées par quelque cérémonie symbolique qui a revêtu maintenant des apparences chrétiennes, mais qui porte les marques indéniables de manières de sentir et de penser bien antérieures au christianisme.*
>
> [Today the life of the Breton people is completely filled with customs that appear strange because they have disappeared from our times, but they were born from common customs. There are few circumstances in life that are not marked by some kind of symbolic ceremonies, which are re-emerged as Christian happenings, but the ceremony is undeniably in the manner of feeling and thinking that considerably pre-dated Christianity].[337]

Celtology allowed Synge to avoid the pitfalls that most of his Revivalist colleagues were unable to avoid: Celticism. Like Orientalism, Celticism purloins the surface of Celtic civilisation in order to belie personal anxieties. As Joep Leerssen suggests:

> the Celts can be disparaged as barbarians or praised as Noble Savages; they can fall under the shadow of ethnocentrism or be glorified in the spotlight

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[333] Bourgeois, *John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre* (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1913), 33. Also see, MacKenna, NLI MS: 13,276, ff.10-12.
[334] TCD SSMS: 6191, ff.931, 1148.
[335] McCormack, *Fool of the Family: A Life of J.M. Synge*, 213.
[336] For Synge's studies see, TCD MS: 4416. To take a week (6-13 May, 1895) by way of example, Synge's days are taken up with the constant study of de Julleville and Faguet. See, TCD MS: 4416, ff.58r-61v.
[337] Léon Marillier, "Introduction de Léon Marillier," in Anatole le Braz, *La Légende de la Mort en Basse-Bretagne: Croyances, Traditions et Usages des Bretons Armoricans* (Paris: Honore Champion, 1893), xviii. We know that Synge read this work because he discusses it at length in his article "Anatole Le Braz," *Daily Express*, 28 January, 1899, 3.

> of primitivism; they can be exoticized or identified with different authors at different periods, they can be made to fit any role (the Us or the Them; the Good, the Bad or the Mysterious) in the ethnic pattern of Europe's dramatis personae.[338]

Throughout the winter of 1895 Synge was obliged to wrap himself in his bedclothes[339] and burn copious amount of newspapers[340] in order to keep his bedsit warm, while he diligently kept up with his Celtological studies. No longer was Synge intertwining natural history and antiquities for his study of pre-Christian Ireland and quite quickly he would have been aware that the concept of the Celt was a discursive construct that was mobilised in the Irish context in order to facilitate a journey to an alternative temporality of ethnicity that predated the stigmata from British colonial power. In this way, 'Celticism is a system of representation imposed by a hegemonic group on others with such success that those others begin to accept the truth of that alien representation.'[341] However, the Celtologists under whom Synge studied had laid to rest debates over Celtic civilisation in the decade that preceded the Revival and Synge, often the only student to attend de Jubainville's lectures, witnessed how his mentors 'sifted the savage grain from the Irish manuscripts'.[342] The chief exponents of Celticism were Ernest Renan (*La Poésie des Races Celtiques*) and Matthew Arnold (*On the Study of Celtic Literature*)[343] and both authors offered those members of the Ascendancy that were in the throes of solipsism a shortcut to their Celtic roots by demonstrating that the Celtic temperament softened Saxon strength. By corollary, if Anglo-Irish men and women wanted to follow Renan and Arnold to the letter, then their hyphenated Irishness may have been qualified but their political power was left lacking in favour of those racially pure Saxons; the mongrel Anglo-Irish were considered to be the half-bred runts of the litter. However, as early as 1896, le Braz had explained to Synge that Celtic civilisation was very far removed from the concept of a Celtic Arcadia: 'One looks in vain in these rude epics for the ideal cult of woman, so cherished by [Ernest] Renan [...] Such are those impetuous and wholly primitive natures. We are far from the "extreme moral gentleness" that Renan had believed to breathe "in the ideal compositions of the Celtic races."[344]

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[338] Joep Leerssen, "Celticism," in *Celticism*, ed. Terence Brown (Amsterdam: Rodopi BV, 1996), 3.
[339] Robin Skelton, *J.M. Synge and His World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 33.
[340] See, Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 2: 359n.
[341] George Watson, "'Celticism' and the Annulment of History," in *Celticism*, ed. Terence Brown (Amsterdam: Rodopi BV, 1996), 207.
[342] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 176.
[343] There is no cogent evidence that Synge read Renan's *La Poésie des Races Celtiques*. However, he was certainly familiar with Renan's work. In Paris on 4 January, 1896 he began reading Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, a controversial work that advocated that the life of the Saviour should be subject to historiographical scrutiny. See, TCD MS: 4417, f.47r. Edward Stephens suggested that this work 'had on John, an influence which was not restricted to religious ideas' (TCD SSMS: 6191, f.1079).
[344] Anatole le Braz, *Le Théatre Celtique* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1905), 5, 8. My translation follows le Braz's original text: '*Vainement chercherait-on dans ces rudes epopees ce culte ideal de la femme, si prone par Renan,*

As Synge delved deeper into Celtology he learnt that Celtic Ireland was a warring society where scalps were paraded around villages and kept as family heirlooms; a society where gods and goddesses made love to mortals and superstitions were prescribed and purchased with ease. In Celtic Ireland sex and blood ran wild and free, leaving little room for romance and sentiment, as le Braz would have suggested to Synge: 'Instead of a race that is gentle, timid, isolated in its dream and disdainful of all effort, there emerges, on the contrary, vehement natures, passionate, almost brutal, hungry for action, drunk with movement and noise.'[345] Those of Anglo-Irish heritage were desperate to identify the characteristic attributes of the Celt within themselves because not only would such attributes substantiate their Irish heritage, they would also prove that the Anglo-Irish, just like the Catholic Irish, had 'vehement natures'.[346] Synge was keen to emphasise the Celtic element in his blood; writing to Max Meyerfeld he pointed out that 'my Christian names are John Millington, my family were originally called Millington, and Queen Elizabeth is said to have changed this name to "Synge" they sang so finely. Synge is, of course, pronounced "sing," since then they have been in Ireland for nearly three centuries, so that there is now a good deal of Celtic, or more exactly, Gaelic blood in the family'.[347]

The categorisation of the Celt persisted to permeate the Irish Literary Revival and, as Richards and Cairns have pointed out, it offered people like Yeats 'an opportunity for such a re-making, but to be successful Celticism itself had to be purged of any tendency to reference the philological and ethnic roots of the Celt, whose identity had to be sought in more nebulous terms.'[348] This is why George Watson considers Yeats to be 'the ultimate Celticist',[349] because he was '*the* great manipulator of history. He ignores it, inventing his own Ireland'.[350] However, as far as Synge was concerned, suppositions on the veracity of Irish Celtology were all well and good, but the gap between theory and dramaturgical praxis needed to be bridged. Significantly, le Braz was able to do this:

> *Or, en, réalité, il n'y a qu'un seul people celtique chez laequel on ne connaisse aucun vestige de theatre, et – par une anomalie qui, au premier abord, a de quoi surprendre – c'est le people irlandais. Nul autre, on l'a*

[...] *Telles sont oes* [sic] *natures impétueuses et toutes primitives. Nous sommes loin de "l'extrême douceur de mœurs" que Renan a cru respirer "dans les compositions idéales des races celtiques."*'

[345] Anatole le Braz, *Le Théatre Celtique*, 5. My translation follows le Braz's original text: '*Au lieu d'une race douce, timide, isolée dans son rêve et dédaigneuse de l'effort, voici surgir, au contraite, des natures véhémentes, passionnées, presque brutales, avides d'action, ivres de mouvement et de bruit.*'

[346] Anatole le Braz, *Le Théatre Celtique*, 5.

[347] NLI MS: 778, ff.13r-13v. J.M. Synge to Max Meyerfeld, 12 September, 1905. It should be pointed out that there is some dispute whether it was Queen Elizabeth or Henry VIII that gave the Synge family its name. Certainly, one of these monarchs gave the family its name after hearing a chorister named Millington at Rochester Cathedral. See, Edward Synge, *The Synge Letters: Bishop Edward Synge to His Daughter, Alicia, Roscommon to Dublin, 1746-1752*, ed. Marie-Louise Legg (Dublin: Lilliput in association with the Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1996), xxiii.

[348] Cairns and Richards, *Writing Ireland*, 67.

[349] George Watson, "'Celticism' and the Annulment of History," 216.

[350] George Watson, "'Celticism' and the Annulment of History," 216. Emphasis in original.

> *vu, ne fut naturellement mieux doué pour inventer des situations fortes, créer des caractères d'une tremple peu banale, mener avec entrain une action pleine de mouvement et de vie. "A la fois violent et sensible, imaginative et batailleur", il a prodigué le drame dans l'épopée. Oui, mais il ne semble pas qu'il l'en ait jamias fait sortir. Alors que, peu à peu, au cours des ages, les genres littéraires en germe et comme en suspens dans l'ondoyante matière épique, – jurisprudence, médecine, géographie, histoire, - finissaient par s'isoler, se dégager, s'organiser, se developer chacun d'une existence proper, le genre dramatique ne parvint pas à se dissocier de la gangue primitive où il flottait à l'état de dialogues et de scenarios épars.*
>
> [For, in, reality, there is only one Celtic race with whom one does not recognise no vestige of theatre – for an anomaly which in the first instance is completely surprising – it is the Irish. No other that I have seen is as good at inventing striking situations, creating characters that are not touched by the banal, who can put into being with actions full of movement and life. "At the same time violent and sensitive, imaginative and combative" it has produced drama on the epic form. Undoubtedly, but it does not seem as if they could ever have detached it from that form. For, little by little, during the course of time, literary genres in their inception and as if suspending their epic flowing subject matters – jurisprudence, medicine, geography, history – ended up by isolating themselves, disengaging themselves, organising themselves, so that each one develops its own existence and the dramatic genre didn't manage to disassociate itself from the primitive rock where it floated in a state of scanty dialogues and scenes.][351]

When Celticism was put to work in the Irish Literary Theatre's premiere of Yeats's *Countess Cathleen* Synge, recently returned from ethnographic fieldwork (3-16 April 1899) in Quimper, Brittany, attended the performance. In his article for *L'Européen* (31 May, 1902), "Le Mouvement Intellectuel Irlandais," he recalled that '*à chaque séance, on voyait des ivrognes scandalisés qui débitaient, du haut des galleries, des observations morales à l'adresse de M. Yeats et de ses confrères* (at each performance, were to be seen scandalous drunks who shouted, from high up in the gallery, moral observations about the skill of Mr. Yeats and his colleagues.'[352] Significantly, Synge wasn't displeased by the mobilisation of Celticism and in this cheerful ignorance we can see that Synge had the potential to conveniently forget his studies in favour of a defence of Ascendancy integrity.

Two years after the performance, Synge published an article in the *Freeman's Journal* on the praxis of a Celtic theatre. The article compares and contrasts Irish theatre and the theatre of the 'Breton-speaking peasantry of Low or West Brittany'[353] and he points out that Irish theatre is caught up in the quotidian concern of attempting 'to replace the worthless plays now familiar to the public by artistic work'.[354] In contrast, the true Celtic theatre of Brittany was concerned with the 'survival of the sincere, if sometimes grotesque,

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[351] le Braz, *Le Théatre Celtique*, 46-47.
[352] *CW*, vol. 2: 380.
[353] J.M. Synge, "A Celtic Theatre," *Freeman's Journal*, 22 March, 1900, 4.
[354] Synge, "A Celtic Theatre," 4.

religious drama'[355] and, in conclusion, the dramatist foregrounds the Breton theatre because it is performed by 'the peasant actors who form the real interest of the movement.'[356] It is plausible to conjecture, then, that Synge privileges a Celtic theatre as long as it attempts to stage 'two streams of humanity – the old and the new'[357] so that a placement of the pre-modern within the modern is conducive to 'a pregnant luxuriance undreamed of hitherto, [because] from moments such as these depend the purer movements of mankind.'[358] If Synge had learnt from le Braz that a truly Celtic theatre in Ireland needed to re-establish itself with epic subject matter, then Synge would attempt to do this by creating a dramaturgy that negotiated the realm of the political by reconsidering epic subjects such as jurisprudence and history while keeping the savage grain of Celtic Ireland. His conception of a Celtic theatre would be his debt to le Braz and in the *Daily Express* he recounted how le Braz had informed him that in Ireland, pre-Christian 'survivals of the old have not for us the charms of lingering regret, but rather the incitement of a thing that is rare and beautiful'.[359] Whether Synge would always believe that the cultural residue from the pre-Christian was rare and beautiful would be certainly tested as the dramatist approached his mature plays. And it is to a consideration of how Synge's Modernist dramaturgy of the pre-Christian cultural residue is interrogated in five plays across three chapters in this dissertation that we must now turn in order to understand how his plays complicated Catholic bourgeois modernity with an aesthetic that was wrought with 'naked hideousness'.[360]

Chapter One: "The Cries of Pagan Desperation"[361]

Chapter One is concerned with Synge's dramatisation of magical realism in *Riders to the Sea*. In order to demonstrate the ways in which the play is far removed from the Abbey's predictable staging of cottage-kitchen realism, the chapter juxtaposes Synge's staging of pre-Christian homeopathic magical rituals against his knowledge of comparative social science and metaphysics.

Of significance in this chapter is Synge's understanding of primitive religion that he had learnt from James Frazer and Herbert Spencer because comparative anthropology (Frazer) and comparative sociology (Spencer) allowed Synge to understand the schematics of those residual aspects of pre-Christian culture that he encountered on the Aran Islands.

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[355] Synge, "A Celtic Theatre," 4.
[356] Synge, "A Celtic Theatre," 4.
[357] J.M. Synge, "Anatole Le Braz," *Daily Express*, 28 January, 1899, 3.
[358] Synge, "Anatole Le Braz," 3.
[359] Synge, "Anatole Le Braz," 3.
[360] Yeats, "Notes and Opinions," 6.
[361] *CW*, vol. 2: 75.

Of equal significance is Synge's mobilisation of Celtology because this discourse allowed the dramatist to understand the cultural efficacy of *caoineadh* (keening). Schopenhauer privileged tragic drama because it focussed on the individual's sublime attempt to alleviate *wille*: 'the summons to turn away the will from life remains the true tendency of tragedy, the ultimate purpose of the intentional presentation of the sufferings of mankind'.[362] Schopenhauer's influence permeates Synge's dramatisation of magical ritual that pluralises reality as the character Maurya transcends *wille* thorough music and Nature.

Riders to the Sea is set on Inis Meáin and if Paris introduced Synge to the efficacy of comparative social science, then it was on Aran that Synge was able to interact with a living, breathing, residual pre-Christian culture. In his notebook he remarked on his own astonishment: 'The antiquarian treasures of the islands are not strictly in the scope [of my] scattered notes'.[363] Based on the first four of his five annual visits, *The Aran Islands* provided Synge with the requisite material conditions upon which he could predicate a praxis of magical realism. Synge had come across the material conditions of Aran culture during his studies of pre-Christian antiquity in the work of William Stokes and George Petrie, where he had read that the 'old influences still hang about them; the old traditions of the time when the early saints of Ireland made holy their sea-grit and barren rocks'.[364] Popular culture in *fin-de-siècle* Ireland classified the Aran Islands in two specific ways; it was either a place where '[f]ew articulate-speaking men ever visit' and/or it was a place where 'Paganism and ancient Christianity have left in it remains [...] [and] amassed great treasure'.[365] However, even before Synge went to Aran in 1898, he was fully aware of Aran life because his uncle, the Rev. Alex Synge, had attempted to proselytize the islanders of Inis Mór. Uncle Alex failed to do so because he was preoccupied with creating a monopoly on the fishing industry; he and his skipper (who steered a modern vessel with a firearm) were violently threatened by the islanders because the monopolisation of the fishing industry proved to be the final straw. Uncle Alex's letters to his family reveal that while he 'got on with the [islanders]', he feared that things were about to change because he was preparing 'to attack their bad ways & religions etc'.[366] Chapter One suggests that Synge was certainly not of the same persuasion as uncle Alex by arguing that *Riders to the Sea* is Synge's best attempt at intervening within Catholic progressive historicism and therefore it

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[362] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 435.
[363] TCD MS: 4385, f.52v.
[364] William Stokes, *The Life and Labours in Art and Archæology of George Petrie* (London: Longmans Green, 1868), 47-48. Synge's notes point out that '[t]he Aran islanders were so honest before they were corrupted by communication with the mainland that if a purse was dropped any where on the islands it was sure to turn up in the course of time in the Chapel. They are a brave and hardy race, industrious' (TCD MS: 4375, ff.58v-57r).
[365] "Aran Mor," *Speaker* 17 (1898): 555-56.
[366] TCD ASMS: 6200, f.4v. Alexander Synge to Edward Synge, 19 July, 1851.

is also the dramatist's most considered and authentic dramatisation of pre-Christian cultural residue.

The chapter suggests that it is with significance that Synge utilised magical realism because it cajoled the Catholic, bourgeois spectator into developing a respect for pre-Christian cultural residue, precisely because the dramatic action was presented within the framework of cottage-kitchen realism. The chapter advocates that the mobilisation of this dramaturgical convention allowed Synge's spectator to reconsider the discrepancy between religious persuasion and political ideology in material conditions – if only briefly – from the perspective of subaltern culture. Synge was at pains to point out that *The Aran Islands* was written 'inventing nothing, and changing nothing that is essential.'[367] This statement barely belies Synge's intentions. The implication is clear, for what Synge is attempting to do is to deconstruct the essentialised Aran in popular culture, a process that would inevitably lead him into difficult straits. This is why Synge scholars have perennially raised an eyebrow over Synge's claim of veracity. However, while Synge may have doctored his field notes in order to construct a literary narrative, it is unlikely that he invented any of the material conditions that constituted the islanders' tenacious attachment to the pre-Christian residual culture. The Gaelic Leaguer Agnes O'Farrelly also visited Inis Méain in the same summer of Synge's first visit, even deciding to stay in the cottage that Synge had just vacated. Her anthropology of Aran life drew similar conclusions to Synge's. O'Farelly writes of how the *caoine* (keen) was 'the saddest sound I have ever heard'[368] and she also makes reference to 'the learned men' of Inis Méain that 'talk about the fairies who often visit the forts during the night-time, and of the castles which used to rise up out of the sea and the various miracles'.[369] And it is these two materialities of Irish pre-Christian cultural residue, the *caoine* and the fairy faith that fundamentally concern Synge's dramatisation of magical ritual in *Riders to the Sea*.

Chapter Two: "Priest-Ridden People"[370]

Chapter Two is concerned with Synge's dramatisation of the strange and mercurial powers of the Natural landscape that he understood to be a residue of pre-Christian pantheism. His knowledge of pre-Christian pantheism is explored in *The Shadow of the Glen*, *The Well of the Saints* and *The Tinker's Wedding*.

From a young age Synge was, by his own admittance, 'a worshipper of nature'.[371] His family circle recognised his interest in natural history and, when the boy was seven

[367] *CW*, vol. 2: 47.
[368] Agnes O'Farrelly, *Smaointe ar Árainn*, ed. Ríona Nic Congáil (Dublin: Arlen House, 2010), 108.
[369] O'Farrelly, *Smaointe ar Árainn*, 102.
[370] W.P. Ryan, *The Pope's Green Island* (London: James Nisbet, 1912), 41.

(1877), a family friend, Mr. John Joly, gave Synge the book *Birdie and Her Dog with Other Natural History Stories* for Christmas.[372] As a young man in puberty, Synge likened his sexual awakening to that of 'a pilgrim to the sun'.[373] As an adult, wandering amongst the Aran islanders, the natural order was at the front of his mind: 'the supreme interest of the islands lies in the strange concord that exists between the people and the impersonal limited but powerful impulses of the nature that is round them'.[374] Synge's fascination with Nature was nurtured and encouraged by the Dublin Naturalists' Field Club. As a member of the club he would listen to lectures by established academics and partake in field trips to Portmarnock and Howth in County Dublin.[375] The study of natural history marks Synge's first foray into the residue of pre-Christian Ireland and his knowledge of pre-Christian sensibility was advanced by the study of comparative social science and metaphysics.

In all three plays the one character that draws comfort and solace from the Natural landscape is the tramp/tinker and it is significant that Synge understood the tramp/tinker to be just like himself: 'The hunter, poacher and painter are the *only* men who know nature.'[376] Synge likened himself to the tramp because, like the tramps of his plays, he also considered himself to be in harmony with the Natural order and this is the kernel of pre-Christian pantheism. The chapter draws upon Synge's knowledge of pre-Christian pantheism, which he acquired from his studies of comparative social science and metaphysics. From Frazer, Spencer and de Jubainville, Synge understood how the residue of pre-Christian pantheism operated as material praxis in pre-Christian Ireland and in the glens of Wicklow he identified a residual sentiment for this pre-Christian praxis. The chapter also suggests that Synge's view of residual pre-Christian pantheism was considerably influenced by his study of metaphysics in the work of Baruch de Spinoza and Schopenhauer. Synge's synthesis of these two opposing philosophical positions allowed him to negotiate residual pre-Christian pantheism as the divinity of Nature that was conducive towards the alleviation of *wille* and the postulation of Ideas.

In *The Shadow of the Glen*, Synge dramatises the Tramp as a figure that has the consummate understanding of pre-Christian pantheism, as he is able to lead Nora through the mystery of the glens of Wicklow. In describing this action, the dramatist necessarily complicates the bourgeois habitations of Catholic propriety. In *The Tinker's Wedding*, Synge uses residual pre-Christian pantheism in order to explicitly critique how the Catholic clergy adhered to precepts of Popular Catholicism and while the play was not staged in

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[371] *CW*, vol. 2: 5.
[372] TCD SSMS: 6214.
[373] *CW*, vol. 2: 13.
[374] *CW*, vol. 2: 75.
[375] Synge joined the Field Club as one of its original members in 1886 and rejoined in 1887. Membership was five shillings. See, TCD SSMS: 6213, f.4.
[376] *CW*, vol. 2: 10. Emphasis added.

Synge's lifetime this suggests that a precursor to the play was *The Well of the Saints*. For if Schopenhauer argued that the appreciation of the noumenal within the phenomenal is 'very like that of an operation for cataract on a blind man',[377] then the chapter argues that the character of the Saint who cures the blindness of Mary and Martin Doul is a Protestant tramp with the ability to identify the noumenal. From his studies in pre-Christian antiquity, Synge would have been aware that there was said to be at least three different St. Patricks and he would have to search no further for evidence of this than the scholarship of G.T. Stokes: 'Patrick (Patricius) was rather a title of honour than a personal name in the strict sense of the word'.[378] Stokes concluded that St. Patrick was 'rude and unlettered'[379] and that the miracles that the Saint was said to have performed were speculative if not spurious. Stokes's hagiography of St. Patrick's miracles concluded that 'no miracle is too absurd or too incredible for the writers.'[380] But, in comparison to St. Patrick's *Confessio* (Confession), 'the writings of St. Patrick himself contain no miraculous stories; they are simple and natural histories. Two centuries elapse, and miracles begin to cluster round the memory of the saint.'[381] Thus, the analysis presented in *The Well of the Saints* suggests that the Saint as tramp is able to draw miraculous powers from a pre-Christian system of belief that invests divinity in the Irish landscape. And so, if the Priest in *The Tinker's Wedding* adhered to the precepts of Popular Catholicism then, in *The Well* Synge dramatises the Catholic laity's lingering attachment to Popular Catholicism. The chapter concludes by foregrounding the pertinence of Synge's decision to dramatise the Saint as a Protestant because it marks his first solipsistic retreat to his Ascendancy class as he began to withdraw under the increasing attacks on his plays made by the Catholic bourgeoisie. But the retreat came at a price and, whereas in *Riders to the Sea* and *The Shadow of the Glen* the dramatist privileged pre-Christian cultural residue for its own sake, in *The Well of the Saints*, *The Tinker's Wedding* and *The Playboy of the Western World* he began to use it to defend himself and, by corollary, the class into which he was born.

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[377] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1: xv.

[378] G.T. Stokes, *Ireland and the Celtic Church: A History of Ireland from St. Patrick to the English Conquest in 1172* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1886), 27. While there is no manuscript evidence to suggest that Synge read this work, it is very likely that Synge had read Stokes's work because his undergraduate studies at Trinity College required a strong foundation in ecclesiastical history. In his notebook Synge made notes that could have easily been taken from Stokes's work such as: '[t]wo works of Patrick are extant; his Confessions and his Epistle' (TCD MS: 4373, f.12v) and '[t]he Romans put down the Druids; but legalized tribal organization. Each tribe was ruled by its chief but there was a king at Meath over them who held a convention every 5 or 7 years at Tara the last assembly of its tribe was in 563 AD.' (TCD MS: 4373, f.13v). Certainly, we know that Synge read Stokes's, *Ireland and the Anglo-Norman Church: A History of Ireland and Irish Christianity from the Anglo-Norman Conquest to the Dawn of the Reformation* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897) in July 1892; Synge began reading the text on 13 July and finished it seventeen days later (TCD MS: 4413, f.61v and f.69r).

[379] Stokes, *Ireland and the Celtic Church*, 27.

[380] Stokes, *Ireland and the Celtic Church*, 31.

[381] Stokes, *Ireland and the Celtic Church*, 32.

Chapter Three: "The Changeling of the Western World"

Chapter Three interrogates *The Playboy of the Western World* by considering how Synge's scientific analysis of changeling folklore refracted the Romanticism of pre-Christian anachronism within the Ireland of Synge's time.

In 1898 Yeats wrote a letter to William Sharp (who wrote under the pseudonym of Fiona Macleod) from Paris saying that he had met 'a new man – TCD graduate' and that he had 'started [him] in folklore'.[382] If Yeats really did introduce Synge to the study of folklore then his analysis was diametrically opposed to Synge's. What separated the two analyses was the efficacy of comparative social science; in February 1889 Yeats would write a letter to Gregory from Paris: 'I have seen Synge. He is a really and most excellent servant. He works very hard & is learning Breton. He will be a very useful scholour [sic]'.[383] Synge had been studying comparative social science as early as 1894. In March of that year, his German friend, Valeska von Eicken, wrote to Synge in Würzburg: 'Probably a little disturbance in your lonely life of art and science at which you are now so busy will do you good. Therefore I shall disturb your peace today and write you this ordinary letter[,] which is neither a scientific nor an artistic essay.'[384] His postgraduate studies in Paris refined his scholarship of comparative social science and in February 1889 Synge, the scholar of comparative social science, was busy juxtaposing Aran folklore with various discourses that he had been asked to research by his professors.

Folklore and subaltern culture, as Diarmuid Ó Giolláin suggests, are synonymous.[385] Gramsci repeatedly turned towards folklore in order to define subaltern consciousness because it included 'the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting.'[386] The scientific study of folklore, predicated upon subterranean culture and the death of tradition appeared in Irish cultural discourse as folklore was disappearing and during the Revival it was seen as an umbilical cord to an innate Irish culture that had not emanated from the colonial garrison in Dublin Castle. It should come as no surprise that Synge's scientific understanding of folklore differentiated from the material conditions of the Catholic bourgeoisie but his analysis, while counter-hegemonic, only succeeded in enforcing Catholic hegemony as disturbances ensued. The chapter suggests that whereas Synge's previous dramatisations of residual pre-Christian sensibilities attempted to privilege the agency of the pre-modern, and pre-political, Irish

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[382] Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 2: 213. W.B. Yeats to William Sharp, 4 July, 1898.

[383] Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 2: 359. W.B. Yeats to Lady Gregory, 14 February, 1899.

[384] Valeska von Eicken, quoted in Greene and Stephens, *J.M. Synge: 1871-1909*, 38. Valeska Von Eicken to J.M. Synge, 1 March, 1894.

[385] Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, *Locating Irish Folklore: Tradition, Modernity, Identity* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), 3.

[386] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 323.

subject, in *The Playboy of the Western World* Synge chose to foreground the punitive understanding of the pre-Christian cultural residue within the Ireland of his time in order to defend himself from the 'scurrility and ignorance and treachery'[387] of the Catholic bourgeoisie.

Éilís ní Dhuibhne-Almqvist suggests that Synge's understanding of folklore was 'much better than that of his great contemporaries in the Anglo-Irish revival, something that Yeats himself, far too subjective to be anything than a thorn in the side of folklorists, probably knew as well as anybody'.[388] However, the chapter concludes by suggesting that although Synge's scientific analysis of folklore may have been diametrically opposed to Yeats's, the dramatist ultimately conformed to Yeats's philosophy on 'the free life of the stage'.[389] In 1905, Yeats published his "Preface to the First Edition of *The Well of the Saints*," in which he praises the dramatists of the German stage because they conveyed 'politics or social passion, a veiled or open propaganda' in favour of 'hopes and alarms common to every man that ever came into the world'.[390] With this European impetus, Yeats concluded that what 'has need of reproof [...] is the hostility of Christianity and Paganism in our day'[391] because to reproof such hostility will ostensibly restore harmony to Irish socio-politics. It is with significance that Yeats espoused his philosophy of theatre practice as a means of distributing the sensible (to borrow Rancière's phrase) *apropos* Synge's drama, which is marked by 'the hostility of Christianity and Paganism',[392] because it presented Yeats with the opportunity to negotiate historical time in order to privilege what he considered to be the 'bloody, arrogant power' of the Ascendancy.[393] 'Behind all Irish history' remarked Yeats was 'a great tapestry' that was specifically pre-Christian and so 'even Christianity had to accept it and be itself pictured there. Nobody looking at its dim folds can say where Christianity begins and Druidism ends'.[394] As far as Yeats was concerned, the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland was the *sine qua non* of Irish history, and the question that this chapter concludes with, is this: did Synge dramatise the residue from pre-Christian Ireland to negotiate the Ascendancy's anxiety over their Irish heritage, or was it because he had difficulty accepting that the wanton cultural imperialism that was articulated by the Catholic Church and its newly enfranchised bourgeois-laity exploited the residue from pre-Christian Ireland.

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[387] *CW,* vol. 2: 283n.
[388] Éilís ní Dhuibhne-Almqvist, "Synge's use of Popular Material in *The Shadow of the Glen*," *Béaloideas: The Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society* 58 (1990): 167.
[389] Yeats, *Essays and Introductions,* 302.
[390] Yeats, *Essays and Introductions,* 302.
[391] Yeats, *Essays and Introductions,* 302.
[392] Yeats, *Essays and Introductions,* 302.
[393] Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, 480.
[394] Yeats, *Essays and Introductions,* 513-14.

'To Relieve our Fallen Kind'[395]

Shortly after Synge's death, Yeats argued that the dramatist's work 'is precisely the work that is dangerous with an Irish audience. It is very hard to understand, and, therefore, the very desire to do so makes them impatient with it.'[396] Synge's dramatisation of the residue of pre-Christian culture forces the question of what it means to take seriously those materialisms that disrupt the relationship between economic base and cultural superstructure. For if the materialism of the cultural vestiges of pre-Christian Ireland is predicated upon the sublimation of repressed logic by the subject-agent that progressive historicism disregards, then those subaltern pasts are only allowed access to the habitations of modernity if they can be qualified by an Enlightened rationality. 'Who the hell wants to museumize or protect subalternity?' asks Spivak, '[o]nly reactionary, dubious, anthropologistic museumizers?'[397] However, for Synge, the whole point was that pre-Christian sensibilities within the Catholic present could be rationally qualified and he had the scholarly knowledge to substantiate it. This is why he adopted such a staunch and unswerving defence of his work: 'what I write of Irish country life I know to be true and I most empathically will not change as a syllable of it because A. B. or C. may think they know better than I do.'[398]

Synge's attempt to pluralise the progressivism of Catholic history was always going to be a tall order for an Ascendancy dramatist, which is why, in the privacy of his own notebook, Synge wrote a short poem about the impossibility of the task that he had set himself:

> And yet you will not bend your mind
> To relieve our fallen kind.
> Religion is, I fear, the cause
> You think you're right who keep her laws
> And preach an unavailing creed
> Which history tells us fills no need.[399]

Kiberd has argued that Synge believed in 'a fusion of the two Irelands, Gaelic and Anglo-Irish, so that neither should shed its pride'.[400] The analysis presented in this dissertation will suggest that while this was certainly Synge's original intention, as the dramatist approached his mature plays he would adopt an increasing recalcitrance towards the very possibility of a fusion between the two Irelands. And so, while Synge may have once attempted to

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[395] TCD MS: 4371, ff.31r-31v.
[396] W.B. Yeats, "Fighting the Censor," *Irish Independent*, 25 August, 1909, 5.
[397] Spivak, quoted in de Kock, "Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa," 46.
[398] *CW,* vol. 3: xxiv.
[399] TCD MS: 4371, ff.31r-31v.
[400] Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 5.

foreground the political agency of the modern Irish subject that rationalised his or her material reality with the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland, he would ultimately find it difficult to remain faithful to his admirable intention as he struggled to resist the perspective of one of the 'reactionary, dubious, anthropologistic musemizers'.[401] This struggle is neatly summarised in D.P. Moran's critique of the Ascendancy man who was prone to think that 'Catholics are superstitious and he believes in spooks himself; he thinks they are priest-ridden and he would like to go back to Paganism'.[402] Nevertheless, even those that supported progressive Catholicism in Synge's Ireland, such as Patrick Kenny, W.P. Ryan and M.J.F. McCarthy, repeatedly pointed out that '[t]he potency of the priest implies a radical weakness in the national character; but it is the priest's interest to perpetuate that weakness and to foster it until it becomes a national imbecility'.[403] And so, this struggle, in which the discrepancy between religion and politics collide and collude, necessitates the concomitance of deceit and betrayal as Moran's supposition that Ireland was '*de facto* a Catholic nation'[404] is subject to Synge's scrutiny. It should come as no surprise, then, that the dramatist emerges in this dissertation as the consummation of his alter ego: 'the playfellow of Judas'[405] and where there is betrayal there is, as Synge suggests, a '[s]orrow's sauce for every kiss'.[406]

[401] Spivak, quoted in de Kock, "Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa," 46.
[402] Moran, "Protestants and The Irish Nation," 342.
[403] M.J.F. McCarthy, *Priests and People in Ireland* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1914), 8.
[404] Moran, "Protestants and The Irish Nation," 343.
[405] *CW,* vol. 2: 11.
[406] *CW,* vol. 1: 51.

CHAPTER ONE

'THE CRIES OF PAGAN DESPERATION'[1]

These people make no distinction between the natural and the supernatural.

- J.M. Synge[2]

J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904) is symptomatic of a hackneyed (but extremely popular) style that was peculiar to the Abbey Theatre's formative years: cottage kitchen realism. Synge went to extraordinary lengths in order to ensure that there be 'no fake about the show'[3] and the authenticity of realism in *Riders to the Sea* can hardly be overstated. Synge set the play on Inis Meáin and from his Aran acquaintance Michael Costello (Máirtín Mac Dhonnchadha), Synge managed to import authentic Aran textiles for the costume department. He even managed to bring the company to a workshop with an ailing Aran exile that lived in a rotting Dublin tenement. Lady Gregory neatly summarised Synge's dedication to the realist aesthetic when she feared that 'local smells'[4] would be brought into the theatre. Even Joseph Holloway, the architect (and frequent spectator) of the Abbey Theatre, congratulated Synge on 'the naturalness of the whole episode'.[5] But when writing *Riders to the Sea* Synge was acutely aware of just how limiting realism could be, especially when reduced to a naturalist aesthetic, which is why he would later criticise 'the reality of life' in the work of Henrik Ibsen and Émile Zola.[6]

When Synge first read *Riders to the Sea* (hereafter *Riders*) to his colleagues at Lady Gregory's London (Westminster) accommodation at Queen Anne's Mansions, Petty France on 20 January 1903, the reading was, as Synge wrote in his diary, 'met with much approval'.[7] The play would be subject to two further dramaturgical interrogations across the subsequent fortnight as W.B. Yeats invited the great and the good of English literature (G.K. Chesterton, John Masefield, Pamela Colman Smith), with the star attraction being Arthur Symons who had visited Inis Meáin with Yeats in 1896. Yeats and Symons were in agreement that the short one act play was a masterpiece of cottage kitchen realism; Symons even sought the dramatist's permission to publish the play in *Fortnightly Review*.[8] But not everyone was convinced. One of the very first readers of *Riders* was James Joyce, whom

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[1] *CW*, vol. 2: 75.
[2] *CW*, vol. 2: 128.
[3] *CW*, vol. 3: xix.
[4] Lady Gregory, *Seventy Years: Being the Autobiography of Lady Gregory* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 415.
[5] Joseph Holloway, NLI MS: 1805, 12 January, 1907, f.30.
[6] *CW*, vol. 2: 53.
[7] TCD MS: 4422, f.4r.
[8] Synge's diary for 12 February, 1903 reads thus: 'Letter from Symons asking my play for "Fortnightly"' (TCD MS: 4422, f.7v).

Synge frequently met at a bistro café on the Rue Saint André des Arts in Paris.[9] Joyce considered Synge to be 'a great lump of a man who could not be argued with',[10] but nevertheless, the two men managed to argue about *Riders*. 'I am glad to say,' wrote Joyce to his brother, Stanislaus, after reading the *Riders* manuscript, 'that ever since I read it I have been riddling it mentally till it has [not] a sound spot. It is tragic about all the men that are drowned in the islands: but thanks be to God Synge isn't an Aristotelian'.[11] In defence Synge told Joyce that '[i]t's a good play, as good as any one-act play can be', but Joyce refused to listen and dismissed it as a 'dwarf-drama'.[12] Joyce's dislike, however, was just a cover-up; shortly after Synge's death, Joyce wrote to Synge's elder brother, Edward, requesting permission to stage a version of *Riders* that he had translated into Italian with his friend, a Triestine lawyer named Nicolò Vidacovich. Unable to reach an agreement with Joyce, Edward Synge was forced to gracefully decline, which led an incandescent Joyce to send Edward to the same place he had sent the younger Synge: 'the Wicklow quarter of hell'.[13]

Six months before Joyce and Synge met, Joyce was, as he told his brother, 'feeling very intellectual these times and up to my eyes in Aristotle's Psychology';[14] the following month (March 1903) he wrote to his mother (Mary Jane Joyce) to inform her how he was 'at present up to the neck in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and read only him'.[15] Joyce held Aristotle in such a high regard that any tragic form that deviated from Aristotle's precepts was less than satisfactory. Accordingly, Joyce maintained he disliked *Riders* because it was 'all in one act'[16] and also because the tragedy was consummated by an animal ('the grey pony'[17]) and therefore the play was supposedly far removed from Aristotle's definition of tragedy.[18] 'Yeats told me [*Riders*] was quite Greek: and I suppose Synge will be boomed now by the Irish Theatre', Joyce wrote to his brother.'[19] He was correct; Yeats felt that the play was symptomatic of the drama of Aeschylus, and at the reading of the play he declared his suppositions. Oliver St. John Gogarty recalled Yeats's initial reaction to the play:

> Maud Gonne sat on the opposite side of the table. Synge was at one end by Lady Gregory. Patrick Column sat next to me. Suddenly Yeats exclaimed in admiration of a scene he was reading:

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[9] Synge met Joyce on 21 September, 1903 and Synge's diary reads thus: 'met Joyce' (TCD MS: 4422, f.20r).
[10] Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce: New and Revised Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 124.
[11] James Joyce, *The Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 2, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 35. James Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, 9 March, 1903.
[12] Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 124.
[13] Joyce, *The Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 2: 244. James Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, 2 September, 1909.
[14] Joyce, *The Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 2: 28. James Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, 8 February, 1903.
[15] Joyce, *The Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 2: 38. James Joyce to Mrs. John Stanislaus Joyce, 20 March, 1903.
[16] Joyce, *The Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 2: 35. James Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, 9 March, 1903.
[17] *CW*, vol. 3: 19.
[18] Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 124.
[19] Joyce, *The Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 2: 35. James Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, 9 March, 1903.

'Aeschylus!'
'Who does he mean?' Colum whispered, amazed.
'Synge, who is like Aeschylus'
'But who is Aeschylus?'
'The man who is like Synge.'[20]

What Yeats could see that Joyce could not, is that which Aeschylus accomplished in his trilogy, *The Oresteia* (458 BC): a seamless interchange between the supernatural and the material world of sensory data so that the divine retribution upon the House of Atreus could be incorporated within narrative realism. Contrary to what Joyce postulated, *Riders* does, in fact, neatly measure against Aristotle's treatise on tragedy. It is true that Aristotle had doubts over tragedies in the one act form because they would not be of an adequate length to be conducive towards a cathartic impulse. But they were doubts only; 'tragedy is mimesis of an action that is complete, whole, and of magnitude (for one can have a whole which lacks magnitude). A whole is that which has a beginning, middle, and end.'[21] The length of *Riders* may lack magnitude but it certainly is a mimesis of action that has a beginning, middle and an end. The reason why *Riders* gets into difficult Aristotelian straits is because of Synge's introduction of supernatural phenomena ('the grey pony'[22]) to consummate tragedy because, for Aristotle, tragedy 'should not comprise irrational components; ideally there should be no irrationality, or, failing that, it should lie outside the plot (as with Oedipus' ignorance of how Laius died), not inside the drama'.[23] Unlike Aeschylus, Synge had brought the supernatural onstage in *Riders*; the grey pony may remain offstage but there is a wealth of pre-Christian supernatural beliefs onstage. But according to Aristotle he was entitled to.

The only way Aristotle would allow the supernatural to appear onstage is if it was necessitated by 'popular belief' and this interchange between the two temporalities of realism reconsidered the tragic paradigm. Aristotle advocated that it is better to convince the spectator of something that is beyond the real rather than attempting to represent something that is real in an unconvincing manner; 'something plausible though impossible [is] preferable to what is possible but implausible.'[24] 'Refer irrationalities to what people say', was Aristotle's injunction to the tragedians of the future, because 'there is also the defence that they are sometimes *not* irrational since it is probable that improbable things did occur'.[25] Aristotle's suppositions concerning the introduction of the supernatural into the

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[20] Oliver St. John Gogarty, *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street: A Phantasy in Fact* (London: Rich and Cowan, 1937), 289.
[21] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans and ed. Stephen Halliwell (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 55.
[22] *CW,* vol. 3: 19.
[23] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 125.
[24] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 135.
[25] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 135. Emphasis in original.

hegemony of literary realism governed stagings from Greek tragedy right through to medieval morality plays and onwards to the Gothic literature of the nineteenth century. Synge, like the authors of these disparate literary styles before him, invites the reader of the theatrical text to question the mimetic constraints of realism by constructing his or her own understanding of reality from a narrative that identifies the sacred within the profane. If Synge's spectators expected to watch a traditional tragedy that adhered to Aristotelian received convention, which maintained that the supernatural should be kept backstage at all costs, then their expectations would have been deeply confounded. Although the sensory data of *Riders* completely conformed to realistic convention, this was, in fact, Synge's way of suturing the spectator within a familiar horizon, of realistic expectation; this is why Nicholas Grene correctly concludes that '[t]he supernatural in Synge is oddly matter-of-fact and un-mysterious'.[26] Synge knew that once his spectator was sufficiently comfortable with the familiar material referentiality of the stage picture, he could then complicate the objective truth of realism with those supernatural phenomena that permeated the material conditions of Inis Meáin. For if his visits to Aran had taught Synge anything, it was that the hegemony of realism is perennially suspicious of those supernatural phenomena that are characterised as unreal. And in *Riders* the presence of supernatural phenomena within the parameters of realism is categorical, to the extent that Edward Kopper argues: 'The play contains so many pre-Christian references that it might be convincingly argued that *Riders* is shaded in the direction of the pagan'.[27] Cottage kitchen realism is magically subverted in *Riders* and Synge subverts it by accounting for the supernatural through Nature, illocution, divination and death laments. All these dramaturgical conventions can be traced back to Aeschylus, with whose work Synge was familiar.[28] *Riders*, then, is no tragedy of cottage kitchen realism but a tragedy of magical realism.

The dramaturgy of *Riders* is in dialogue with the fundamental principles of the mode of writing that would subsequently come to be known as magical realism, a counter-normative literary style that privileges ontological and ideological disruption so that magic can culturally correct received conventions of realism that include, but are not limited to, causality, motivation and materiality. Magical realism is parasitic on literary realism because it uses the convention of realism to structure a safe place for ontology and ideology but then complicates them by mobilising cultural discourses that it considers to be just as "real" as the discourses that conventional literary realism mobilises. More often than not,

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[26] Nicholas Grene, *Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 54.

[27] Edward A. Kopper Jr., "Towards an Assessment," in *A J.M. Synge Literary Companion*, ed. Edward A. Kopper Jr. (London: Greenwood, 1988), 216.

[28] TCD MS: 4413, f.24r. It should be pointed out that it is not categorically clear that Synge read *The Oresteia*. Synge's diary for 29 April, 1892 reads thus: 'Stories from the Greek Tragedians by Church'. Alfred J. Church's work narrates the supernatural mythos that Aeschylus used in *The Oresteia*'s literary realism. Synge spent a considerable amount of time on this work, finishing it on 6 May, 1892 (TCD MS: 4412, f.27v).

these cultural discourses are pre-Christian in their genealogy and they include the performative aspects of postcolonial oral cultures where myth, legend, folklore, superstition and magical ritual constitute supernatural narratives of realism, rather than the normative literary narrative of realism. At this cultural disjuncture these oral and fundamentally pre-modern narratives supply magical realism with a wealth of narrative possibility and their application in literary narratives of magical realism revitalises and re-constitutes pre-Christian residual culture within the cultural hegemony of modernity. Accordingly, Synge's narrative of what will here be referred to as magical realism gives credence to a subterranean culture where patterns of residual pre-Christian belief puncture and problematise the homogeneity of cottage kitchen realism.[29]

James Frazer argued that 'an Age of Religion' had forced people to 'abandon magic as a principle and practice',[30] but Synge's narrative of magical realism in *Riders* suggests otherwise and the play draws strength from three pre-Christian homeopathic magical rituals: the Evil Eye, a magical illocutionary rite with punitive effects; the *Imbas Forosnaí* (Illumination by the Palms of the Hands), a ritual practice that involved divination of supernatural phenomena; and *caoineadh* (keening), the ancient-Irish lament for the dead. If the functionalist approach to ritual maintains that 'ritual is a means to regulate and stabilise

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[29] It should be noted that magical realism only achieved critical currency in 1925 (long after Synge's premature passing in 1909) through Franz Roh's discourse on post-Expressionistic art. However, the principles of magical realism were first theorised by Novalis (Friedrich Leopold Hardenberg) in the late eighteenth century. Novalis's philosophy postulates the efficacy of magical idealism, that is to say, Novalis questions how the *magischer Idealist* (magical Idealist) can create a synthesis between realism and idealism. It is not that magical idealism attempts to subsume idealism into realism but rather, it posits that a magical ideal exists within the hegemony of sensory data. According to Novalis, the noumenal exists within the phenomenal, which makes realism magical: '*Der Übergang von Monotonie zur Harmonie wird freylich durch Disharmonie gehn – und nur am Ende wird eine Harmonie entstehn. In der Periode der Magie dient der Körper det Seele, order der Geisterwelt.* (The transition from monotony to harmony passes effortlessly through disharmony – and only at the end does harmony exist. In the interval magic is of service to the body of the soul or the spirit world).' See, Novalis, *Schriften*, vol. 2, *Das Philisophische Werk I*, trans. Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz (Stuggart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1960), 546-47. Novalis's magical idealism distinguishes between objective reality and a subjective, self-referential reality that depends upon mystical intuition and, therefore, magical idealism finds the separation between subject and object problematic. As Frederick C. Beiser points out, the essence of Novalis's magical idealism is that 'Novalis imagines that someday we will have the power to direct our internal ones. This analogy appears in the context of the common eighteenth-century distinction between inner and outer sense. Novalis locates external sense in the body, internal sense in the soul. Through the body we perceive stimuli in the external world, whereas through the soul we perceive stimuli within ourselves. Thanks to our powers of attention and abstraction, Novalis writes, we have great control over out internal sense. We have the power to determine what we perceive within ourselves by abstracting form, or directing our attention to, some things rather than others. Is it also not possible, Novalis asks, for us to have the same degree of control over our external sense, if we only educate this latent power?' (Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002], 422). Novalis understood the two essential principles of magical idealism to be poetry and medicine. The *magischer Idealist*, then, uses poetry and medicine to turn thoughts into tangible objects and tangible objects into thoughts. In this way, the *magischer Idealist* demonstrates how the noumenal is both internalised within the mind and externalised in objects. Arthur Schopenhauer's metaphysics is in philosophical dialogue with Novalis's philosophy because Schopenhauer proceeds to problematise the relationship with the noumenal and the phenomenal through experience of the Idea that is found in Nature and music. Thus, although *Riders* is not concomitant with the birth of magical realism as a literary discourse, it is undoubtedly in dialogue with magical realism's fundamental philosophical concerns.

[30] James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 55.

the life of [social discourse], adjust its internal interactions, maintain its group ethos, and restore a state of harmony after any disturbance',[31] then Synge's dramatisation of magical ritual in *Riders* is solely concerned with negotiating social order on Inis Meáin and, in accordance with magical realism's narrative effects, these three rituals problematised Synge's perceiving subject's imagined security of cottage kitchen realism. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to demonstrate how, twenty-one years before magical realism achieved its title as a literary style, Synge wrote *Riders* as magical realism. In order to give credence to this supposition, *Riders* will be juxtaposed with magical realism's narrative trademarks. Furthermore, the analysis will explore Synge's notebooks in order to demonstrate how his dramaturgy is predicated upon his knowledge of comparative social science and metaphysics. As Maggie Ann Bowers has suggested, magical realism is employed as a narrative mode by authors who wish to give credence to a 'particular attitude to non scientific and non-pragmatic beliefs in a world which is universally influenced by a science and pragmatism.'[32] *Riders*, however, is influenced by the dramatist's scholarship of comparative social science, and it had to be. After returning from Aran in September 1898, the dramatist needed to turn towards the pragmatism of comparative social science in order to understand material conditions on Aran. However, the pragmatism of comparative social science is tempered by Arthur Schopenhauer's metaphysics and these two discourses are dialectically engaged in the play as the dramatist explores how knowledge of pre-Christian cultural residue necessitates the consummate knowledge of the Idea and the subsequent negotiation of *wille*. And if *wille* is conducive towards suffering and pain, then, for Synge, the realisation of *wille* for Maurya and her family and, indeed, for his spectators, is the only way to ensure the cessation of a tragic turn of events.

'Reality to Those who Witness it'[33]

As Synge packed his suitcase for his first trip to Aran in May 1898, his inventory included the work of that early-eighteenth-century mystic, Emmanuel Swedenborg.[34] It is true that Synge had borrowed books on theosophy and the occult from Stephen MacKenna in Paris and, in the final months of 1897, Synge, after meeting Æ (George Russell), began attending Dublin's Theosophical Society; as MacKenna suggested, his attendance increased 'under the influence of Yeats',[35] who was a founding member of the society.[36] We can be clear as

[31] Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 29.
[32] Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 4.
[33] Joseph Holloway, NLI MS: 1802, 26 February, 1904, f.100.
[34] Synge began reading Swedenborg's *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell from Things Heard and Seen* on 3 April, 1898 (TCD MS: 4419, f.40r).
[35] Stephen MacKenna, NLI MS: 13,276, f.16.

to what attracted the dramatist towards Swedenborgian mysticism. Swedenborg argued that a world of supernatural phenomena could be appreciated through the self-application of an inner eye. Swedenborg's *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell from Things Heard and Seen* would have encouraged the young dramatist to renounce a scientific understanding of the universe and, instead, immerse himself in a world of Christian revelation, where angels would highlight correspondences between the sacred and the profane. Synge's notes may only reveal Swedenborg's debt to Christian teaching ('all life is from the Lord. The Lord is the all in all of Heaven'),[37] but Swedenborg's attraction to theosophical circles is in little doubt as esoteric cliques would use Swedenborg's thought not so much to identify god's mystery on earth, but as a handbook for occult practice. Synge was certainly interested in Swedenborg and while he may have dabbled in theosophical practice, being a pragmatist, he was unable to heed Swedenborg's injunction that requested the rejection of scientific enquiry. Nevertheless, Swedenborg did rekindle Synge's investigation into the hegemony of realism and when writing *Riders* Synge was acutely aware of two differential realities and concerned with how they could be made to dovetail seamlessly within his Modernist dramaturgy.

Synge's notebooks make it unequivocally clear that the dramatist philosophised the reality of life as two temporal modes of existence: '[our] reality [is] conceivable in connexion with an absolute reality'.[38] He had come to this conclusion shortly before his twenty-second birthday in 1893 (nine years prior to his first draft of *Riders*), after he had finished reading Arthur Schopenhauer's suppositions on the relationship between the noumenal and the phenomenal, which state that 'our world is nothing else than the appearance'.[39] If Kant postulated a reality that exists independently of human existence, which in turn, makes realism a problematic illusion because it is 'connected with other knowledge as a limitation of given concepts, but whose objective reality cannot be known in any manner',[40] then what Schopenhauer added to Kant's postulate was not just that the noumenal is the kernel of truth behind all phenomena, but also that the noumenal as *wille* could be bypassed by a higher form of consciousness that encompasses the Idea of existence. For Schopenhauer, if a consciousness could appreciate *wille* then by corollary that person, the pure subject of knowledge, would be able to understand that realism as humans know it, isn't "real" at all:

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[36] The Theosophical Society was originally called the Dublin Hermetic Society and was found in 1885. It changed to the Theosophical Society in 1890.
[37] TCD MS: 4378, f.62v.
[38] TCD MS: 4379, f.93r.
[39] Arthur Schopenhauer, "Supplement II: On The Metaphysics of Music," in Richard Wagner, *Beethoven: With a Supplement from the Philosophical Works of Arthur Schopenhauer*, trans. Edward Dannreuther (London: W.M. Reeves, 1903), 161.
[40] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Alexander Meiklejohn and ed. Vasilis Politis (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), 213.

> According to realism, the world is supposed to exist, as we know it, independently of this knowledge. Now let us once remove from it all knowing beings, and thus leave behind only inorganic and vegetable nature. Rock, tree, and brook are there, and the blue sky; sun, moon, and stars illuminate this world as before, only of course to no purpose, since there exists no eye to see such things. But then let us subsequently put into the world a knowing being. That world then presents itself *once more* in his brain. [...] Thus to the *first* world a *second* has been added, which, although completely separated from the first, resembles it to a nicety. [...] [A]ll this proves absurd enough, and thus leads to the conviction that the absolutely *objective* world outside the head, independent of it and *prior* to all knowledge, which we at first imagined we had conceived, was already no other than the second world already known *subjectively*, the world of the representation, and that it is this alone which we are actually capable of conceiving.[41]

From his studies of Schopenhauer's philosophy, Synge understood that mankind's flaw is to let the world 'pass by us like an empty dream, or a ghostly vision not worth our consideration'.[42] According to Schopenhauer, if humans could exercise the correct categories of the mind then the matrix of our material existence would become alarmingly clear and, all of a sudden, 'the inborn realism which arises from the original disposition of the intellect' would be expelled.[43] Synge was fascinated by Schopenhauer's postulate, which proceeds to substantiate, at length, that our experience of reality is just a simulacrum of suffering that is idealised by the perceiving subject. Consequently, Schopenhauer occupied Synge's thoughts and time and again the dramatist would reach for his notebook so that he could muse over the authenticity of the realistic aesthetic: 'Real? The conception of reality can be nothing more than some mode of consciousness and the question to be considered is – What is the relation between this and other modes?[44] Thus, Swedenborg's mysticism merely catalysed Synge to return to Schopenhauer's metaphysics and question his own comprehension of ontology and existentiality: 'Metaphysics is nothing but an analysis of our knowledge by means of our knowledge and inquiry by our own intelligence into the decisions of our intelligence....our own intelligence fundamentally untrustworthy? Intelligence cannot prove its own invalidity, because it must postulate its validity in doing this.'[45] When combined, these two discourses created a curious dialectic that the dramatist would then manipulate in order to form his narrative of magical realism, which would, in turn, pluralise reality so that the spectator of *Riders* could be afforded a new metaphysical understanding of his or her own ontology.

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[41] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 9-10. Emphasis in original.
[42] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 99.
[43] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1: xxiii.
[44] TCD MS: 4379, f.94r.
[45] TCD MS: 4379, f.85v.

The efficacy of the interchange of the natural and supernatural that Synge frequently encountered on Aran can hardly be overstated because it encouraged Synge to cast a critical eye on the banality of phenomenal existence. With each visit to Aran his incredulity towards realism slowly increased. So for example, in December 1899, after Synge's second visit to Aran, the dramatist began reading Herbert Spencer's *The Principles of Psychology*, and he began to critically consider what reality meant to the perceiving subject. Spencer's somewhat controversial work reminded Synge that our conception of reality is unreliable and in his notebook Synge recorded Spencer's theory of Transfigured Realism. Hugh Eliot has neatly summarised Spencer's theory of a transfigured reality:

> [...] the Realism which is forced upon us is not the crude Realism of the peasant, but a "Transfigured Realism". We are prohibited from believing that external objects are in their absolute nature [...] We must therefore regard the object as an appearance: objective existence as it appears to us is phenomenal, not noumenal. There is behind it the Unknowable Reality of which we can predicate and image nothing [...] Objective existence is a mode of the Unknowable; and subjective existence is another mode. The Realism we have arrived at is not an absolute Realism, but a relative Realism. For we can predicate *absolute* reality only of the Unknowable. [...] The true realism is that called Transfigured Realism, which is based upon the most certain of all deliverances of consciousness.[46]

In his notebook Synge recorded Spencer's theory on 'Transfigured realism', which 'simply asserts objective existence as separate from and independent of subjective existence. But it asserts neither that one any mode of this existence is in reality that which it seems, nor that connexions among its modes are objectively what they seem.'[47] What Synge is trying to explain here is Spencer's theory that a transfigured, noumenal reality or, in other words, a reality that provides the kernel of material existence, is always beyond our understanding. Therefore, our reality is always open to reasonable doubt because we rely on our subjective gaze to rationalise the phenomenal world. To Synge this was nothing new, as he had come across this understanding of the kernel of existence that lies behind material existence when studying the work of Schopenhauer. Spencer, however, brought Synge's appreciation of an alternative reality into dialogue with comparative social science. These enquires into the consciousness of reality made by philosophy and comparative social science underlie Synge's dramaturgical praxis of magical realism.

The fundamental premise of magical realism is the notion of narrative hierarchy. Narratives of magical realism create a complicated dialectic where the 'unreal' interchanges with the real to ensure that supernatural phenomena are plausibly produced; as Lois Parkinson and Wendy B. Faris suggest, 'the supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter,

[46] Hugh Elliot, *Herbert Spencer* (London: Constable, 1917), 230-31. Emphasis in original.
[47] TCD MS: 4379, f.85r.

but it *is* an ordinary matter, and everyday occurrence – admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism'.[48] However, magical realism is often speciously supposed to be another form of the fantastic as the spectator is forced into raising an eyebrow towards reality. But unlike a fantastical narrative, magical realism requires that the spectator is not disconcerted by supernatural phenomena, but rather cajoled into accepting the credibility of that which may appear to be extra to the ordinary. As far as *Riders* is concerned, this is an essential supposition that needs to be entertained and therefore it is worth exploring Tzvetan Todorov's useful delineation of the fantastic if we are to accept Synge's narrative to be in accordance with magical realism.

Todorov proposed that the presence of fantastic elements presents the spectator with a curious disjuncture. At this disjuncture, two possible interpretative outcomes can be entertained when the reader of the theatrical text is presented with supernatural phenomena. The first possible outcome is what Todorov characterised as the fantastic-uncanny, which means that the spectator is able to posit a rational explanation for the presence of supernatural phenomena by, for example, attributing the magical event to a mere trick of the mind. The second outcome is what Todorov understood to be the fantastic-marvellous, in which the spectator accepts that the supernatural phenomena defy the causality of natural law and so the narrative is not conditioned by our conception of reality but rather the narrative constitutes a fictional world.[49] For the spectator, the narrative is disjunctive precisely because of the presence of the fantastic, which requires the spectator to stop and decide exactly what is going on within the narrative. Thus, the fantastical element of the narrative is only fleeting and once the spectator has decided whether the presence of supernatural phenomena is uncanny or marvellous, events in the narrative can be contextualised within either mode.

The only exception to Todorov's rule is if the characters in the narrative are persistently unsure about the presence of supernatural phenomena. If this is the case then the narrative must be considered as being purely fantastical, simply because the uncanny/marvellous mode cannot be entertained; the Yeats/Gregory play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902) is a good example of a purely fantastical narrative because the characters can never quite work out if The Poor Old Woman is just that or if she is, in fact, a supernatural phenomenon.[50] Analysis of *Riders* demonstrates how magical realism deviates

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[48] Lois Parkinson and Wendy B. Faris, "Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson and Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 3. Emphasis in original.

[49] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), 44.

[50] It should be pointed out that Todorov's third condition of the fantastic as a literary genre requires that 'the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as "poetic" interpretations' (Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 33). It is commonly understood that the character of The Poor Old Woman is a poetic allegory for Mother Ireland, which therefore makes the example of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* as

form Todorov's conception of the fantastic. A narrative of magical realism requires that the characters and the spectator do not entertain the indecision that is indicative of the fantastic, and it is precisely because there is no uncertainty pertaining towards supernatural phenomena that the uncanny/marvellous narrative mode does not apply. This respect for the reality of supernatural phenomena is contingent upon the organic relationship that the characters within the text have with supernatural phenomena and as a result their acceptance sutures the spectator within realistic convention.

'The Valley of the Black Pig'[51]

Synge based the characters in *Riders* upon the lives of the Aran islanders and the dramatist was fully aware that supernatural phenomena were an essential part of the sensory data on Inis Meáin, to the extent that he concluded that the islanders made 'no distinction between the natural and the supernatural', a supposition that was later qualified by Seán Ó Súilleabháin.[52] This acknowledgment of supernatural phenomena is the fulcrum upon which the praxis of *Riders* is balanced because the characters demonstrate a credulous relationship with supernatural phenomena that competes with the realist aesthetic for narrative hierarchy.

An idiosyncrasy of magical realism is the insistent but subtle interjection of supernatural phenomena within the paradigm of realism. Narratives of magical realism saliently witness the materialisation of the supernatural in the Natural order, which in turn complicates those everyday objects that are an integral part of realism's material referentiality. The repeated manner in which the Natural order functions symbolically in *Riders*, and essentially acts as the protagonist in the text, is Synge's debt to this narrative principle. For example, the stage direction, '[*The door which Nora half closed behind her is*

being indexical of the fantastic somewhat problematic. However, we should remind ourselves that The Poor Old Woman operates within the paradigm of realism and the reader of the theatrical text is required to consider the character within these limitations; like the Gillane family in the play, the reader of the theatrical text hesitates over the ontology of The Poor Old Woman; Peter Gillane saw an old woman, whereas Patrick Gillane saw a young girl with the walk of a queen. As Jonathan Allison has pointed out: 'the crux of the play lies in the double function of the old woman as symbol of the nation and as a naturalistic character in the drama [...] For a "fantastic" moment or two, the audience cannot decide what she is' (Jonathan Allison, "Magical Nationalism, Lyric Poetry and the Marvellous: W.B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney," in *A Companion to Magical Realism*, ed. Stephen M. Hart and Wen-Chin Ouyang [Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2010], 234-35). For more on how *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* is exemplary of the fantastic see, Peter Kuch, "Writing 'Easter 1916,'" in *That Other World: The Supernatural and the Fantastic in Irish Literature and its Contexts*, vol. 2, ed. Bruce Stewart (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1998), 1-17.

[51] W.B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 161.

[52] *CW*, vol. 2: 128. According to Ó Súilleabháin, Synge was correct to conclude that 'the natural and the supernatural were equally real' to the islanders. But unlike Synge, Ó Súilleabháin maintained that the islanders were able to distinguish between the two temporal modes. As far as the relationship between *Riders* and magical realism is concerned, Synge ensured that just like himself, his characters were able to differentiate between the natural and the supernatural; he merely appropriated the uniform credence that he believed the islanders gave to both natural and supernatural phenomena. See, Seán Ó Súilleabháin, "Synge's Use of Irish Folklore," in *J.M. Synge Centenary Papers: 1971*, ed. Maurice Harmon (Dublin: Dolmen, 1972), 26.

blown open by a gust of wind.]' measures appositely against magical realism's elementary narrative principles because the door, an object of everyday experience, bursts open specifically when Nora (Maurya's daughter) discusses the supposed death of her brother, Michael.[53] In this way, Synge uses the Natural order to introduce the supernatural and to complicate the cause of Michael's death, which forces the spectator to question exactly what happened to Michael when he embarked on the sea. This dramatic device affords Synge the opportunity to set up Michael's death as something that is possibly extra to the ordinary, but importantly this possibility is not paid off until the spectator is completely grounded within the realistic aesthetic. For just when the spectator begins to hesitate and entertain the possibility that the cause of Michael's death might be supernatural (as in the fantastic), Synge proceeds to account for the certitude of Michael's death with a realistic device.

In *The Aran Islands* Synge remarks that the islanders live a 'simple life' in which the principle of economy is taken to its frugal conclusion to the extent that the islanders thought that '[e]very article' held a 'personal character'.[54] Michael's death is not originally substantiated by any supernatural evidence because his sisters are able to empirically verify it by 'three score stitches' of his stocking, which was found on the Donegal shore.[55] After viewing 'the incident in which the sisters discover that the old shirt & stocking are those of their missing brother' Joseph Holloway concluded that the scene appeared as consummate 'reality to those who witness[ed] it'.[56] But this is magical realism's complicated dialectic of narrative hierarchy in full force; the realistic account of Michael's death draws the spectator into the realism of the cottage kitchen, but it also brings supernatural phenomena, such as the symbolic and supernatural function of the Natural order – which up until this point had been understated – firmly within realistic convention. However, this primary analysis does not necessarily vindicate Synge's praxis as magical realism; to fully appreciate how *Riders* is in accordance with magical realism we need to establish how Synge used comparative science and Schopenhauer's metaphysics to theorise magical realism.

Narratives of magical realism are often predicated upon folklore and cultural residue, which makes them known as narratives of folkloric magical realism.[57] *Riders* is consummate folkloric magical realism because Synge utilises two pre-Christian cultural residues, the fairy faith and homeopathic magical rituals, in order to effect his narrative with a sympathy for the vestiges and traces of pre-Christian Ireland. As Synge settled into Aran

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[53] *CW,* vol. 3: 5.
[54] *CW,* vol. 2: 58.
[55] *CW,* vol. 3: 15.
[56] Holloway, NLI MS: 1802, 26 February, 1904, f.100.
[57] Maggie Ann Bowers discusses narratives of folkloric magical realism as follows: '[folkloric] magical realism originates either from a particular folk tradition, or is cultivated from a variety of traditions in order to produce a particular narrative effect'. See, Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism*, 91-92.

life he was repeatedly reminded of the efficacy of the fairy faith, and, indeed, the fairies were as equally centralised in their orthodoxy as Roman Catholicism was on Synge's Aran. The presence of the fairies is identifiable from a whole host of supernatural phenomena that correspond to various folkloric narrative structures in Synge's Ireland. Judith Dineen Remy reductively questions the application of folkloric analysis to *Riders*, maintaining that '[i]nteresting though this is, it does not seem to contribute to our understanding of the play.'[58] Remy, however, is mistaken and both Declan Kiberd and Richard Bauman respectively have analysed Synge's debt to folkloric principles in *Riders* and their deft analyses are crucial when considering how *Riders* is a tragedy of magical realism.[59] It is worth pointing out Kiberd's insightful identification of Synge's debt to the folkloric narrative principle that concerns the blackness of objects.[60] In Irish folklore the colour black is an index for ominous supernatural phenomena. Synge utilises this motif throughout the dramaturgy of his seven plays, but it is in *Riders* that this principle is given considerable dramatic attention. For example, Michael's stocking and shirt were found by 'the black cliffs of the north'[61] and they were wrapped in a parcel tied by a 'black knot on it you wouldn't loosen in a week'.[62] Furthermore, the 'pig with the black feet'[63] roams in and around the cottage kitchen nibbling the halter that will be instrumental in riding Bartley to the sea.

What is striking about Synge's dramatic treatment of the pig with black feet is that black pigs were revered by Irish folk culture and Synge would have to look no further for information on this subject than Yeats. In the April 1896 edition of *The Savoy*, Yeats published "Two Poems Concerning Peasant Visionaries," which was later published under the title of "The Valley of The Black Pig" in his collection, *The Wind Among The Reeds*. In the poem Yeats invites the reader to descend into a trance where, all of a sudden, 'dreams gather; unknown spears / Suddenly hurtle before my dream-awakened eyes'[...].[64] What Yeats is referring to here is the mythological battle of the black pig and he discusses the battle in a footnote to the poem where he piles conjecture upon conjecture, extrapolated from works such as John Rhys's *Lectures on the Growth of Religion As Illustrated By Celtic Heathendom*, which Synge had also spent considerable time reading.[65] However, it was

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[58] Judith Dineen Remy, "Synge's Peasants: Characters Reflected In A Cracked Mirror," (PhD diss., The University of California: Irvine, 1981), 62.
[59] See, Declan Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1993) and Richard Bauman, "John Millington Synge and Irish Folklore," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1963): 267-79.
[60] Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 166.
[61] *CW*, vol. 3: 15.
[62] *CW*, vol. 3: 15.
[63] *CW*, vol. 3: 9.
[64] Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems*, 161.
[65] TCD MS: 4378, f.72r. Synge began reading the *Lectures on the Growth of Religion As Illustrated By Celtic Heathendom* in September 1898. His diary reads thus: 'Hibbert Lectures on Celtic Heathendom'. Rhys's work was originally given as part of the annual Robert Hibbert lectures on theological issues between May and June 1886.

through meeting James Frazer's good friend, the British anthropologist, Edward Clodd, that Yeats really began to understand what the battle of the black pig was about. Clodd attended dinner with Yeats and Gregory in November 1897, and by April of the following year, Yeats felt comfortable enough to approach Clodd – who was, by then, the President of the Folklore Society – so that he could discuss the battle for the black pig. After the meeting on 4 April 1898, Clodd turned to his diary and wrote how Yeats had 'showed me his notes on the Black Pig & we discussed many things, chiefly the equation of the fairies with the dead: Irish belief in the body & soul as immortal'.[66] With this new understanding of the battle for the black pig, Yeats felt comfortable enough to conclude his thoughts on the significance of the battle and how it concerned:

> the manifest world and the ancestral darkness at the end of all things [...] The Battle should, I believe, be compared with three other battles; a battle the Sidhe are said to fight when a person is being taken away by them; a battle they are said to fight in November for the harvest; the great battle the Tribes of the goddess Danu fought, according to the Gaelic chroniclers, with the Fomor at Moy Tura, or the Towery Plain.[67]

The battle for the black pig, then, was a pre-Christian myth that interrogated the correspondence and convergence between the material reality of this world and the Otherworld. As Yeats points out, the two warring parties are the fairies and the members of the human race and the battle was often heard to take place on the 'Isles of Arran, [where an] old Arann fisherman [told Yeats] that it was fought over two of his children'.[68] To experience the events of the battle required the ability to descend into a shamanic state of consciousness or, as Yeats puts it, the ability to 'fall down in a fit and rave out descriptions of the Battle'.[69] Yeats concludes: '[t]he country people say there is no shape for a spirit to take so dangerous as the shape of a pig',[70] because this meant that the battle was about to commence or, to put it another way, that the fairies were about to steal a member of the human race. And Synge capitalises on the battle of the black pig in *Riders* by including the supernatural phenomenon – 'the pig with the black feet'[71] – directly within the reality of the cottage kitchen. And while, of course, only the pig's feet are black – as opposed to the entire body – it is important to remember Kiberd's point that, in Synge's Ireland, 'black was the colour of evil and death'.[72]

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[66] Edward Clodd, quoted in Genevieve Brennan, "Yeats, Clodd, Scatalogic Rites and the Clonmel Witch Burning," in *Yeats Annual*, vol. 4, ed. Warwick Gould (London: Macmillan, 1986), 207.
[67] Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems*, 810.
[68] Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems*, 810.
[69] Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems*, 809.
[70] Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems*, 809.
[71] *CW*, vol. 3: 9.
[72] Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 166.

Upon arriving on Aran Synge was made aware that the fairies often snatched humans and, according to folk belief, if the human being was held in their company for more than ten days, the human was unable to return.[73] Synge juxtaposes Michael's supposed death, ten days before, with this belief that he knew was discursively familiar amongst the Aran islanders. We know that Michael disappeared ten days before through Bartley's attempt to assuage Maurya's fears about his travelling to Galway on the morning of the tenth day: '[h]ow would [he] be washed up, and we after looking each day for nine days, and a strong wind blowing a while back from the west and south?'[74] Hence, it is possible to conjecture that the fairies snatched Michael, especially since the fairies were known to maliciously linger over the sea, waiting to abduct humans. With respect to the concomitance of the fairies with the sea, Irish folklore maintains that certain people were able to hear what the fairies were saying by paying close attention to the sea's cadences and rhythms. With this information the seer was said to be able to divine the future, as proposed by Dáithí Ó hÓgáin: 'There was a very old tradition that the sea around Ireland [...] cried out to foretell a catastrophe.'[75] The currency of this superstition finds its way into *Riders*; up until this point the spectator, along with Maurya and her two daughters, has been led to assume that Michael has drowned in the sea, simply because it is the only realistic conclusion. But this is just Synge's way of convincing the spectators that they are (like Synge's characters) "rational" subjects. Synge understood that if the spectator could willingly accept that his characters were reasonable, then when the same characters nonchalantly accept the presence of supernatural phenomena within the realistic aesthetic, the spectator would be obliged to do the same.

From his Celtological studies Synge understood that the fairies would take Michael to the pre-Christian Otherworld that was located across a sea. The passage to this Otherworld was dependent on the favour and the orchestration of the Celtic god of the Sea, Manannán mac Lir. Synge had read about Manannán mac Lir in various works, such as John Rhys's *Lectures on the Growth of Religion As Illustrated by Celtic Heathendom*; in Rhys's fourth lecture of the series, Synge would have read how Manannán mac Lir is 'the chief of the fairies in the Land of Promise [...] Of course his character was as self-contradictory as that of Cronus, for he appears mostly as the tricky druid of the other world'.[76] However, it was in Kuno Meyer's translation of the Irish epic, *The Voyage of Bran, Son of Febal to the Land of the Living* that Synge learnt about the Celtic god of the

[73] Joan Hoff and Marian Yeates, *The Cooper's Wife is Missing: The Trials of Bridget Cleary* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 166.
[74] *CW*, vol. 3: 9.
[75] Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *Irish Superstitions* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2002), 52.
[76] John Rhys, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion: As Illustrated by Celtic Heathendom* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1892), 665.

sea in considerable detail, his notes extending to fourteen pages.[77] *The Voyage of Bran* intricately dramatises the Otherworld as a 'wondrous land' where 'splendours of every colour glisten' and explains that entrance to this land was orchestrated by Manannán mac Lir.[78] It should, however, be pointed out that in *The Aran Islands* Synge is unable to conclude that the islanders know of the existence of Manannán mac Lir. This would suggest why Yeats would write to the dramatist during his first trip to Aran, asking if, on his return to Dublin, he could stop by Coole Park and 'talk about Aran and your work there' but, before he left, Synge was to '[t]ry [and find out] if the people remember the names of [...] Mannanan [sic] & the like'.[79] And this uncertainty towards the islander's knowledge of the Celtic god of the sea finds its way into Synge's early drafts of *Riders.*

In an earlier draft of the play Maurya points out that 'in three nights it is Martin's night'.[80] St. Martin's night takes place on 11 November and, in Ireland, according to Seán Ó Súilleabháin, St. Martin's night was ritually observed by the sacrifice of an animal. More often than not, this animal was a pig because St. Patrick was said to have performed the sacrificial act on a pig in honour of St. Martin.[81] However, Synge's final draft of the play advocates that the play takes place during the Celtic New Year of Samhain –'I'll have no call now to be going down and getting Holy Water in the dark nights after Samhain'[82] – a time when, according to Ó Súilleabháin, 'all fairy forts were said to be open'.[83] Synge chose to set the play at Samhain in order to strengthen his narrative of magical realism and, also, to shift his dramaturgical dependence from a Christian festival to residual pre-Christian custom; pigs were sacrificed in honour of Manannán mac Lir in order to protect individuals from being taken to the Otherworld. Bartley reminds the family that, 'if the jobber comes you can sell the pig with the black feet if there is a good price going'.[84] However, the pig shouldn't be sold in the first instance, rather, it should be ritually sacrificed in honour of Manannán mac Lir. The jobber fails to offer any price at all for the black pig and so, the ominous index of fairy abduction is allowed to trot around the cottage kitchen, which

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[77] Synge first read *The Voyage of Bran, Son of Febal, To The Land of The Living: An Old Irish Saga*, vol. 1 and Alfred Nutt, "An Essay upon the Irish Vision of the Happy Otherworld and the Celtic Doctrine of Re-birth," in *The Voyage of Bran, Son of Febal, To The Land of The Living: An Old Irish Saga*, vol. 2, on 21 September, 1898. His diary reads thus: 'bran voyage nutt' (TCD MS: 4419, f.98v). He finished it on 3 October, where his diary simply records 'bran finished' (TCD MS: 4419, f.104v). For Synge's extensive notes on both Meyer's translation and Nutt's Celtological analysis, see, TCD MS: 4378, ff.53v-47v.

[78] Kuno Meyer, *The Voyage of Bran, Son of Febal, To The Land of The Living: An Old Irish Saga*, vol. 1 (London: David Nutt, 1895), 6, 8, 24.

[79] W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 2, *1896-1900*, ed. Warwick Gould, John Kelly and Deirdre Toomey (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 242. W.B. Yeats to John Millington Synge, 21 June, 1898.

[80] *CW,* vol. 3: 244.

[81] Seán Ó Súilleabháin, "The Feast of St. Martin in Ireland," in *Studies in Folklore, in Honor of Distinguished Service Professor Sith Thompson*, ed. W. Edson Richmond (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1957), 253.

[82] *CW,* vol. 3: 25.

[83] Seán Ó Súilleabháin, *Irish Folk Custom and Belief* (Dublin: Three Candles, 1967), 69.

[84] *CW,* vol. 3: 9.

suggests why Padraig Pearse thought *Riders* portrayed Maurya's family 'in the hands of some strange unpitying God'.[85]

'Down to the Spring Well'[86]

John Messenger, who conducted a considerable amount of ethnographic fieldwork throughout the 1960s into the Aran islanders' relationship with priests, pointed out that the folk are 'extremely critical of their priests and retain and reinterpret pagan religious forms'.[87] If the islanders retained and reinterpreted patterns of pre-Christian culture as late as the 1960s, then their attachment to pre-Christian residual custom in Synge's Ireland was considerably tenacious. Nevertheless, through the character of Bartley, Synge dramatises the transition from pre-Christian residual sensibility to the orthodoxy of Roman Catholicism that was being readily accepted by a generation born at the beginning of the twentieth century; a generation that was completely removed from the cataclysmic decline of folk culture during the Great Famine.

According to Synge, on Aran 'the women live only for their children'[88] and Maurya attempts to stop Bartley from travelling to the Galway horse fair because she fears that he will drown. Her daughters, Cathleen and Nora attempt to assuage Maurya's fears by invoking the Aran curate's advice: 'NORA. Didn't the young priest say the Almighty God won't leave her destitute with no son living'.[89] In keeping with Messenger's analysis of the Aran islanders' critique of priests, Maurya dismisses the young and naïve priest's conjecture: '[*in a low voice, but clearly*]. It's little the like of him knows of the sea'.[90] Nicholas Grene suggests that the young priest 'is obviously a controlling authority on the island',[91] and likewise, Remy follows suit by advocating that '[t]he islanders do not question his categorical authority'.[92] However, this is not the case. If we recall Synge's notes on primitive religion from *The Golden Bough* then the second principle of primitive religiosity is: 'No temples'.[93] Synge's implication is that, unlike the young priest (the young age of the priest is repeatedly insisted), Maurya can suspect something extra to the ordinary is taking its course and therefore she does not need to ascertain the priest's advice in the chapel on Inis Meáin, simply because she is a supplicant of primitive religion. Thus, in keeping with magical realism's narrative invocation of the Natural order, she attempts to

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[85] P.H. Pearse, "The Passing of Anglo-Irish Drama," *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 9 February, 1907, 7.
[86] *CW*, vol. 2: 13.
[87] John C. Messenger, *Inis Beag: Isle of Ireland* (New York: Holt Reinehart and Winston, 1969), 57.
[88] *CW*, vol. 2: 92.
[89] *CW*, vol. 3: 21.
[90] *CW*, vol. 3: 21.
[91] Grene, *Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays*, 55.
[92] Remy, "Synge's Peasants," 82.
[93] TCD MS: 4378, f.55r.

deter Bartley from travelling on the sea by referencing the mysterious celestial and lunar movements: 'that wind is raising the sea, and there was a star up against the moon, and it rising in the night'.[94] Mysterious lunar movements were part and parcel of material conditions on Aran; Synge wrote that his guide, Michael Costello, was 'sensible of the beauty of nature, [although] he never speaks of it directly', but when Costello does talk of the Natural order his attention is turned toward 'the movements of the stars and moon'.[95] Bartley, however, chooses to ignore his mother's warnings about mysterious celestial and lunar movements. Instead, he decides to travel to the Galway horse fair and as he leaves he gives a blessing to his mother, a blessing that is unreturned:

> BARTLEY. [*taking the halter*]. I must go now quickly. I'll ride down on the red mare, and the grey pony'll run behind me...The blessing of God on you. [*He goes out*].
>
> MAURYA. [*crying out as he is in the doorway*]. He's gone now, 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.
>
> CATHLEEN. Why wouldn't you give him your blessing and he looking round in the door? Isn't it sorrow enough is on everyone in this house without your sending him out with an unlucky word behind him, and a hard word in his ear?[96]

At first appearance, Maurya's failure to requite Bartley's blessing appears as a mother's stubborn disposition but, in fact, it has far greater significance as it affords the dramatist another opportunity to introduce the magical pre-Christian ritual known as the Evil Eye into narrative realism.

According to Messenger's study of Aran life, '[w]itchcraft once flourished', but his ethnographic enquiry concluded that 'only the casting of the evil eye is practiced.'[97] The Evil Eye is a residual pre-Christian magical ritual that involved the transference of misfortune onto a person through the punitive execution of words. The Evil Eye was given a concentric study by Alfred Cort Haddon and Charles Robert Brown in "The Ethnography of The Aran Islands, County Galway":

> *An droc ryl*, or The Evil Eye. – The 'Evil Eye' is very much dreaded in Aran, hence you had better not praise any Aranite, or any of his live stock, in his presence without saying 'God bless him or them'. Otherwise, if any accident afterwards occurred to either one or the other it would be due to your having an Evil Eye. Anyone affected by the Evil Eye is cured by the person possessed of it spitting on the patient, and at the same time saying

[94] *CW*, vol. 3: 9.
[95] *CW*, vol. 2: 128.
[96] *CW*, vol. 3: 11.
[97] Messenger, *Inis Beag*, 101.

> [...] (God bless you). Numberless are the tales told of the Evil Eye and of those who have succumbed to it.[98]

There is no record to suggest that Synge read this article, but he was familiar with Haddon's work, as the dramatist had heard Haddon deliver lectures at the Dublin Naturalists' Field Club.[99] In this case, as Cathleen points out, Maurya's 'hard word'[100] will ensure that Bartley will be 'drown'd with the rest'.[101] However, residual pre-Christian sensibility in Synge's Ireland maintained that the curse of the Evil Eye could be broken if the person that delivered the malediction invited the blessing of god on the cursed, hence why Cathleen urges Maurya to 'go down to the spring well [...] You'll see him then and the dark word will be broken, and you can say "God speed you"'.[102] However, as an informant told Yeats, if that person 'doesn't say "God bless it," [the fairies] can bring it away then'.[103]

Maurya makes haste to the spring well and it is here that Synge introduces the second of his three pre-Christian rituals, the *Imbas Forosnaí* (Illumination of the Hands). According to Eugene O'Curry, in pre-Christian Ireland, a person capable of the *Imbas Forosnaí* began invoking its power by chewing,

> the raw red flesh of a pig, or dog, or a cat, and then [he] retires with it to his bed behind the door, where he pronounces an oration upon it, and offers it to his idol gods. He then invokes his idols; and if he has not received the 'illumination' before the next day, he pronounces incantations upon his two palms, and takes his idol gods unto him (into his bed), in order that he may not be interrupted in his sleep. He then places his two hands upon his two cheeks, and falls asleep. He is then watched, so that he be not stirred or interrupted by any one, until every thing that he seeks is revealed to him.[104]

Those who had the power of the *Imbas Forosnaí* 'were much in vogue' in Synge's Ireland, but they had acquired these powers 'through their association with the fairies'.[105] In this way, the *Imbas Forosnaí* required a complicit relationship with supernatural phenomena (the fairies) so that those with magical powers such as the *Imbas Forosnaí* could, according to W.Y. Evans Wentz, 'counteract fairy power, thereby preventing changelings or curing them [...] in short, nullifying all undesirable influences emanating from the fairy world.'[106] In his survey of ancient Irish texts, Ó hÓgáin points out that the power of *Imbas Forosnaí*

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[98] A.C. Haddon and C.R. Browne, "The Ethnography of The Aran Islands, County Galway," in *The Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Third Series*, vol. 2 (Dublin: Dublin University Press, 1893), 819.
[99] TCD SSMS: 6213, f.4r.
[100] *CW*, vol. 3: 9.
[101] *CW*, vol. 2: 11.
[102] *CW*, vol. 2: 13.
[103] W.B. Yeats, *Uncollected Prose*, vol. 2, ed. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson (London: Macmillan, 1975), 228.
[104] Eugene O'Curry, *On The Manners and Customs of The Ancient Irish*, vol. 2 (Dublin: John F. Fowler, 1874), 208.
[105] Ó Súilleabháin, *Irish Folk Custom*, 77.
[106] W.Y. Evans Wentz, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1977), 253.

could be ascertained from a water source[107] and Tom Cowan argues that spring wells were considered to be portals into the Otherworld.[108] We know that Maurya frequently visits the spring well because her daughter, Nora, recalls that 'the day Michael was drowned you could hear her crying out from this to the spring well'[109] and after Bartley exits the cottage kitchen she arrives at the spring well in order to utilise the *Imbas Forosnaí*:

> MAURYA. I went down to the spring well, 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 [*she puts her hands, as if to hide something from her eyes*]. The Son of God spare us, Nora![110]

Two weeks after *Riders* was subject to dramaturgical interrogation in London, Synge and Yeats met to discuss Maurya's prayer and in his diary Synge recorded: 'With Yeats[,] *Riders to the Sea*[.] [R]ead on Irish Christian prayers etc'.[111] Synge and Yeats, well versed in Swedenborg's philosophy,[112] which suggested that supernatural phenomena could be identified within sensory data, may have discussed Maurya's ability to utilise the *Imbas Forosnaí* so that she could descend into a shamanic state of consciousness, whereby she could briefly travel to the Otherworld in order to ascertain if Bartley has arrived there safely.

Synge's dramatisation of the *Imbas Forosnaí* is strikingly similar to what he had read in the works of Schopenhauer and Spencer. In April 1893, Synge diligently read Schopenhauer's shrewd philosophical defence of 'apparitions and magic',[113] which advocated that apparitions could be detected and magical ritual could be executed if we could just understand *wille*. Schopenhauer argued that 'in real life we do not usually make use of that method investigation to distinguish between dream and reality',[114] and furthermore, he suggested that it is entirely possible to send our minds to higher consciousness through the power of dreams and once in this mode of consciousness it is not only possible to detect magical apparitions but also to 'announce things that occur at a distance'.[115] In the same line of thought, Spencer maintained that the appreciation of an alternative reality formed the provenance of pre-Christian religion. Spencer was keen to

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[107] Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *The Sacred Isle: Belief and Religion in Pre-Christian Ireland* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999), 77.
[108] Tom Cowan, *Fire In the Head: Shamanism and the Celtic Spirit* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 32.
[109] *CW,* vol. 3: 25.
[110] *CW,* vol. 3: 19.
[111] TCD MS: 4422, f.6r. Synge met with Yeats on 2 February, 1903.
[112] Yeats was particularly knowledgeable on Swedenborg's philosophy. For example, in 1920 he published an essay entitled "Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places," in Lady Gregory, *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1970), 311-36.
[113] Arthur Schopenhauer, "Supplement I: An Essay on Visions and Matters Connected Therewith," in Richard Wagner, *Beethoven: With a Supplement from the Philosophical Works of Arthur Schopenhauer*, trans. Edward Dannreuther (London: W.M. Reeves, 1903), 117.
[114] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1: 16-17.
[115] Schopenhauer, "Supplement I," 150.

emphasise the efficacy of dreams because it allowed the believer in pre-Christian religion to appreciate and differentiate between two states of consciousness, the night-time consciousness (the dream-self) and the daytime consciousness (the shadow-self). According to Spencer, when the supplicant of pre-Christian religion dreams, he/she becomes aware that the soul can leave the body, and with this newfound appreciation of the duality of human consciousness, the dreamer starts to consider what form the soul might take when it leaves the body. To Synge, this would have been similar to what he had read in Schopenhauer's study of metaphysics, where Schopenhauer pointed out that dreams are 'a second faculty of perception' and, furthermore, that '[o]ur capacity for representation whilst dreaming is immeasurably superior to our imaginative faculty. During a dream every perceptible object is really complete [...] only what we dream is true and real'.[116] Similarly, Spencer, writing from the perspective of comparative social science, advocated that the conjecturing from dreams of the primitive gives rise to the belief that after death the soul can take the form of a ghost. The propitiation of these spirits is, according to Spencer, the kernel of pre-Christian religious practice. Synge did not make any notes on Spencer's schema, choosing instead to focus on Spencer's suppositions on causality and natural law. But it is possible to conjecture that Synge appropriated Spencer's theory of pre-Christian religion into *Riders*, especially when one considers the striking parallels within his dramaturgical praxis. And while there is, of course, an anthropological difference between a ghost and a fairy, we would do well to remember Frazer's third principle of primitive religiosity, which Synge recorded from *The Golden Bough*: 'Spirits not gods are recognised. Names general not proper.'[117] For Synge, ghosts and fairies were interchangeable precisely because they were both spirits with generic titles, rather than ones with any individual appellation. And the supposition that primitive religion was predicated upon dreams and the wandering of the soul has been incorporated into Irish folk religion, as Ó Súilleabháin advocates:

> Such ideas were, of their nature, prechristian [sic]. Dreams and hallucinations among early peoples seem to have given rise to the belief that the soul (or whatever it was) could move about of its own accord. In dreams, we appear to see people and speak to them, and they converse with us – it does not matter that some of them are already dead [...] Thus there arose the idea that part of oneself could leave the body in sleep, meet its counterparts and associate with them, returning later to the body.[118]

In *Riders* Synge amalgamates Schopenhauer and Spencer's theories on dreams and applies them to Maurya's character. From this perspective, Maurya, a supplicant of residual

[116] Schopenhauer, "Supplement I," 137, 121, 138.
[117] TCD MS: 4378, f.55r.
[118] Ó Súilleabháin, *Irish Folk Custom*, 39.

pre-Christian practice, believes that the dead will return as ghosts. It is through dreaming that she is able to detect their presence and, indeed, this belief was naturalised into material conditions in Synge's Aran; Synge was told how 'a woman had a great sight out to the west in this island, and saw all the people that were dead a while back in this island and the south island and they all taking with each other'.[119] And so, Synge dramatises Maurya as not simply another mother of a frugal Aran household, but a woman with magical and prophetic powers of the *Imbas Forosnaí*, which allows her to send her consciousness to a shamanic reality and divine 'the fearfullest thing'.[120] With respect to shamans, as Mircea Eliade points out, '[m]agic and magicians are to be found more or less all over the world, whereas shamanism exhibits a particular magical speciality [...] the shaman specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave the body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld'.[121] Thus, by entering a shamanic state of consciousness Maurya is able to negotiate the matrix of everyday reality and detect Michael's presence as a supernatural phenomenon (a fairy) that has returned to snatch his brother, Bartley, and take him to the Otherworld. As Wendy B. Faris points out, a narrative of magical realism 'resembles the performance of a shaman who constructs a persona and a discourse that imaginatively negotiate different realms [...] shamanism thus illuminates the cultural function of magical realism generally, irrespective of the particular and extremely varied subjects of its texts.'[122] Maurya's divination of Michael as a fairy that has returned to abduct his brother harmonises the supernatural within realistic convention and indeed it had been harmonised for quite some time; the shirt that Bartley was wearing as he left the cottage kitchen was originally Michael's because 'his own shirt was heavy with the salt in it.'[123] Returning from her shamanic state of consciousness that the *Imbas Forosnaí* necessitated, Maurya realises that Michael did not drown, but rather he has been snatched by the fairies that lurk on the sea:

> MAURYA. [*a little defiantly*]. I'm after seeing [Michael] 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 words 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.[124]

Maurya's vision is taken from the story that surrounded the disappearance of Old Mourteen's child on Inis Meáin. In that story, Old Mourteen (Máirtín Ó Conghaile)

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[119] *CW*, vol. 2: 157.
[120] *CW*, vol. 3: 19.
[121] Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (London: Arkana, 1989), 5.
[122] Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 75.
[123] *CW*, vol. 3: 15.
[124] *CW*, vol. 3: 19.

introduced Synge to a culture where changeling belief was accepted in social discourse and Synge would later mobilise it in *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), which is discussed in Chapter Three. Nevertheless, Synge would explore the dramaturgical potential of changeling belief in *Riders* by literally appropriating Old Mourteen's story: 'Afterwards he told me how one of his children had been taken by the fairies. One day a neighbour was passing, and she said, when she saw it on the road, "That's a fine child." Its mother tried to say "God bless it," but something choked the words in her throat [...] "Believe me," said the old man, "the fairies were in it".'[125] According to the fairy faith, the fairies snatched their victims on a grey horse, but if the horse could be stopped then the fairies would cease their abduction. Maurya fails to do this and in keeping with magical realism's reliance on supernatural metaphor, we learn that '[t]he grey pony knocked [Bartley] over into the sea', where the fairies lurked in the waves.[126]

Concomitant with Spencer's theory of transfigured realism is his hypothesis on the persistence of consciousness: 'we speak of a belief as something separate from the conception to which it relates, yet on analysis we find that we simply express by it a certain property of such conception – *its persistence*'.[127] According to Spencer, although our conception of reality is unreliable, any reality could be justified through what he classified as a persistence of consciousness: 'The belief being the persistence, the persistence cannot be destroyed without the belief being destroyed.'[128] And in his notebook Synge jotted down Spencer's supposition: 'By reality we mean persistence in consciousness' and later '[t]he real, as we conceive it is distinguished solely by the test of persistence for we distinguish it from what we call unreal.'[129] What Synge is articulating here is Spencer's theory that the belief in any reality is solely dependent on the application of our consciousness to that reality; as long as the consciousness remains constant then, by corollary, the credibility of that reality will also remain constant. Thus, as far as Synge was concerned, Maurya's vision is completely real, precisely because of the persistence of her shamanic state of consciousness during her application of the *Imbas Forosnaí*. In this way, Spencer suggested that all primitive communities embodied a psychic unity, which allowed Synge, who also believed that the community on Inis Meáin had a 'psychic memory'[130], to substantiate Maurya's vision as being completely credible to her daughters. Indeed, Nora and Cathleen may counter the supernatural phenomenon by referencing their own empirical evidence (Michael's stocking) but they immediately accept the validity of Maurya's prophecy –

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[125] *CW*, vol. 2: 51.
[126] *CW*, vol. 3: 23.
[127] Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 30. Emphasis in original.
[128] Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology*, 30.
[129] TCD MS: 4379, ff.94r-94v.
[130] *CW*, vol. 2: 99.

'[i]t's destroyed we are from this day'[131] – once the supernatural phenomenon is given its realistic details. Furthermore, the girls are inclined to accept Maurya's prophecy because it is likened to Bride Dara's vision of 'the dead man with a child in his arms',[132] which suggests that the community on Inis Meáin is completely familiar with shamanic states of consciousness and divinations from the *Imbas Forosnaí*. Accordingly, the confirmation of Maurya's vision allows Synge to dramatize Maurya's divination as something that is reasonable and fundamentally realistic. 'Refer irrationalities to what people say', was Aristotle's fundamental premise when a tragedian decided to introduce the supernatural into the hegemony of realism, because 'there is also the defence that they are sometimes *not* irrational since it is probable that improbable things did occur'.[133] And the realistic nature of the divination is consummated when Maurya correctly predicts the immediate sequence of events:

> MAURYA. [...] I seen two women, and three women, and four women coming in, and they crossing themselves, and not saying a word. I looked out then, and there were men coming after them, and they holding a thing in the half of a red sail, and water dripping out of it – it was a dry day, Nora – leaving a track to the door. [*She pauses again with her head stretched out towards the door. It opens softly and old women begin to come in, crossing themselves on the threshold, and kneeling down in front of the stage with red petticoats over their heads.*][134]

This *mise-en-abîme* is characteristic of narratives of magical realism because such narratives relish in playing with the signifiers of realistic convention so that the supernatural emerges from the narrative as being self-evident; this is why Grene concludes that Maurya's vision 'grows out of a particular dramatic context.'[135] However, with respect to Maurya's divination, Malcolm Pittock criticised Synge for asking 'a modern audience, formed in a different cultural pattern, to believe in such superstition with any real seriousness'.[136] In Synge's defence Mary C. King pointed out that 'this, precisely, is what Synge does *not* require of us'.[137] However, it is possible to conclude that Synge *does* want a modern audience to give credence to Maurya's vision, so that they are cajoled and coaxed into reconsidering their perception of reality. Synge's spectator is forced to accept Maurya's divinatory powers precisely because the supernatural cannot be overlooked; what she divined has actually materialised within the cottage kitchen. Again, this is just another way that magical realism foregrounds its most fundamental concern: the reconfiguration of

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[131] *CW*, vol. 2: 19.
[132] *CW*, vol. 3: 19.
[133] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 135. Emphasis in original.
[134] *CW*, vol. 3: 21.
[135] Grene, *Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays*, 50.
[136] Malcolm Pittock, "Riders to the Sea," *English Studies* 49 (1968): 448.
[137] Mary C. King, *The Drama of J.M. Synge* (London: Fourth Estate, 1985), 60. Emphasis in original.

reality. In this way, Synge's magical realism attempts to critique the habitations of Catholic, bourgeois Ireland by giving the spectator the chance to appreciate Spencer's realm of transfigured realism, where supernatural phenomena are understood to be perfectly plausible because they exist within the noumenal. Maurya's ability to send her consciousness to an alternative temporality means that she is able to identify how pain and suffering *(wille)* manifest themselves within phenomenal existence: the abduction of Bartley. Maurya, then, understands the Idea of existence, not simply because she transcends *wille* but also because she used Nature to contemplate the Idea.

As far as Synge was concerned, the *Imbas Forosnaí* wasn't such an incredible phenomenon because, after all, his brother in law, Harry Stephens, claimed to be a clairvoyant. His son, Edward Stephens, recalled how his father had 'remarkable powers of second sight, powers which, were claimed, to some degree, also by his sisters [...] Spiritualism and occult lore he hated, and denounced mystics as untidy and unwashed.'[138] Synge was interested in his brother-in-law's psychic ability and, as Edward Stephens pointed out, Synge's 'interest in dreams, premonitions, and visions helped him to understand the lore of country people and was to prove an important link'.[139] Synge had grown up with a Protestant version of a residual pre-Christian ritual and, in this way, it meant that the dramatist would have little difficulty in accepting *Imbas Forosnaí.* But there was one final pre-Christian ritual that Synge laced into the dramaturgy of *Riders*; this ritual was one that dramatist was completely unfamiliar with and, significantly, to Synge's conservative spectators, it would be the one offending element of the play. This ritual was *caoineadh* (keening) and indeed, the *caoine* (keen) begins as Maurya exercises the *Imbas Forosnaí*; 'I seen two women, and three women, and four women coming in, and they crossing themselves, and not saying a word'.[140]

The exposition of the *caoine* is heard in the inarticulate cry from the Irish supernatural death messenger, the *ban sí.* In her study of the *ban sí*, Patricia Lysaght advocated that 'the banshee was usually seen sitting on a rock with her face to the sea combing her long hair down her back'.[141] Synge gives this credence when he references the fact that 'there's some one after crying out by the seashore'[142] and that 'the black hags that do be flying on the sea'[143] perform Michael's *caoine*; according to Ó Súilleabháin, the *ban sí* has a genealogy that emanates from the Irish mythological warrior goddess Badhbh, who appeared in the form of a crow and would scream over battlefields to frighten and

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[138] Edward Stephens, *My Uncle John: Edward Stephens's Life of J.M. Synge*, ed. Andrew Carpenter (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 68.
[139] Stephens, *My Uncle John*, 69.
[140] *CW,* vol. 3: 21.
[141] Patricia Lysaght, *The Banshee: The Irish Death Messenger* (Colorado: Roberts Rinehart, 1996), 66.
[142] *CW,* vol. 3: 21.
[143] *CW,* vol. 3: 17.

foreshadow the death of her enemies.[144] We know that Synge was familiar with this theory of the *ban sí* because in *The Aran Islands* he references how 'a great flock of birds on the water and they all black without a white bird through them'[145] was considered to be a supernatural portent by the islanders. Alternatively, according to Ronald Hutton, the most ominous sign of a tragedy at Samhain was 'the black sow' and people 'would pretend to be the pig, grunting in the darkness.'[146] If we follow Hutton's analysis then the *ban sí* has been present in the house all the time because, as Lysaght maintains, in Irish folk culture many people believed that the 'banshee appeared in pig-shape' and was often referred to as 'a black bitch'.[147] But the 'pig with the black feet'[148] should also have been sacrificed in honour of Manannán mac Lir, the god that orchestrates Bartley's passage on the ocean. Now, a disrespected god has brought divine retribution on the cottage kitchen and he has allowed Bartley to be taken away to the Otherworld. Indeed, all the signs of fairy abduction have surrounded the realism of the cottage kitchen and Maurya's ignorance of them is integral to the dramaturgy of the play. If Lady Wilde maintained that 'the deep pathos of Irish nature finds its fullest representation in the tender, plaintive, spiritual music of the wail and lamentation of the *Ban-Sidhe*'[149] then, as the *ban sí* begins to wail, Synge complements the lament with his knowledge of music. Music, for Schopenhauer, could provide the pure subject of knowledge with the Idea of noumenal existence and, as the homeopathic magical ritual of the *caoine* is brought into the phenomenal reality of the cottage kitchen, Maurya begins her *caoine* to alleviate *wille*.

'The Cries of Pagan Desperation'[150]

As Joseph Holloway stepped out of Molesworth Hall into Dublin's February night air, he knew something was wrong. Holloway had just attended the premier of *Riders*, a production that Synge directed. Synge just about managed to attend the premier because, as Mrs. Synge recorded in her diary, he was suffering acute pain from an abscessed tooth, which was accompanied by a high temperature; certainly for the rest of the run 'Johnnie [was] very poorly with abscess inhis face, staid inbed'.[151] It was probably a good thing that Synge remained absent. The last play of Synge's that Holloway saw, *The Shadow of the Glen* (1903), centred around a wake, and *Riders*, the dramatist's next play, centred upon another

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[144] Seán Ó Súilleabháin, *Irish Wake Amusements* (Cork: Mercier, 1967), 141.
[145] *CW,* vol. 2: 181.
[146] Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 360.
[147] Lysaght, *The Banshee*, 110.
[148] *CW,* vol. 3: 9.
[149] Lady Wilde, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland: With Sketches of the Irish Past*, vol. 1 (London: Ward and Downey, 1887), 280.
[150] *CW,* vol. 2: 74-75.
[151] TCD SSMS: 6219, f.67.

pre-Christian death ritual: the *caoine*. Familiar with jingoistic drama, Holloway had just witnessed a ritual performance of the *caoine* upon a stage of national-popular sovereignty. He could hardly believe his eyes. Arriving home to 21 Northumberland Street, the architect-cum-theatre-critic fumbled for his diary:

> Before a very distinguished audience the National Theatre Society presented JM Synge's intensely sad sketch of fisher-life on an island off the west coast of Ireland [...] The entrance of the keeners...was nearly proving fatal to the solemnity of the situation, but luckily they did not.[152]

Holloway could hardly believe his eyes because the performance of *caoineadh* summoned the contemporaneity of the dead and the pre-modern discontents of Catholic modernity. While touring Ireland in the middle of the nineteenth century, Mr. and Mrs. S.C. Hall stumbled across a performance of *caoineadh*. So alarmed were they that, upon returning to Britain, they consulted the Rev. G.N. Wright, who informed them that such a savage practice 'was of very ancient date, and can be traced back to heathen origin with tolerable certainty.'[153] *Caoineadh* holds its provenance within the *nosad* (funeral rites) of the *Teamhur Feis* (Rites of Tara).[154] The *nosad* of the *Teamhur Feis* were conducted by the Arch Druid of Ireland at the burial of the deceased High King of Ireland; St. Patrick usurped the *Teamhur Feis* in 433 A.D, which precipitated pre-Christian culture into a decline from a culture of dominance to a culture of residue. As far as the Catholic Church was concerned *caoineadh* was the trump card in the deck of pre-Christian residual culture because it could not be beaten; *caoineadh* persisted in its counter-normative logic through the ancient saga texts, such as the Deirdre's Lament for the Sons of Uisneach or Emer's lament for Cú Chulainn, through to the Fenian ballads and, further still, into Dion Boucicault's *The Shaughraun* (1874).[155] In that play the '[*t*]*he* WOMEN *are rocking to and fro during the wail*'[156] as the character Biddy laments how Conn The Shaughraun 'grew strong, for she fed him wid her heart's blood. Ah, hogoola! Where is he now? Cowld in his bed! Why did ye die?' As she speaks, Biddy is '[*r*]*ising, and flinging back her hair*'.[157]

Caoineadh appears in two out of Synge's seven plays: *Riders* and *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1910), in which Deirdre '*begins swaying herself backwards and forwards keening*

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[152] Holloway, NLI MS: 1802, 25 February, 1904, ff.95-96.
[153] Mr. and Mrs. S.C. Hall, *Ireland: Its Scenery, Character, &c*, vol. 1 (London: How and Parsons, 1841), 222n-223n.
[154] Eugene O'Curry, *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, vol. 1 (Dublin: John F. Fowler, 1874), cccxxiv.
[155] Synge was certainly interested in Boucicault's work. On 11 June, 1904 he published an essay on Boucicault's drama in *The Academy and Literature* in a section entitled 'Literary Notes'. In that essay he points out that it was 'unfortunate for Dion Boucicault's fame that the absurdity of his plots and pathos has gradually driven people of taste away from his plays, so that at the present time few are perhaps aware what good acting comedy some of his work contains' (*CW*, vol. 2: 398).
[156] Dion Boucicault, *Selected Plays of Dion Boucicault* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1987), 315.
[157] Boucicault, *Selected Plays*, 316.

softly'[158] as she laments '[*wild with sorrow*]: It is I who am desolate, I, Deirdre, that will not live till I am old.'[159] *Caoineadh* is also written into the dramaturgy of two of Synge's playlets, *A Vernal Play* (written in 1902-1903), in which three women, Boinn, Etain and Niave keen for 'the man who died tonight';[160] and *Luasnad Capa and Laine* (written in 1902-1903), in which 'the wife of Laine [...] laments The wife of Luasnad.'[161] *Caoineadh*, then, was something that Synge continually returned to. It was on Inis Meáin that he first witnessed the ritual performance of *caoineadh*:

> Each old woman, as she took her turn in the leading recitative, seemed possessed for the moment with a profound ecstasy of grief, swaying to and fro, and bending her forehead to the stone before her, while she called out to the dead with a perpetually recurring chant of sobs. All round the graveyard other wrinkled women, looking out from under the deep red petticoats that cloaked them, rocked themselves with the same rhythm, and intoned the inarticulate chant that is sustained by all as an accompaniment [...] [The women] are usually silent, but in the presence of death all outward show of indifference or patience is forgotten, and they shriek with pitiable despair before the horror of the fate to which they are all doomed. Before they covered the coffin an old man kneeled down by the grave and repeated a simple prayer for the dead. There was an irony in these words of atonement and Catholic belief spoken by voices that were still hoarse with the cries of pagan desperation.[162]

There are two performance styles of *caoineadh*. The first style is formal and fundamentally poetic and involved the performance of rehearsed behaviour. The *ban caointhe* (female keener) would perform her *caoine* with long sentences with differing emphases and stresses on words, almost as if she were reciting iambic pentameter. A good example of this style of *caoineadh* is *Caoineadh Airt Úi Laoghaire* (Keen for Arthur O'Leary), which was performed by Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill in 1773:

> [...] Dear firm friend
> I didn't credit your death
> Till your mate came back, streaked
> With your heart's blood, from her cheek
> To your tooled leather saddle,
> Where you rode astride and standing.
> I took one leap to the doorstep,
> A second to the gate
> And the third up on her back.
> I yelled and I screamed,
> And beat my hands together,
> And pressed the mare to gallop
> As fast as she could travel,

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[158] *CW*, vol. 4: 261.
[159] *CW*, vol. 4: 259.
[160] *CW*, vol. 3: 192.
[161] *CW*, vol. 3: 198.
[162] *CW*, vol. 2: 74-75.

Till I found you, lying dead,
Like a cow or a horse,
Beneath a clump of furze,
With no pope or bishop,
No clerk, no priest
Who could read a psalm above you;
Just a weary old woman
Who had spread her cloak across you.[163]

The other style of *caoineadh* was extempore and required a certain degree of creative articulation and loquacity from the *ban caointhe*, whose *caoine* would involve a simplified metre with restricted emphasis on words. The first style of *caoineadh* is the older of the two styles and this literary tradition extends as far back as the *nosad* of the *Teamhur Feis*. It was rarely encountered within the Ireland of Synge's time because, more often than not, the *ban caointhe*, even if she was a professional *ban caointhe*, had hardly any time to prepare an intricate *caoine* for the deceased. Maurya's *caoine* is indicative of an extempore *caoine*:

> MAURYA. [...] They're all together this time, and the end is come. May The Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul, and on the souls of Sheamus and Patch, and Stephen and Shawn [*bending her head*]...and, may He have mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of every one is left living in the world. [*She pauses, and the keen rises a little more loudly from the women, then sinks away. Continuing.*] Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of the Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied.[164]

Maurya's lament is similar to a *caoine* that Synge read in William Stokes's *The Life and Labours in Art and Archæology of George Petrie*, in which an Aran mother begins her *caoine* with the following lament: 'it was not the will of God to leave him with me long. It was too much happiness for this world. My boy [...] while fishing, was drowned in a storm off the cliffs Mohir, and I had not even the consolation of embracing his corpse'.[165] The style of *caoineadh* that Synge mobilises in *Riders* requires the actor playing Maurya to deliver the *caoine* in an extempore fashion and, in the years after Synge's death, the Abbey actor George Roberts criticised the directors for allowing 'too much "composition" about the *caoine* in the Abbey in later years, and too little of the passionate sorrow which should inform it.'[166] The efficacy of *caoineadh*, then, required the performer to become lost in a ritual performance of grief. This required considerable dedication and skill from the actor

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[163] Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill, "Tórramh-Chaoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire," in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. 4, *Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, ed. Angela Bourke, Siobhán Kilfeather, Maria Luddy, Margaret Mac Curtain, Gerardine Meaney, Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, Mary O'Dowd and Clair Wills (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), 1379.
[164] *CW*, vol. 3: 27.
[165] William Stokes, *The Life and Labours in Art and Archæology of George Petrie* (London: Longmans Green, 1868), 58.
[166] George Roberts, "Memoirs of George Roberts," *Irish Times*, 2 August, 1955, 5.

and this is why Synge drafted in a *ban caointhe* from Aran who lived in a decaying tenement just off Gardiner Street, Dublin, to teach the precise schematics of the *caoine* to the company.[167] The lady was actually discovered by Roberts, and his account of the ritual performance of the *caoine* is indexical of how Synge thought the *caoine* in *Riders* should be performed:

> Synge was exceedingly anxious that 'caoine' should be as close as possible to the peculiar chant that is used in the islands, and after much searching I found a Galway woman living in one of the Dublin suburbs who consented to show two of the girls how the caoine was given. She was very nervous about it, though somewhat proud that one of that what she looked on as country custom should be so eagerly sought after in the city. At the same time, she was very interested in the whole affair, wanting to know what the play was about, and saying the caoine was so terrible a thing she could hardly believe people would want to put it in a play. At first she tried to begin in her little parlour, but she confessed after a few moments she could not do it properly there, so she brought the two girls up to a bedroom. At first it seemed no better, until she conceived the idea that I should act as a corpse. She lighted the wake candles, and then she got that note full of terror of the dead. I was relieved that she did not take snuff off my belly, but apparently the candles were enough. She was a native Irish speaker, and the Irish cadences and rhythm of the words, in conjunction with the clapping of the hands and swaying of her body, made a scene very terrible and yet beautiful to look on.[168]

The actress, Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh (one of the girls that Roberts identifies) would later recall the precise nature of the *caoine*.

> swaying backwards and forwards with the rise and fall of the music [...] It was strangely moving to see this old figure standing at the window of a crumbling tenement, looking over a city street singing. She seemed to forget we were there. She sang: "*Tà sé imighthe uaim*! *Go deo*! *Go deo*! *Go deo*!"* [...] They were thin, piping notes [...] The *caoin* [sic] seemed to possess her. Synge might have written this play around her alone; an old woman counting the loss of her sons with a bitter satisfaction.[169]

In her *caoine,* Maurya points out that she saw 'four women coming in',[170] and this number of *mná caointe* (keening women) was the requisite number for the ritual performance as advocated by Eugene O'Curry: 'The usual number was at least four; one stood near the head of the bed or table on which the corpse was laid, one at the feet, who was charged with the care of the candles, and one or more at each side; the family and immediate friends of the deceased sat around near the table.'[171] Nic Shiubhlaigh's account

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[167] *CW,* vol. 3: xix.
[168] Roberts, "Memoirs of George Roberts," 2 August, 1955, 5.
* "He is gone from me! Forever! Forever! Forever!"
[169] Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years: Recollections of Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, as told to Edward Kenny* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1955), 55.
[170] *CW,* vol. 3: 21.
[171] O'Curry, *On The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, vol. 1: cccxxiv.

of how the *caoine* should be performed is similar to what the Halls witnessed on their tour through Ireland, where the women would move 'their bodies with a slow motion to and fro, their arms apart, they continue to keep up a heart-rending cry.'[172] And so, it is possible to begin to consider how the *caoine* should be performed: four women surrounding the corpse at symmetrical angles in a performance space that is adjacent to spectators consisting of family and friends of the deceased. In essence, these four women are tragic actors that perform a ritual for the sake of communal catharsis.

An informant from County Clare points out that the *caoine* should begin by 'some deep murmuring, repeating over and over the name of the deceased';[173] this exposition is what Nic Shiubhlaigh found the most haunting.[174] Another informant, from County Limerick, points out that this murmuring gradually resulted in an elegy that was complemented by 'a choral cry, in which the others who are present join in, repeating throughout, 'Och-ochone!' or some such words.'[175] This cry, which was also recalled by the Halls, was known as the *gol*: an impassioned wail of grief that is also (but less frequently) known as the *ullaloo*.[176] The *gol* was performed at the end of each individual verse of the elegy and, as Donald Campbell concluded in his antiquarian study of *caoineadh*, the *gol* should 'be regarded as a solemn amen to the feeling and the sentiment of every verse of the song, bursting spontaneously from the heart of hearts of the audience'.[177] The *gol* was not reserved for the *ban caointhe* but rather, it was an invitation to the spectator of the performance to partake in ritual performance. Everyone, as noticed by an anonymous seventeenth-century visitor to Ireland, took up the *gol*, and it was 'like those loud outcries used by the Romans at the death of their friends in hopes to recover from their deep sleep.'[178] Throughout the *caoine*, as recorded by the eighteenth-century Irish antiquarian, William Beauford, 'The genealogy, rank, poffeffions, the virtues and vices of the dead were rehearfed'.[179] Synge certainly adheres to this schematic of *caoineadh*, in *Deirdre of the Sorrows* Deirdre recalls Naisi's virtues such as 'the time it was your rods and cloaks made a little tent for me where there'd be a birch tree making shelter, and a dry stone';[180] in a similar fashion, Maurya recalls the time when 'I was sitting here with Bartley, and he a

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[172] Mr. and Mrs. S.C. Hall, *Ireland*, 223.
[173] RIA MS: 12 Q13, f.107.
[174] Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years*, 54.
[175] P.W. Joyce, *Ancient Irish Music* (Dublin: M.H. Gill, 1890), 59.
[176] William Beauford, "Caoinan: or Some Account of the Antient Irish Lamentations," in *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. 4, ed. George Bonham (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1792), 43. All of my quotations from Beauford's analysis (including the title of his essay) repeat his eighteenth-century use of the English language.
[177] Donald Campbell, *A Treatise on the Language, Poetry, and Music of the Highland Clans with Illustrative Traditions and Anecdotes and Numerous Ancient Highland Airs* (Edinburgh: D.R. Collie & Son, 1862), 163.
[178] Anonymous informant, quoted in Edward McLaysaght, *Irish Life in the Seventeenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1950), 349.
[179] Beauford, "Caoinan," 44.
[180] *CW*, vol. 4: 261.

baby, lying on my two knees.'[181] Beauford also suggested that during the *caoine*, 'a number of interrogations were addreffed to the deceafed: As, Why did he die?'[182] The interrogation of the life of the deceased was often performed solely by an individual *ban caointhe*, but more often than not, the interrogation was performed within a communal discourse known as the *rosc*, which was conducted between several of the *mná caointe*.[183] In Irish folk culture, any *ban caointhe* that performed a *gol mná aonair* (the cry of a lone woman), or in other words, a solitary *caoine*, would be received with great indignity by the community.[184] *Caoineadh*, then, was a collective female utterance that brought women in a community together and united them through their grief. Synge gives this aspect of pre-Christian residual belief significant credence by allowing other *mná caointe*, who up until this point have been '[...*kneeling down in front of the stage with red petticoats over their heads*]',[185] to join in Maurya's *caoine* with a *rosc*; one of the *ban caointhe*'s reflects on Cathleen's question: 'What way was he drowned?', and responds: 'The grey pony over into the sea, and he washed out where there is a great surf on the white rocks.'[186]

Angela Bourke has suggested that Synge 'would have known something about the Irish practice of lamentation before he heard women in Aran give voice to it',[187] and proceeds to imply that the dramatist may have studied *caoineadh* in works such as Thomas Crofton Croker's *Researches in the South of Ireland*.[188] There is, however, no manuscript evidence to suggest that Synge read this work or, indeed, that the dramatist had ever encountered *caoineadh* before he arrived on Inis Meáin in May 1898. Accordingly, the Synge scholar can only conclude that the dramatist, raised on the Protestant ethic of humility and the privatisation of grief, must have been shocked when he first observed the howling and wailing that is concomitant with what the dramatist must have considered to be a pre-Christian ritual of Gothic excess. As Synge watched the *caoine*, he concluded: 'the grief of the keen is no personal complaint [...] but seems to contain the whole passionate rage that lurks somewhere in [...] the inner consciousness of the people'.[189] What Synge is demonstrating here is that *caoineadh* was a communal performance conducted in what Kevin Whelan considers to be a 'therapeutic theatre of death' that explored 'both the

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[181] *CW*, vol. 3: 21.
[182] Beauford, "Caoinan," 44.
[183] Breandán Ó Madagáin, "Song for Emotional Release in the Gaelic Tradition," in *Irish Musical Studies*, vol. 2, *Music and the Church*, ed. Gerard Gillen and Harry White (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1993), 259-60.
[184] Breandán Ó Madagáin, "Irish Vocal Music of Lament and Syllabic Verse," in *The Celtic Consciousness*, ed. Robert O'Driscoll (Dublin: Dolmen, 1981), 313.
[185] *CW*, vol. 3: 21.
[186] *CW*, vol. 3: 23.
[187] Angela Bourke, "Keening as Theatre: J.M. Synge and the Irish Lament Tradition," in *Interpreting Synge: Essays from the Synge Summer School, 1991-2000*, ed. Nicholas Grene (Dublin: Lilliput, 2000), 69.
[188] Bourke argues that in 'the years before [Synge] began to make regular visits to the islands, Irish readers of English has been introduced to *caoineadh* as a source of romantic poetry. Thomas Crofton Croker's Researches in the South of Ireland (1824) and the Keen of the South of Ireland (1844) had drawn attention to the traditional oral lament many years before' (Bourke, "Keening as Theatre," 69).
[189] *CW*, vol. 2: 75.

emotional experience of loss and the necessary continuity of the surviving community.'[190] To this end, as a ritual performance, *caoineadh* was taken as an obligatory rite in the Ireland of Synge's time; travelling through Kilcrea, County Cork, the Halls were equally shocked to encounter 'a woman so aged as to be scarce able to walk, who had journeyed from the end of Kerry in order to perform [the *caoine*] for her dead daughter'.[191] In various reports of *caoineadh* in the archive this is common and, as Angela Bourke points out, during the *caoine* the *ban caointhe* enters 'a sort of temporary psychosis [...] and [is] oblivious to everything but the fact of death'.[192] Synge utilises this respect for *caoineadh* within the social discourse of Irish folk culture by allowing Maurya to perform her *caoine* in isolation '[*without hearing anything*]' and '[*as if she did not see the people around her*]'.[193]

Breandán Ó Madagáin points out that *caoineadh* is considered to be 'the oldest Irish music to have survived',[194] and furthermore, that, '[m]usic was not at all peripheral to keening, nor a mere addition to the verbal verse: rather was it integral to that expression, an elemental part of the communicative event [...] whether as performers or listeners, the very sound of keening music had an immediate emotional effect, independent of verbal expression'.[195] To a man like Synge, who nearly flunked his education at Trinity College Dublin because he spent most of his time studying music at the Royal Irish Academy of Music, *caoineadh* would have been music to his ears. Ó Madagáin points out that both styles of *caoineadh* (literary and extempore) were performed to music and were 'never given mere recitation'.[196] The music, however, was not played on any instrument because it was an early form of what contemporary popular culture would consider to be a barbershop quartet. Synge was particularly interested in counterpoint, winning a prize in counterpoint from the Royal Irish Academy of Music in 1891 and a scholarship in it during the following year.[197] Counterpoint, the technique of creating an intricate harmony from differing melodies, would have been integral to Synge's precise staging of *caoineadh*. Beauford concluded that 'the Caoinan [sic] was fang extempore, there being no general eftablifhed tune, each fet of Keeners varied the melody according to their tafte and mufical abilities, carefully, however, preferving the fubject or burden of the fong throughout, both in the vocal and inftrumental part, as begun by the leading Keener.'[198] Thus, the verbal

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[190] Kevin Whelan, "The Cultural Effects of the Famine," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 141.
[191] Mr. and Mrs. S.C. Hall, *Ireland*, 15n.
[192] Angela Bourke, "Performing, Not Writing: The Reception of an Irish Woman's Lament," in *Dwelling in Possibility: Women Poets and Critics on Poetry*, ed. Yopie Prins and Maeera Shreiber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 143.
[193] *CW*, vol. 3: 21, 23.
[194] Ó Madagáin, "Irish Vocal Music of Lament and Syllabic Verse," 311.
[195] Ó Madagáin, "Song for Emotional Release in the Gaelic Tradition," 256.
[196] Ó Madagáin, "Irish Vocal Music of Lament and Syllabic Verse," 311.
[197] TCD SSMS: 6213, ff.3r-3v.
[198] Beauford, "Caoinan," 45.

performance is just one aspect of *caoineadh* and the efficacy of the ritual is dependent on other musical elements: the soft mumbling and groans of the chorus, the impromptu *gol* and *rosc* and dramatic silences and pauses. Synge's notes from Sir Robert Steward's lectures on the history of Irish music at the Royal Irish Academy of Music[199] testify that Synge understood that the 'music of the first Christians was vocal and antiphonal'[200] and, accordingly it is possible to begin to understand how Synge would have wanted Maurya's extempore *caoine* to be performed. Synge would have wanted Maurya to be flanked on four sides by her fellow *mná caointe*, and then she would begin a barely audible mumble of Bartley's name, just as Deirdre begins her *caoine* for Naisi: '[*a*]t *first her words are not heard, then they become clear*'.[201] Gradually the other women would join in to create a harmonised melody, which would form the instrumental to the dirge that would be punctured and punctuated by the *gol* and the *rosc* at random, but nevertheless significant, intervals.

Synge would have accepted Schopenhauer's supposition that the contemplation of music was the premier way (more so than Nature) to alleviate *wille* because music 'gives the innermost kernel preceding all form, or the heart of things'.[202] What Schopenhauer privileged about music, as opposed to other arts, was its technical dimensions, such as the precise mathematical proportions of a harmony or the intricate symmetrical form of a symphony and Synge's studies in counterpoint concentrated on the poetics of harmony and symphony. As far as Schopenhauer was concerned, the person that understood symphony and harmony was the person that could understand the kernel of a universal language: the melodic voice. The melodic voice had the ability to transcend *wille* because 'it seems to disclose to us its most secret meaning, and appears to be the most accurate and distinct commentary on [will]',[203] which is to say that the melodic voice arrests human beings into a moment of self-awareness in which it is possible to reflect on our existence as the consummation of suffering. The melodic voice, then, is Schopenhauer's shortcut to a realm of Ideas:

> the nature of man consists in the fact that his will strives, is satisfied, strives anew, and so on and on; in fact his happiness and well-being consists only in transition from desire to satisfaction, and from this to a fresh desire, such transition going forward rapidly. For the non-appearance of satisfaction is suffering; the empty longing for a new desire is languor, boredom. Thus, corresponding to this, the nature of melody is a constant digression and deviation from the keynote in a thousand ways, not only to the harmonious intervals, the third and dominant, but to every tone, to the dissonant

[199] TCD SSMS: 6190, f.575.
[200] TCD MS: 4373, f.28r.
[201] *CW,* vol. 4: 261.
[202] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1: 263.
[203] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1: 262.

> seventh, and to the extreme intervals; yet there always follows a final return to the keynote. In all these ways, melody expresses the many different forms of the will's efforts, but also its satisfaction by ultimately finding again a harmonious interval, and still more the keynote. The invention of melody, the disclosure in it of all the deepest secrets of human willing and feeling, is the work of genius, whose effects is [sic] more apparent here than anywhere else.[204]

Maurya's *caoineadh* is in dialogue with Schopenhauer's postulates on the melodic voice because her *caoine* negotiates the suffering and pain that Bartley's *wille* (the desire to go to the Galway horse fair) produced since, for Schopenhauer, the melodic voice is analogous 'to the highest grade of the will's objectification, the intellectual life and endeavour of man'.[205] What Schopenhauer means by this is that a melodic voice can unlock the kernel of everyday existence, precisely because it is a consummation of the Idea and therefore it has the ability to take the performer of and the listener to the melodic voice into a noumenal reality that transcends human wants, desires and strivings; all the quotidian concerns of *wille*. 'Music', Synge writes in his notebook after reading Schopenhauer's philosophy, is 'form with ideas',[206]and he concludes that 'the moments of spiritual excitement the voice has' are peculiar to 'the indication of the melody'.[207] Maurya's melodic voice calls forth her ability as a pure subject of knowledge where the Idea of phenomenal existence is revealed. If we recall that Schopenhauer argued that magical ritual is predicated upon the ability to not only understand how *wille* is manifested in phenomenal existence but also the ability to manipulate it, then Maurya's *caoine* is indexical of residual pre-Christian magical ritual because she uses her melodic voice to embrace the Idea of existence. By degrees, if her melodic voice is conducive towards the Idea of existence then she necessarily transcends to a higher consciousness and it is from here that she is able to understand not simply how *wille* is disguised as the noumenon of phenomenal existence, but also how *wille* can be manipulated. For Schopenhauer, the manipulation of *wille*, a category of existence that the average human does not even recognise in everyday life, is precisely how magical ritual operates. In this way, as Maurya performs her *caoine* she is able to manipulate Bartley's *wille* and, in doing so, Synge requires Maurya to debunk Catholic eschatology because the magic of her *caoine* lies precisely in the fact that she performs a ritual to ensure that Bartley's passage to the Otherworld is safe and secure.

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[204] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1: 260.
[205] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1: 259.
[206] TCD MS: 4349, f.20v.
[207] TCD MS: 4349, f.3v.

'Shut up, Priest, and Stand up Straight!' [208]

Unlike Holloway, Max Beerbohm, upon leaving the London premier of *Riders*, was delighted by what he saw and in the *Saturday Review* he wrote that the *caoine* had an 'utter incapacity to be vulgar' and concluded by saying: 'I delight in the recollection of it as it was. And still cherished in my ears are the soft echoes'.[209] Back in Dublin, however, the reaction to the *caoineadh* was less than favourable. Arthur Griffith advocated that 'Mr. Synge could get his effects without the introduction of a body of a drowned man on the stage – this is a cheap trick of the Transpontine dramatists'.[210] A Transpontine dramatist was a writer of melodramas that were performed on London's South Bank in the nineteenth-century and Griffith's invocation of this dramatic style barely belies his dislike of the presentation of a body on stage. As usual, the critic from the *Irish Times* cut straight to the chase and said what Griffith could not bring himself to say: 'the play develops into something like a wake'.[211] Like Griffiths, this anonymous critic also had a problem with the presentation of a body on stage, but unlike Griffiths, the critic thought that it was alarmingly real: 'The long exposure of the dead body before an audience may be realistic, but it certainly is not artistic. There are some things which are lifelike, and yet are quite unfit for presentation on the stage, and *Riders to the Sea* is one of them.'[212] This critic was much nearer to the point than Griffith could ever be in his analysis of *Riders*; Synge wanted a realistic presentation of *caoineadh*, which marked the exposition of an Irish wake. The dramatist wanted to achieve this narrative effect because *caoineadh* was a ritual that was performed in order to intercede on the behalf of the deceased with the supernatural forces, such as Manannán mac Lir, who orchestrated the entrance into the Otherworld. And while it is important to remember that Bartley is not deceased but, rather, has been taken away by the fairies to the Otherworld, Maurya understands that his chance of returning is slim – '[t]hey're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me'[213] – so she begins to *caoine* not because he has died but in order to perform a magical intervention of pre-Christian ritual that is predicated upon his safe passage to the Otherworld.

The magical intervention on behalf of the deceased in order to ensure a safe passage to the Otherworld is the primary function of *caoineadh*, rather than a cathartic expression of grief; Ó Madagáin advocates that the *caoine* primarily held a 'supernatural ritual function:

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[208] Anonymous informant, quoted in Angela Bourke, "More in Anger than in Sorrow: Irish Women's Lament Poetry," in *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women's Folk Culture*, ed. Joan Newlon Radner (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 167.
[209] Max Beerbohm, "Some Irish Plays and Players," *Saturday Review*, 9 April, 1904, 457.
[210] Arthur Griffith, "All Ireland," *United Irishman*, 5 March, 1904, 1.
[211] "Irish National Theatre Society," *Irish Times*, 26 February, 1904, 5.
[212] "Irish National Theatre Society," 5.
[213] *CW*, vol. 3: 23

to transfer the spirit of the deceased from this world to that of the spirits'.[214] This is why, as Bourke demonstrates, the *ban caointhe* would ensure that 'most of the lament is an address to the corpse, she speaks not to the dead but to the living, and to the recently dead person as a member of the community of those living, but one who is about to defect.'[215] The *ban caointhe* does this because she considers the deceased to be present within the community as a supernatural phenomenon that requires help to be transported to the Otherworld. This supposition, as noted during a visit to Ireland by the Elizabethan poet, Edmund Spenser, was particularly disturbing because *caoineadh* offered 'no hope of [Christian] salvation'.[216] This negation of Christian salvation and juxtaposition of it with a pre-Christian Otherworld is what made the *caoine* particularly distressing to Synge's Catholic, bourgeois spectator and, significantly, it is what makes the *caoine* a structural element of Synge's narrative of magical realism.

Despite the Church's role as an Ideological State Apparatus, *caoineadh* still dominated the religious habitus, causing the Diocese of Leighlin, County Kildare to issue their 1748 tract on *caoineadh*:

> It is therefore (ordained) all Parish Priests and religious laymen of this Diocese are herby strictly charged and commanded, in virtue of holy obedience, to use all possible means to banish from Christian burials such anti-Christian practices, by imposing arbitrary punishment of prayers, fasting, alms and suchlike wholesome injunctions on as many men and women as will loudly cry and howl at burials. But to such men and women as will or do make it their trade to cry or rhyme at burials, we decree and declare that for the first crime of this kind they shall not be absolved by any but by the Ordinary or his representatives, and in case of a ralapse [sic], the aforesaid criers or rhymers are to be excluded from Mass and the Sacraments, and in case of perseverance in this detestable practice, they are to be excommunicated and denounced. [217]

The clergy went to seemingly irrational ends in order to ensure that *caoineadh* was deleted from funeral rites. Father M. Horgan, the parish priest of Blarney, County Cork, considered the ritual to be 'synonymous with every thing profligate, wicked, wasteful, and disgraceful to a Christian people' and so he roamed his parish, procuring recently deceased bodies, whereupon he would hide them in a round tower so that *caoineadh* could not possibly commence. Father Horgan would, by his own admission, leave 'a vault of 10 feet in diameter in the base to which so soon as a coffin is procured the body is conveyed to remain

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[214] Breandán Ó Madagáin, *Caointe Agus Seancheolta Eile: Keening and Other Old Irish Musics* (Indreabhán, Conamara: Cló Iar-Chonnachta, 2005), 81.
[215] Angela Bourke, "The Irish Traditional Lament and the Grieving Process," *Women's Studies International Forum, Special Issue: Feminism in Ireland* 11, no. 4 (1988): 289-90.
[216] Edmund Spenser, *Ireland Under Elizabeth and James the First, Described by Edmund Spenser by Sir John Davis and Fynes Moryson*, ed. Henry Morley (London: George Routledge *and* Sons, 1890), 95.
[217] M. Comerford, *Collections Relating to the Dioceses of Kildare and Leighlin* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1883), 81-82.

there for a time.'[218] As Roman orthodoxy was implemented the *ban caointhe* was slowly replaced by the parish priest and as this process of religious regulation took place subversive exchanges between the *ban caointhe* and the Church were commonplace; a woman who was advised by her parish priest to cease her *caoine* was said to have replied: '*Éist, a Shagairt agus seasuigh díreach, Léigh an tAifreann is gheobhaidh tú díol as.* (Shut up, Priest, and stand up straight! Read the Mass and you'll get paid!).'[219] In this way, as Bourke argues, the *ban caointhe* required 'intellectual stamina, as well as great reserves of emotion [...] [to direct] eloquently at named individuals, many of them people in authority'.[220]

As the Church began to reduce the respect afforded to *caoineadh* in the Irish religious habitus by, for example, equating the *caoine* with trousers that hugged in all the wrong places, the folklore attached to the ritual began to change.[221] And so, in Synge's Ireland, as Ó Súilleabháin suggests, the *caoine* was unable to be performed for at least 'two hours after death lest the sleeping dogs of the Devil be roused along the path which the departed should had to follow'.[222] However, Maurya's *caoine* begins within minutes of Bartley's death because, ostensibly, she has little concern for the Christian concept of Satan. Satan is one of the cornerstones of belief that Catholics base their understanding of the afterlife upon; if the Catholic does not repent then eternal damnation awaits. Maurya does not give any credence to Catholic eschatology, which is why she concludes that: 'They're all together this time, and the end is come'.[223] Remy argues that to entertain the supposition that Maurya's 'caoine reflects a holdover belief in Druidical death ceremonies [...] is about as convincing as saying that the practice of decorating a tree at Christmas is an indication that contemporary Americans believe in Woden'.[224] Indeed, while it is plausible and possible to suggest that Maurya is referring to her family being all together in a Christian heaven and/or hell, we would do well to bear in mind Gearóid Ó Crualaoich's supposition that the sole function of the *ban caointhe* was to act 'as the female agent of the mournful transition of the deceased individual to the afterlife of an ambiguously Christian/fairy otherworld'.[225] Ó Crualaoich advocates that the *ban caointhe* was in fact, 'a flesh-and-blood reflex of the supernatural female sovereign who rules over the otherworld and into whose

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[218] RIA MS: 12, M11, f.395.
[219] Anonymous informant, quoted in Angela Bourke, "More in Anger Than in Sorrow: Irish Women's Lament Poetry," 167.
[220] Angela Bourke, "Lamenting The Dead," in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. 4: 1365.
[221] Seán Ó Coileáin, "The Irish Lament: An Oral Genre," *Studia Hibernica* 24 (1988): 114. Ó Coileáin advocates that 'by the mid-seventeenth century, keening is being mentioned, along with the wearing of the traditional tight-fitting trousers, as something abhorrent to the Catholic clergy.'
[222] Ó Súilleabháin, *Irish Folk Custom and Belief*, 40.
[223] *CW*, vol. 3: 27.
[224] Remy, "Synge's Peasants," 87.
[225] Gearóid Ó Crualaoich, "The "Merry Wake"," in *Irish Popular Culture: 1650-1850*, ed. James S. Donnelly Jr. and Kerby A. Miller (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1998), 192

domain the deceased is now to be translated'.[226] From this perspective, the *caoine* must be seen as a magical utterance of illocutionary force that transports the deceased to a pre-Christian Otherworld.

Synge's knowledge of the pre-Christian Otherworld was predicated upon his reading of *The Voyage of Bran* and within his notes from reading that text the dramatist wrote himself a reminder: 'Observe that ~~Heaven~~ the idea of Hell absent from primitive texts gradually assumes such prominence that it at last completely overshadows idea of heaven. In Irish and non-Christian texts no hell'.[227] The influence that *The Voyage of Bran* had on the dramaturgical praxis of *Riders* can hardly be overestimated for not only did the work introduce Synge to the pre-Christian belief in Manannán mac Lir, it also allowed Synge to develop a concentric understanding of the Otherworld. Anthony Roche maintains that '[u]nlike Christian notions of an otherworld, this Elysium is on and of the earth and its rewards are depicted very much in terms of the natural and man-made world.'[228] Synge was of the same persuasion and, in the same year that he wrote *Riders*, the dramatist published an article in *L'Européen* entitled "La Vieille Littérature Irlandaise", in which he pointed out that:

> *Rien, par example, dans la littérature n'est aussi primitif que cette foi commune aux Grecs et Irlandais, foi en un autre monde où les morts continuent une vie semblable à l'existence terrestre sans espoir d'être récompensés pour leurs vertus ni appréhension d'être punis pour leurs méfaits.*
>
> [Nothing in literature, for example, is as primitive as this faith common to the Greeks and the Irish, faith in another world where the dead continue to live a life similar to earthly existence without hope either of being rewarded for their virtues or of being punished for their misdeeds.][229]

In his notebook Synge continued his ruminations on the Otherworld by reminding himself that 'Irish and Hellenic alone preserved the first stage of the otherworld conception ~~that~~ which it is solely gods land unconnected with man's fate'.[230] Maurya's *caoine* makes reference to neither heaven nor hell because *caoineadh* was concomitant with the Otherworld; to permeate this Celtic belief with Catholic beliefs would only fly in the face of Synge's studies on the Otherworld that he had learnt from *The Voyage of Bran*, from which he made the following conclusion: 'The Celtic Doctrine of Re-Birth [is a] pre-Christian Irish Otherworld vision [that] finds its closest analogues in the earliest known stage of Hellenic belief and forms with them the most archaic Aryan presentiment of the divine

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[226] Ó Crualaoich, "The "Merry Wake"," 192.
[227] TCD MS: 4378, f.49v.
[228] Anthony Valentine Roche, "The Otherworld Drama of John Millington Synge," (PhD diss., The University of California: Santa Barbara, 1984), vii.
[229] *CW*, vol. 2: 354
[230] TCD MS: 4378, f.49v.

happy land'.[231] Bartley, then, has not passed into heaven or hell but, just like his elder brother, he continues to live in eternal youth in the Land of the Young (*Tír na nÓg*). If any promise of an afterlife is discernible in Maurya's *caoine*, then it must point towards the Celtic Otherworld because as contemporaneous scholars in Synge's Ireland suggested, 'the pig was conspicuous in the Irishman's Elysium as he is to-day in the cabin of the Irish peasant';[232] therefore, 'the pig with the black feet'[233] is an explicit signpost for the concomitance of the Otherworld. This is why the *Freeman's Journal* took issue with Maurya's *caoine*, because she believes that 'her prayers to Providence may cease, [and she] leaves off her praying just when Irish peasant's prayers would really begin.' [234] In short, Synge knew 'nothing of Irish peasant religion.'[235] However, Maurya does not need to pray for the divine entrance of her sons into Heaven because, as Synge recorded from *The Voyage of Bran*, entrance to the Otherworld is always 'dissociated from eschatological belief' because the Otherworld is always 'framed without reference to man's future life'.[236] Indeed, this is why Robin Skelton has suggested that the Holy Water that Maurya asks her daughter for is 'much more the magical water of pre-Christian belief than the water blessed by the priest'.[237] Critics such as William Hart have suggested that Skelton's conjecture is 'feeble'.[238] However, it is possible to suggest that the water that Maurya requires is, indeed, the Holy Water utilised in Catholic ritual, but nevertheless, in keeping with the precepts of pre-Christian sensibility, her recourse to Catholic ritual is permeated with the residue of pre-Christian belief. From this perspective, Skelton's pre-Christian consideration is not as feeble as Hart suggests, especially when the water is considered with the wealth of supernatural elements that make up the dramaturgy of *Riders*.

At this juncture it is possible to begin to bring together the disparate dramaturgical threads that Synge independently weaves into his narrative of magical realism. Synge set the play at *Samhain*, a time when supernatural phenomena were naturalised within the sensory data of human existence. During this time, the Celtic god of the sea, Manannán mac Lir expected to be venerated with a ritual sacrifice of a pig. Meanwhile, Bartley's brother, Michael returns to bring his brother away to the Otherworld and this is catalysed by Maurya's Evil Eye. Chastised by her daughters, Maurya visits the spring well to exercise the *Imbas Forosnaí*, which allows her to divine the future and realise that Bartley has been taken away to the Otherworld. In an attempt to ensure a safe passage to the Otherworld, she

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[231] TCD MS: 4378, f.49r.
[232] James Heron, *The Celtic Church in Ireland: The Story of Ireland and Irish Christianity from before the Time of St. Patrick to the Reformation* (London: Service and Paton, 1898), 41.
[233] *CW,* vol. 3: 9.
[234] "Irish National Theatre: Mr. Synge's New Play," *Freeman's Journal*, 6 February, 1905, 5.
[235] "Irish National Theatre: Mr. Synge's New Play," 5.
[236] TCD MS: 4378, f.49v.
[237] Robin Skelton, *The Writings of J.M. Synge* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 51.
[238] William Hart, "Synge and the Christian Ethos: A Critical Examination of a Recent Book," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 61 (1972): 92.

conducts a *caoine* but, significantly, even this performance is flawed. For not only has Maurya reduced the chances of Bartley's entrance into the Otherworld by failing to sacrifice a pig to Manannán Mac Lir, she then proceeds to debunk the teleology of the Otherworld. As Synge pointed out in his article for *L'Européen*, the Otherworld was a place of joyous and everlasting youth but Maurya concludes her *caoine* by negating this fundamental principle: 'No man at all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied.'[239] Roche argues that '[t]he dramatic conflict in *Riders to the Sea* is only secondarily between Christian and pagan beliefs. Primarily, it is embodied in the tidal struggle between Maurya's efforts to secure her sons in this world and Manannán's to draw them into the other'.[240] Maurya's incredulity towards the Otherworld in her *caoine* is her hamartia in full swing because not only has she lost Bartley to the Otherworld, she has reduced his chance of entering the Otherworld by dishonouring Manannán Mac Lir on two accounts: the negation of the sacrificial act and, furthermore, by discrediting the kingdom which he presided over.

'You Might as Well Call Epilepsy a Celtic Gift'[241]

In Holloway's diary it is possible to see a smudged footnote where he reminds himself: 'I heard the "Riders to the Sea" styled the drama of the clique.'[242] It cannot be denied that Synge worked with an elite Anglo-Irish clique and indeed, certain aspects of his dramaturgy in his plays are indexical of the fetishistic traits and tropes that have come to be associated with 'the drama of the clique'.[243] Like Yeats, Synge was partial to cutting and pasting the facts so that he could construct an efficacious dramatisation of pre-Christian residual culture. So, for example, Synge was fully aware that the Aran islanders did believe in Hell; a young girl in *The Aran Islands* taunts Synge: 'I think it is to Hell you will be going by and by'[244] and furthermore, the dramatist was told a folk tale about a fisherman 'who went to Hell' and Synge compared this to the 'stories in Brittany'.[245] Likewise, the young priest of Inis Meáin did have a considerable influence over the islander's lives; on one Sunday morning the dramatist found himself sitting alone on one of the island's 'pagan forts'[246] while 'the people are at Mass'.[247] At no point in *Riders* is any of this alluded to. Nevertheless, it would be unfair to postulate that the magical realism of *Riders* is in dramaturgical dialogue with the motifs that are indexical of the elite. Rather, Synge

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[239] *CW*, vol. 3: 27.
[240] Roche, "The Otherworld Drama of John Millington Synge," 101.
[241] Andrew Lang, "The Celtic Renascence," *Blackwood's Magazine* 161 (1897): 188.
[242] Holloway, NLI MS:1802, 25 February, 1904, f.95n.
[243] Holloway, NLI MS:1802, 25 February, 1904, f.95n.
[244] *CW*, vol. 2: 114.
[245] TCD MS: 4378, f.40v.
[246] *CW*, vol. 2: 69.
[247] *CW*, vol. 2: 82.

understood that if his narrative of magical realism could be accepted within the hegemony of cultural discourse, then it would be possible to begin to work through the melancholy that orbited the decline of pre-Christian culture in the wake of the Famine.

When Edmund Spenser stumbled across 'lewd crying and howling' he quickly considered the performance to be symptomatic of 'Sycthian barbarism'; the *caoine* was, in his final analysis, 'altogether heathenish.'[248] And while, of course, this was a contributing factor to the spectator's recalcitrance towards *caoineadh* in *Riders*, it was an easier analysis to accept than Synge's peculiar invocation of the nightmare of death that continued to linger in the popular consciousness in the wake of the Famine. If Synge's dramatisation of residual pre-Christian sensibility is in dialogue with the cultural haemorrhage caused by the Famine, then *caoineadh*, more than any other element of Synge's drama, engages in this therapy of cultural loss. In Synge's Ireland *caoineadh* was an index for the heathen and the savage in colonial discourse and the dramatist attempts to remove the ritual performance from this speculative logic. Instead, he proceeds to juxtapose the performance with a repressed cultural loss that is predicated upon the contemporaneity of the dead in the Irish landscape. If *caoineadh* is performed to send the deceased to the Otherworld, then during the Famine the preference of *caoineadh* was often given to the failed potato crop; Ó Madagáin reminds us that, during the Famine, 'women ran out among the gardens beside themselves, clapping their hands, crying aloud and keening their potatoes as they would keen the dead'.[249] Bodies were left to rot by the wayside as the natural impulse to feed the human body took precedence over the supernatural respect for the body and, quite quickly, as an informant called 'Frank' from County Clare observed: 'the hunger and destitution which prevailed throughout the country deprived the people in fact to that natural feeling and regard which they were wont to have for the dead.'[250] What was left, as noted by George Petrie (the antiquarian much admired by Synge), was an 'awful, unwonted silence, which during the Famine and subsequent years, almost everywhere prevailed, struck more fearfully upon [the Irish] imaginations.'[251] In contrast to the years before the Famine, Petrie characterised Ireland as 'the land of song' but now it was 'no longer tuneful; or, if human sound met the traveller's ear, it was only that of the feeble and despairing wail for the dead.'[252]

Again, we return to the consideration of *caoineadh* as music and Synge's dramatisation of this discordance and disharmony was considered by critics such as Arthur Clery (Joyce's classmate at University College Dublin), who wrote under the name of 'Chanel', to be particularly offending. Clery failed to stomach the 'distraught wailings of an

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[248] Spenser, *Ireland*, 95, 94.
[249] Ó Madagáin, *Caointe agus Seancheolta Eile*, 86.
[250] RIA MS: 12 Q13, f.107.
[251] George Petrie, *The Petrie Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland*, vol. 1, ed. George Petrie (Dublin: Dublin University Press, 1855), xii.
[252] Petrie, *The Petrie Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland*, vol. 1: xii.

Arran mother [...] [which is] horribly depicted, the caóin forming [...] a dire obligation to her murmurings'.[253] With respect to *caoineadh*, David Lloyd has argued that 'if the sound is quite literally haunting, that is surely because it picks up and foregrounds a whole chain of representations of the Famine and its psychological effects that recur through virtually every account, journalistic, historical and fictional'.[254] It is because the dead were not properly venerated during the Famine that they were left to stalk the melancholic corridors of the cultural consciousness where they reappear, as the repressed must, unexpectedly but nevertheless poignantly within the culture of the present: Synge's dramatisation of magical realism in *Riders*. From this perspective, in performance, the *gol*, an anonymous and wordless exclamation of grief, extends further than Maurya's desperation for the loss of her family and can be considered to be a startling and shocking re-emergence of the pre-modern within the modern; as Lloyd suggests, *caoineadh* invites 'those subaltern formations' that are problematic for the modernising drive of 'nationalist subjectification'.[255] If Catholic progressive historicism is haunted by the spectres of the pre-modern and the pre-political then Synge's dramatisation of *caoineadh* refuses the mourning of cultural loss because subaltern pasts exist in the ruins of modernity. The very existence of subaltern pasts rearticulate progressive historicism as a discourse where the past, present and future constellate, rather than a cultural discourse where the past appears as a palimpsest suited for geologic interpretation.

The shocking reminder of the discontents of Irish culture is why Frank Fay thought Riders 'a masterpiece'[256] and, in a letter to a disgruntled Holloway, he let his thoughts be known: 'And after all, just at present when people shirk facing the facts and sorrow of life [...] it is good that we should put on plays of this kind [...] I am bound to think that so long as Ireland is in her present depressed state, her drama will inevitably mirror that state.'[257] This, however, did not wash with Holloway. And after attending the production for the second night running he summed up his thoughts on *Riders* and its dramatisation of *caoineadh*: 'I have come to the conclusion that a more gruesome [...] play than *Riders to the Sea* has seldom if ever been staged before. The thoroughly in earnest playing of the company made the terribly depressing "wake" episode so realistic [...] that some of the audience could not stand the painful horror of the scene, & had to leave the hall during its progress.'[258] Synge's spectators would have been familiar with the dramatisation of the *caoineadh* in Boucicault's *The Shaughraun*, but the problem with Synge's dramatisation of

[253] Chanel, "The National Theatre," *Leader*, 5 March, 1904, 28.
[254] David Lloyd, "The Memory of Hunger," in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanijan (Berkley: University of California Press, 2003), 205-06.
[255] David Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press and Field Day, 2008), 66.
[256] NLI MS: 13,267, f.6. F.J. Fay to Joseph Holloway, 1 March, 1904.
[257] NLI MS: 13,267, f.6.
[258] Holloway, NLI MS: 1802, 26 February, 1904, f.99.

caoineadh lies precisely in the fact that the ritual performance was presented to a bourgeois audience that must have been all too familiar with the material reality of *caoineadh* in folk culture upon a stage of national-popular sovereignty, which claimed to eschew the 'buffoonery and easy sentiment'[259] that was concomitant with Boucicault's stage-Irishman. What Synge's narrative of magical realism in *Riders* forced Holloway to realise was that residual pre-Christian rituals such as *caoineadh* still held cultural capital in Ireland. Synge's demonstration that the Irish populace still believed in the magical pluralisation of reality, made spectators such as Holloway acutely aware that if their categorisation of reality was indefinite then, by corollary, all presuppositions that concern what it means to be modern were also indefinite. This is why Synge's narrative of magical realism is subversive. It treats the spectator as if s/he were a child by enticing him/her with peculiar supernatural details, such as fairy abduction and pre-Christian rituals, so that ultimately, the spectator willingly accommodates the supernatural within his/her understanding of mimesis so that the supernatural is afforded the opportunity to work its magic within narrative realism. In doing this, Synge is able to use magical realism to privilege the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland because the narrative foregrounds reality that is made magical by a displaced culture and, in the same instance, this magic of this reality has been untouched and untainted by Catholic modernity. *Riders* is a text that exposes the simulacra behind the simulacrum, which in turn, exposes the uncertainty of modernity by positioning elements from a subsumed and subterranean culture within an alternative temporality.

In Synge's hands, then, magical realism in *Riders* attempts to emerge as a discourse of counter-hegemony as it seeks to problematise the convention of realism, which was so essential in bolstering the binary structures of rationality and ontology, two concepts that were important to the emergence of the modern Catholic subject. To achieve this end, Synge had to discredit the magical nationalism of the Revival because he understood the convention of cottage kitchen realism to be a reductive aesthetic that bolstered cultural hegemony. From his knowledge of comparative social science Synge knew that Maurya's use of the *Imbas Forosnaí* had nothing to do with the Celtic Geist and he had to look no further than Andrew Lang's critique of the Revival for evidence of this. Lang complained that '[...]"second sight" is averred to be a Celtic gift. You might as well call epilepsy a Celtic gift. Every savage – the Maori, the Red Indian, the Zulu – is as full of second sight as any man of Moi-dart. What is called "Celtic" in poetry or in superstition is really early human, and may become recrudescent anywhere, for good or for evil.'[260] Synge's narrative of magical realism, then, is not concerned with the Celtic Geist but rather, it questions why the pre-modern aspects of Irish culture were disavowed within Catholic modernity.

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[259] Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1972), 20.
[260] Lang, "The Celtic Renascence," 188-189.

Not all spectators emerged dissatisfied from the performance. An anonymous letter was received by the *Irish Times*, in which the author relished how 'the keen of the sorrowing neighbours swells and sinks with a perfect emotional effect, the pathos and the pity of it must be felt and cannot be described. [...] Your critic asserts that the exposure of the dead body is not artistic. He may be right, but I should like to point out that he is not in agreement with Aeschylus.'[261] When Yeats first likened *Riders* to the work of Aeschylus, the reaction had, according to George Roberts, caused 'some misunderstanding in Dublin literary circles, where the comparison was looked on as the outcome of Mr. Yeats' [sic] imagination'.[262] However, the anonymous writer of the letter that landed on the editor's desk at the *Irish Times* was certainly not confused. Like Yeats he/she instantly recognised that Synge's staging of the *caoine* invited the concomitance of the supernatural within the natural, just as Electra's lament with her mourning women did at the exposition of *Electra* (458 B.C). For Synge, like Aeschylus before him, the dramatisation of the unreal within the real was the only way that the dramatist perceived the sensory data of material existence. And in his notebook, Synge reminded himself of his essential task when writing *Riders*; the concomitance of the unreal with the real that was informed by his scholarship of Schopenhauer and comparative social science: 'There is no mode of establishing the validity of any belief, except by that of showing its entire congruity with all other beliefs'.[263] The dramatist would have been glad, then, that the pluralisation of reality in *Riders* afforded at least one spectator an enlightened metaphysical understanding of his or her own ontology.

The hostile response to *Riders* forced Synge to begin to question his strategies when staging the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland. With his first two plays (*Riders* and *The Shadow of the Glen*) the dramatist had chosen to demonstrate his knowledge of pre-Christian sensibility with a deep respect for residual culture and on both occasions Synge was left to lick his wounds after a veritable scathing. During the summer of 1904, then, Synge, like all great rebels, decided to rally and come back with a vengeance. Throughout this transition period, Frank Fay promised Holloway that 'Synge's next two plays will be devoid of corpses'[264] but to the dramatist this mattered not. By now he had undergone a transition from a playwright that dramatised pre-Christian sensibility in order to highlight the cracks and fissures of Catholic progressive historicism, to a playwright that would begin to use pre-Christian sensibility as a personal defence for his own class insecurity.

When Synge was ready to stage his next work, James Joyce was the first to know about it. Joyce had orbited the inception of *Riders* and now, he was present at the inception

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[261] "Mr. Synge's New Play," *Irish Times*, 27 February, 1904, 6.
[262] George Roberts, "Memoirs of George Roberts," *Irish Times*, 1 August, 1955, 5.
[263] TCD MS: 4379, f.95v.
[264] NLI MS: 13,267, f.6.

of *The Well of the Saints* (1905), choosing to arrive at a rehearsal in Camden Hall on the evening of 20 June, 1904 completely inebriated. Joyce's visits to Camden Hall were usually tolerated because he provided entertainment (singing) to the National Theatre Society in their breaks from rehearsal. On this occasion, however, Joyce couldn't quite make it inside the hall and, instead, he chose to slump underneath a gas jet that dimly lit the passageway that linked the hall to Camden Street. Later that same evening he was found by Vera Esposito (an actress in the society) and her astonished Russian mother, which caused Frank Fay to lock and bolt the door as Joyce banged on it while screaming: 'Open the door at once, Fay. You can't keep us out of your bawdy house. We know you'.[265] Ten days earlier, however, it had been a completely different story. On that evening Joyce attended the meeting called by the Society, where Synge informed the company about his new play and Roberts remembered how,

> "The Well of the Saints" was then read to us by F.J. Fay. Synge was exceedingly nervous during the reading, although it was only to a small committee all of whom were his friends; but when ever [sic] his work was concerned this nervousness would arise. I remember well the intense feeling the play aroused in us and the enthusiastic remarks of A.E. after the reading. It was forthwith cast, Synge himself asking for W.G. Fay to play Martin Doul and myself to play Timmy the Smith.[266]

Just two months after Joyce had attended the reading of Synge's new play he published a satirical poem, "The Holy Office," in which he valorised Synge as a dramatist that remained 'sober all the day / Mixes a naggin in his play'.[267] *The Well of the Saints*, with its conflicting dramatisation of pre-Christian pantheism, would certainly turn the Abbey into a 'bawdy house'.[268]

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[265] Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 161.
[266] Roberts, "Memoirs of George Roberts," 2 August, 1955, 5.
[267] James Joyce, *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, ed. Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann (New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), 150.
[268] Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 161.

CHAPTER TWO

'PRIEST-RIDDEN PEOPLE'[1]

Animism precedes theism hence reduplication.

- J.M. Synge[2]

'In no case can we exactly copy nature', Synge writes in his notebook, because 'there must be some thing reflex in art'.[3] The efficacy of the Natural landscape in all of Synge's plays can hardly be overstated; when *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1910) toured to North America, the *New York Times* maintained that the dramatist was the consummate '[p]oet of nature, [who] knew the sounds and savours of the outdoors, the music of wind and rain, and the simple comfort of shelter in a storm'.[4] Synge's understanding of the Natural landscape is particularly dependent upon the residue of pre-Christian sentiment because, as he admits, the mysterious power of the landscape gives rise to 'the origin of local superstitions' that hold their provenance in the 'fearful and genuine hypnotic influence such things possess upon the prepared personality'.[5] Synge was aware of the debilitating effects that Ireland's 'peculiar climate'[6] had on its populace as weather conditions violently oscillated between incessant downpours, in which the 'thatch drips with water stained to a dull chestnut and the floor in the cottages seems to be going back to the condition of the bogs near it',[7] to exquisite periods of sunshine during which the landscape is saturated with 'supernatural radiance'.[8] For Synge, nowhere was this more apparent than amongst the idiosyncratic climate of the Wicklow glens, a climate that was conducive towards pre-Christian superstition because, like the Aran islanders, the psyche of those that lived in the glens was deeply troubled by 'the influence of a particular locality'.[9] Synge's Wicklow plays particularly focus on four localities in County Wicklow: Aughavannagh, Rathdangan, Greenane and Glenmalure. These localities extend from Wicklow's heartland (Aughavannagh) towards the east of the County (Glenmalure); from the massif of Lugnacuillaigh, across the Avonmore River and through to the glaciated valleys. In his unpublished essay, "East Irish Traits," Synge points out that these localities are '[b]eyond

[1] W.P. Ryan, *The Pope's Green Island* (London: James Nisbet, 1912), 41.
[2] TCD MS: 4378, f.55r.
[3] TCD MS: 4373, f.25v.
[4] Brooks Atkinson, "The Theatre," *New York Times*, 15 December, 1949, 51.
[5] *CW*, vol. 2: 10.
[6] *CW*, vol. 2: 209.
[7] *CW*, vol. 2: 209.
[8] *CW*, vol. 2: 209.
[9] *CW*, vol. 2: 209.

the beaten tracks'[10] and, as far as Synge was concerned, in all four of these localities the tyranny of space and place was acute.

Synge is perfectly willing to accept that the tyranny of the Wicklow landscape could be explained by the tumultuous weather conditions that have 'caused or increased a tendency to nervous depression among the people'.[11] Indeed, Nicholas Grene has argued that Synge believed that 'neurosis and dementia are associated with the mental exposure of those in lonely places to the oppressive emptiness of nature, its menacing power'.[12] But it is also important to recognise that Synge mobilises pathetic fallacy (the literary allocation of sentience to inanimate objects) in the Wicklow landscape and the salience of this trope can be detected throughout Synge's works. For example, as Synge watched the performance of the *caoine* (keen) on Inis Meáin he suggested that although 'the morning had been beautifully fine' as the coffin was lowered into the grave, all of a sudden 'thunder rumbled overhead and hailstones hissed among the bracken', which precipitated 'a death-peel of extraordinary grandeur'.[13] For Synge, Nature is irreducibly subject to his own ideological persuasion and, indeed, the Natural landscape is always an ideological construct that is naturalised into social conditions by cultural hegemony. In Ireland this is particularly apt because the landscape is synonymous with Irish quintessence; during the Revival the landscape was a fetishised commodity (as it still is) that commanded specific cultural capital. The land in Synge's Ireland necessarily summoned the contemporaneity of an ideology that was saturated with the sacred rather than the profane. Thus, the ideological dominance of the land within the Irish context demands that its history is anything but secular. But rarely was this the case in Synge's Ireland because the temporality of modernity that necessitated the politics of Catholic progressive historicism attempted to distance itself from the sacredness of the land, because to postulate that the land was invested in the sacred was to invite the contemporaneity of pre-Christian cultural residue. Nevertheless, the history of the Irish landscape extends beyond the purview of Christian history and, as T.M. Charles-Edwards has pointed out, in pre-Christian Ireland the very act of showing 'contempt for a narrative implanted in the landscape, was to challenge the very basis of the political order'.[14] Synge's plays dramatise narratives of pre-Christian sentiment into the Wicklow landscape in order to problematise the ideological dominance of the progressive historicism of Catholic modernity.

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[10] TCD MS: 4335, f.44v.
[11] *CW*, vol. 2: 209.
[12] Nicholas Grene, "On The Margins: Synge and Wicklow," in *Interpreting Synge: Essays from the Synge Summer School: 1991-2000*, ed. Nicholas Grene (Dublin: Lilliput, 2000), 32.
[13] *CW*, vol. 2: 75.
[14] T.M. Charles-Edwards, "Introduction: Prehistoric and Early Ireland," in *A New History of Ireland*, vol. 1, *Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. Dáibhí Ó Crónín (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), lxxx.

On Synge's Aran 'one is forced to believe in a sympathy between man and nature'[15] and for Synge this could only explained as 'a scheme of exquisitely arranged sensations that have no analogue except in some services of religion'.[16] Synge's notebooks testify that the dramatist believed this service of religion to be pantheism, a philosophy that states that '(1) all existing things are unified; and (2) the maximally-inclusive unity is divine'.[17] Synge's understanding of pantheism was predicated upon residual pre-Christian culture and, as Dáithí Ó hÓgáin suggests, 'a very basic layer of pagan lore in Ireland [is] the situation of the deities within the landscape.'[18] And while Synge's engagement with the Wicklow landscape is still a fetishisation of the commodity, his engagement with it constitutes an insurgency against Catholic, bourgeois modernity because it draws upon a belief that was symbolically central to the cultural residue from pre-Christian belief.

Pre-Christian pantheism permeates Synge's plays as he continually seeks '[a] Christless creed' with 'earth's young majesty'.[19] As a religious belief, pantheism 'reveres and cares for nature, [it is] a religion that joyously accepts this life as our only life, and this earth as our only paradise'.[20] In his childhood Synge believed that he had 'evolved a pantheistic scheme like that of all barbarians',[21] but this is a retrospective analysis of primitivism. Synge's interest in pantheism surely holds its provenance in his acute appreciation of William Wordsworth's Romantic Nature poetry; as Peter Harrison has argued, Wordsworth is the 'best known of the English pantheistic poets'.[22] However, Wordsworth was merely a stepping stone to the efficacy of comparative social science; '[w]hatever knowledge of science [Synge] possessed', recalled Stephen MacKenna, 'had its origin in his extraordinary love of nature; to see a leaf grow or to see one wither was of real interest to him.'[23] Thus, in order to substantiate how Synge's plays repeatedly draw upon a pantheistic belief that is specifically pre-Christian in its praxis, it is necessary to turn to Synge's scholarship of comparative social science and metaphysics. This chapter, then, is concerned with how pantheism of a pre-Christian sensibility operates in three of Synge's Wicklow plays: *The Shadow of the Glen* (1903), *The Tinker's Wedding* (1909) and *The Well of the Saints* (1905). It is significant that in all three plays the only character that is able to mediate pantheism is the character of the tramp or tinker and this chapter will specifically

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[15] *CW,* vol. 2: 75.
[16] *CW,* vol. 2: 102n.
[17] Edward Steinhart, "Pantheism and Current Ontology," *Religious Studies* 40, no. 1 (2004): 63.
[18] Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *The Sacred Isle: Belief and Religion in Pre-Christian Ireland* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999), 107.
[19] *CW,* vol. 1: 6.
[20] Paul Harrison, *Pantheism: Understanding the Divinity in Nature and the Universe* (Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element, 1999), 1.
[21] *CW,* vol. 2: 7.
[22] Harrison, *Pantheism*, 33.
[23] Stephen MacKenna, NLI MS: 13,276, f.2.

identify the ways in which the tramp and the tinker is able to negotiate the pre-Christian pantheism of the Wicklow landscape.

'Wordsworthian Run Mad'[24]

'All art', Synge maintains, 'that is not conceived by a soul in harmony with some mood of the earth is without value'.[25] If the essential premise of pantheism is that the cosmos is animated by a divine power, then Synge advocates pantheism by suggesting that an aesthetic experience of Nature must include 'a spiritual grace beyond and through the earthly'.[26] And so, the dramatist is at pains to point out that Nature is the only alternative to Christian doxology:

> The religious art is a thing of the past only – vain and foolish regret – and its place has been taken up by our quite modern feeling for the beauty and mystery of nature, an emotion that has gradually risen up as religion in the dogmatic sense has died. Our pilgrimages are not to Canterbury or ~~Plymouth~~ to Jerusalem, but to Killarney and Cumberland and the Alps. In my plays and topographical books I have tried to give humanity and this mysterious external world.[27]

In May 1899, upon arriving in Finistère, Brittany, Synge concluded that 'Nature is miraculous'[28] and when in Paris Synge longed 'to come out among the hills' because it allowed him to 'experience things that are divine', but there was 'little poetry that [he could] read [there], except the songs of the peasants and some of Wordsworth'.[29] For Synge, pantheism is inextricably caught up with 'an expression of divine ecstasy rather than a mere decoration of the world'[30] and, furthermore, everyone will recognise these qualities in 'Wordsworth's *Ode*' but still, Wordsworth 'does not seem perhaps to give it its truest interpretation'.[31] In "Ode," Wordsworth considers the spiritualism of the Natural order as a means to transcend the profanity of phenomenal existence:

> Beneath the concave of an April sky / When all the fields with freshest green were dight / Appeared, in presence of that spiritual eye / That aids or supersedes our grosser sight'[...][32]

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[24] Nicholas Grene, *Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 13.
[25] *CW*, vol. 2: 35.
[26] *CW*, vol. 2: 35.
[27] TCD MS: 4405, ff.5v-8v.
[28] *CW*, vol. 2: 33.
[29] *CW*, vol. 2: 35
[30] *CW*, vol. 2: 13.
[31] *CW*, vol. 2: 13.
[32] William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth – The Oxford Authors*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 341.

Wordsworth's poetry inspired Synge to begin writing his own poetry and his very first publication, "Glen Cullen" appeared in Trinity's internal publication, *Kottabos*, in the College's Hilary term in 1893. In that that poem Synge praises the majesty of Nature that is manifested in the 'Thrush, linnet, stare and wren, / Brown lark beside the sun'[...][33] Turning to his notebook Synge remarks that: 'The virtue of Wordsworth = that strange mystical sense of a life in natural things and of mans life as a part of nature, drawing strength and color and character from local influences from the hills and streams, and from natural sights and sounds.'[34] Synge's ostensible objection to Wordsworth's interpretation of nature in "Ode" is not necessarily Wordsworth's investigation into how Nature affects the human psyche – Wordsworth certainly addresses that – but Wordsworth's failure to engage with the supernatural manifestations that 'the spiritual eye'[35] discerns within the specificity of locality.

While pursuing his undergraduate degree at Trinity College Dublin, Synge began a concerted effort to understand how the supernatural could be detected in Nature and, as Chapter One suggests, his reading of Emanuel Swedenborg's mysticism and Arthur Schopenhauer's metaphysics advanced his studies. But he would also draw analysis from his study of Wordsworth's poetry[36] and his detailed reading of Matthew Arnold's *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (first published in 1867).[37] With that work Synge would have been interested in how Arnold equated 'the intimate life of nature' with 'her weird power and her fairy charm.'[38] Continuing with Arnold's work, he would have surely questioned the Celts' 'peculiar aptitude' for 'a magically vivid near interpretation of nature'.[39] Arnold's reductive work may wax lyrical on the Romantic efficacy of Nature but, nevertheless, it was a work that Synge could hardly put down and it appears to have been his critical companion to Wordsworth's poetry.[40] However, even though Synge's initial philosophy of Nature was informed by the Romantic sentiment in the work of Wordsworth and Arnold, caution should be observed with regard to simplified claims that Synge developed a fundamentally Romantic understanding of Nature; W.B. Yeats was incorrect to essentialise Synge's 'passion for Wordsworth' because, while it was certainly 'nothing in itself', it hardly 'completes the image'[41] of the dramatist.

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[33] J.M. Synge, "Glen Cullen," in *Kottabos: Trinity College Dublin* (Dublin: William McGee, 1893), 103.
[34] TCD MS: 4378, f.26v.
[35] William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth – The Oxford Authors*, 341.
[36] TCD MS: 4413, f.122r. Synge began reading Wordsworth on 20 November, 1892.
[37] Synge began reading Matthew Arnold's work on 27 October, 1892 (TCD MS: 4413, f.44r). He read *On the Study of Celtic Literature* on 20 November, 1892 (TCD MS: 4413, f.188v). His study of Arnold's work was undertaken until April of the following year (TCD MS: 4414, f.48r).
[38] Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Kennikat, 1970), 133.
[39] Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, 135.
[40] See, for example, TCD MS: 4413, ff.118v-129v.
[41] W.B. Yeats, "A Memory of Synge," *Irish Statesman*, 5 July, 1924, 530-32.

Arnold suggested that it was impossible to 'be much helped by Wordsworth's philosophy of Nature, as a scheme in itself and disjoined from his poems. Nor shall we be led to enjoy the poems the more by having a philosophy of Nature, as a scheme in itself and disjoined from his poems.'[42] But this is hardly the case with Synge, who looked towards Wordsworth in order to understand what Arnold meant when he discussed the 'fairy-like loveliness of Celtic nature'.[43] In Wordsworth's poetry, Synge would have repeatedly encountered the lone wanderer of the hills and dales of the Lake District, who truly understood Nature's majesty and power. A significant influence on Synge's plays is Wordsworth's romanticisation of the itinerant Who is summoned into the Natural order so that he may escape the corrupt materialism of bourgeois life; in Finistère the dramatist congratulates himself on his own decision to 'come back to nature [because] my rather crude materialism [in Paris] has begun to dissatisfy me.'[44] For Synge, the tramps and tinkers that lived a nomadic life amongst the Wicklow glens were figures that could resonate deeply with pre-Christian pantheism and this must be regarded as Synge's extrapolation from Wordsworth. However, Synge suggested that the wanderer of Wicklow 'is not a leech-gatherer such as Wordsworth met upon the moors but is still full of scorn and humour and impatience'.[45] This may have been the case but Synge could not help himself from orientalising the nomadic lifestyle of the tramp and tinker. If we accept Ziauddin Sardar's suggestion that the Orient is anywhere East of the West, that is to say Other to the Self,[46] then Synge's tramps and tinkers must be seen as a consummation of Orientalism because, as Brian Singleton points out, the Orientalist project necessarily involves 'the projection of desires and anxieties about the Self onto imagined peoples of the Orient'.[47] It is significant that Synge understood the tramp/tinker to be just like himself – 'the hunter, poacher and painter are the only men who know nature'[48] – and his fetishisation of a nomadic lifestyle that involves the separation of oneself from bourgeois culture is clearly evident in his works. He even signed off his letters to his fiancée, Molly Allgood, with the anonym of '[y]our old Tramp'.[49] But Synge wasn't a tramp and, at times, his Orientalism of the tramp/tinker only serves to disclose his privileged position as a member of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy:

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[42] Matthew Arnold, *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, vol. 8, *Essays Religious and Mixed*, ed. R.H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 250.
[43] Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, 133.
[44] *CW*, vol. 2: 33.
[45] *CW*, vol. 2: 196.
[46] Ziauddin Sardar, *Orientalism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), 38.
[47] Brian Singleton, *Oscar Asche, Orientalism, and British Musical Comedy* (Connecticut: Praeger, 2004), 10.
[48] *CW*, vol. 2: 10.
[49] *CL*, vol. 1: 178. J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood, 19 July, 1906. This is the first reference to Synge's alias as a tramp.

> As he sleeps by Lough Bray [County Wicklow] and the nightjar burrs and snipe drum over his head and the grouse crow, and heather whispers round him, he hears in their voices the chant of singers in the dark chambers of Japan and the clamour of tambourines and [the] flying limbs of dancers he knew in Algeria, and the rustle of golden fabrics of the east. As the trout splash in the dark water at his feet he forgets the purple moorland that is round him and hears waves that lap round a boat in some southern sea. He is not to be pitied.[50]

However, while the tramp and the tinker in Synge's writing are exotic constructs, it is important to understand that his application of pantheism that is particularly pre-Christian in its praxis is not an exotic fabrication, but firmly grounded in comparative social science and metaphysics. Tramps and tinkers, the diametric opposite of the rectitude and propriety of Catholic bourgeois Ireland, are simply the vehicles in which Synge can mobilise pre-Christian pantheism, precisely because they spend a nomadic lifestyle wandering through the Wicklow glens.

If Synge's dramaturgy of residual pre-Christian culture is Modernist then, at first glance, the recourse to Romantic constructs of Nature seems strange. However, what Synge had learnt from Wordsworth was that an aesthetic consideration of Nature should be informed by science. What binds Romanticism and science is a sense of wonderment, the "eureka" moment and, as Richard Holmes has pointed out, these two discourses lay cheek by jowl in Wordsworth's England: 'there [was] a Romantic science in the same sense that there [was] a Romantic poetry, and often for the same enduring reasons'.[51] Romantic science blurred the boundaries between cultural subjectivity and mechanical objectivity as science became increasingly dynamic as it investigated 'invisible powers and mysterious energies, or fluidity and transformations, of growth and organic change'.[52] All of a sudden cosmology became Romantic as the science of biology, chemistry and physics moved away from the strictures of Sir Isaac Newton's three natural laws of motion; even astronomy, the scientific quintessence of the Enlightenment, was subject to Romanticism as the unknown cosmos underwent scientific examination. Romantic science, then, called forth interdisciplinary skills as both the artist and the scientist began to investigate the 'notion of an infinite, mysterious Nature, waiting to be discovered or seduced into revealing her secrets'.[53]

'If the time should ever come when what is now called Science, thus familiarised to men', Wordsworth argued, then the poet's imperative is to 'lend his divine spirit' in order to

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[50] *CW*, vol. 2: 196.
[51] Richard Holmes, *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (London: Harper, 2008), xvi.
[52] Holmes, *The Age of Wonder*, xviii.
[53] Holmes, *The Age of Wonder*, xviii.

ensure that science 'put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood'.[54] In this way, Wordsworth held the scientist in the highest of regard:

> The Man of Science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of knowledge; *it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science* [...] the Poet will sleep then no more that at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the Man of Science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself.[55]

Synge's notes on Wordsworth's poetry conclude that he believed that poetry is 'the impassioned expression of all science' because 'without poetry our science will appear incomplete'.[56] Grene has argued that Synge's attitude towards Nature is occasionally 'Wordsworthian run mad',[57] but it is interesting to postulate that while Synge's aesthetic treatment of Nature is certainly indebted to Romanticism as evidenced in Wordsworth, the debt is one of Romantic science. For it surely cannot be Wordsworth's pastoral influence; in 1902 as Synge interviewed 'one of the most remarkable classes left in Ireland' that lived among 'the mountains in dense clouds of mists'[58] in Wicklow, he understood that the pastoral was not an apposite reflection of material conditions: 'Beautiful as these Wicklow [glens] are in all seasons, when one has learned to know the people, one does not love them as Wordsworth did for the sake of their home'.[59] Time and again, in Synge's ethnography of the Wicklow glens we come across informants that have been deeply troubled by pre-Christian pantheism; from a hysterical young girl who is convinced that her two sisters have drowned in a bog[60] to the anxiety of an older lady that lived on her own: 'There's nothing I fear like the thunder', she tells Synge and 'when I do be excited with the thunder I do be afeard I might die there alone in the cottage and no one know it'.[61]

If Wordsworth presented Synge with an efficacious framework of Romantic science, then the dramatist's turn towards comparative social science would have presented him with the opportunity to rarefy Arnold's hyperbole on Celtic nature; there was little point in the realisation of aesthetics if science and poetry were not symbiotic. Quite quickly, as Synge applied the efficacy of comparative social science to Nature, he would have understood that Arnold's understanding of natural magic was a Celticist construct.

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[54] William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, vol. 1, ed. W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 141.
[55] William Wordsworth, *The Prose Works*, vol. 1: 141. Emphasis added.
[56] TCD MS: 4379, f.23v.
[57] Nicholas Grene, *Synge: A Critical Study*, 13.
[58] *CW*, vol. 2: 228n.
[59] *CW*, vol. 2: 228n.
[60] TCD SSMS: 6193, f.1545.
[61] *CW*, vol. 2: 210.

Celtologists such as Andrew Lang continually pointed out that Arnold's suppositions 'are not scientific, they would not satisfy science, yet they have a pseudo-scientific ethnological air. In fact, they are Popular Science. It is impossible to disprove them: we *may* have a Celtic drop in our veins, and that Celtic drop *may* carry with it Celtic qualities in poetry. But it is certain that these qualities are not exclusively Celtic.'[62] As far as Lang was concerned, 'the features of delicacy, love of nature, love of the supernatural and of magic' were merely 'the result of environment and of history rather than race'.[63] Thus, the discourse of comparative social science would have encouraged Synge to turn towards the locality of space and place in order to understand the material conditions that precipitated the 'fairy-like loveliness of Celtic nature'.[64] With respect to the Wicklow landscape Synge did exactly this and he soon appreciated that psychic erosion and pastoral insanity in the Wicklow glens was a corollary of the tyranny of pre-Christian pantheism. And it is with this framework of Romantic science in mind that we can begin to understand how Synge's tramps and tinkers utilise a pre-Christian praxis of pantheism, which is indebted to Synge's knowledge of comparative social science and metaphysics, in three of the dramatist's Wicklow plays.

'The Glory of Irish Philosophy'[65]

In his 1902 article for *L'Européen* entitled "La Vielle Littérature Irlandaise," Synge praised Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville's translation of "The Song of Amergin" that was taken from The Book of Leinster because it was the consummation of Irish pantheism. "The Song of Amergin" suggests that Irish pantheism is a life force that can be felt as '*le vent qui soufflé sur la mer* (the wind which blows on the sea),' or as '*le bœuf aux sept combats'* (the bull of seven fights)' or even as '*le vautour sur le rocher* (the vulture on the rocks)'.[66] Whichever way pantheism manifests itself in material conditions, de Jubainville concluded that pantheism is always able to identify itself: '*Je suis parole de science* (I am the speech of science)'.[67] In his notebook Synge continued the essay in its unpublished form, where he points out that '*la puissante doctrine pantheiste doctrine que est le gloire de la philosophie irlandaise*[,] *le file est la personne fication de la science, la science est l'etre meme tout les forces de la nature* (the powerful doctrine of pantheism is the glory of Irish philosophy[,] the thread is the personification of science, science is the essential being of all forces of nature)'.[68]

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[62] Andrew Lang, "The Celtic Renascence," *Blackwood's Magazine* 161 (1897): 184. Emphasis in original.
[63] Lang, "The Celtic Renascence," 182.
[64] Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, 133.
[65] TCD MS: 4378, f.61v.
[66] *CW,* vol. 2: 354-55.
[67] *CW,* vol. 2: 354-55.
[68] TCD MS: 4378, f.61v.

Sinéad Garrigan Mattar has suggested that 'Pantheism – as defined by de Jubainville in Celtic terms – was Synge's preferred interpretation of "animism"'.[69] Garrigan Mattar, however, is somewhat mistaken. If animism is a 'condition of being alive to the world, characterised by a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness',[70] then animism is not marked by the belief that Nature has a soul but rather, it is a distribution of thought, feeling and power from humans to Nature that is continuous and reciprocal. And so, contemporary anthropological discourse suggests that animism has nothing to do with the physical agency of a tree, rock or water but it is fundamentally concerned with how these features are naturalised as ideological power within material conditions, a process that escapes ontological realisation. For instance, Tim Ingold points towards the example of the wind, because in 'most animic [sic] cosmologies [...] the winds are taken to be alive and to have agentive powers of their own'.[71] Thus, when Synge suggests that for the Aran islanders 'the moment the wind changes everything is reversed',[72] he is not of the persuasion that the wind is anthropomorphic but rather, the wind blows because it is progenitive, in the same way that an organism such as the Aran islander is progenitive. It is not, as Garrigan Mattar argues, that Synge interpreted animism as pantheism. Nevertheless, he certainly appropriated animistic philosophy into his conception of pantheism. But he was entitled to. And his accurate notes from James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* substantiate his entitlement.

As Synge worked his way through *The Golden Bough* in September 1898, he would have understood that animism is only one step ahead of totemism and, furthermore, that both could be identified in the very essence of social structures, the kinship group. From Frazer, Synge would have understood that all that separated totemism from animism was the transference of a soul from the particular (totemism) to the general (animism). In this way, the slight shift of focus found in animism is that of an individual spirit manifested in the entirety of the Natural order, whereas totemism maintains that only individual (not singular) totems are sacred to the kinship group. In turn, this leads to a differentiation between the veneration of an individual spirit or god that protects and perpetuates the life of the kinship group as compared to animism as the ubiquitous progenitor. Animistic belief is dependent upon totemism because of the belief that the soul could leave the body. We have seen in Chapter One that Synge accepted Herbert Spencer's postulation that maintained the origin of religion was predicated upon the belief that when a member of the kinship dreamed, he/she believed his/her soul could leave the body. Animism arises out of

[69] Sinéad Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 187.
[70] Tim Ingold, "Re-Thinking the Animate, Re-Animating Thought," *Ethnos* 71, no. 1 (2006), 10.
[71] Ingold, "Re-Thinking the Animate, Re-Animating Thought," 16.
[72] *CW,* vol. 2: 66.

totemism, then, because the kinship group understood that if their souls were separable from their bodies then this belief must be applicable to other elements of the cosmos.

We know that Synge understood the difference between totemism and animism from his notes on Frazer's work on 'the External Soul' and, in particular, the '[s]oul of a giant in a parrot in a Hindoo tale'.[73] Synge concluded that the difference between totemism and animism could be summarised thus: 'Totem animals with the soul of living men lodged in them'[74] and, furthermore, that this 'initiation [is] explained by totem [and] the man dies as an animal and comes to life as ~~an~~ man'.[75] What Synge is wrestling with here is Frazer's understanding that 'the view of nature as animated by indwelling spirits appears to have generally preceded the view of it as controlled by external deities; to put it shortly, animism preceded deism.'[76] Synge certainly grasped this much from Frazer, as his notes testify: 'animism precedes theism hence reduplication'.[77] Similarly, Frazer advocated that animism preceded theism: 'As men emerge from savagery the tendency to humanise their divinities gains strength; and the more human these become the wider is the breach which severs them from the natural objects of which they were at first merely the animating spirits or souls'.[78] Frazer's key point here is that 'natural objects' have 'animating spirits'.[79] Frazer suggested that animism would evolve into religious belief as men and women developed a 'tendency to humanise their divinities'.[80] However, pantheism is categorically opposed to anthropomorphism. What pantheism does take from animism is the understanding that Nature is an animating life force. When Synge suggests that 'animism precedes theism hence reduplication',[81] what he is trying to explain is that Nature is an animating life force that will exist as a god that is a Unity of life forces, not as a god that is anthropomorphic. This is a fundamental premise of pantheism. It is imperative to point out that animism still exists in pantheism and its existence can be identified in the fact that like pantheism, animism 'rejects a qualitative bifurcation of the inanimate and animate'[82] or, to put it another way, what pantheism borrows from animism is that Nature is an animating life force. But pantheism is not animism precisely because animism denies the existence of a Unity between all life forces and for Synge, animating life forces demanded a Unity between everything that exists, which is why he maintained that 'every life is a symphony' because 'emotions which pass through us have neither end nor beginning – are a part of the

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[73] TCD MS: 4378, f.54v.
[74] TCD MS: 4378, f.54v.
[75] TCD MS: 4378, f.54v.
[76] James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 432.
[77] TCD MS: 4378, f.55r.
[78] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 432.
[79] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 432.
[80] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 432.
[81] TCD MS: 4378, f.55r.
[82] Michael P. Levine, *Pantheism: A Non-Theistic Concept of Deity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 114.

sequence of existence – and as the laws of the world are in harmony it is this almost cosmic element in the person which gives great art the dignity of nature'.[83]

Synge's notebooks also demonstrate that the dramatist was fully aware of Alfred Nutt's rebuttal of de Jubainville's opinion on the glory of Irish philosophy because Irish pantheism was, according to Nutt, 'derived from Dionysus the Areopagite and is Neo-Platonic not Celtic as it is called by Jubainville'.[84] Synge accepted Nutt's suggestion that pantheism is a dualistic philosophy because he understood that Neo-Platonism marked the influence of animism on pantheistic belief. The postulated dualism of the soul allowed Synge to understand that the cosmos was replete with supernatural phenomena that were not ordinarily identifiable to the untrained eye. Synge's conception of pantheism is akin to his pluralisation of reality that is writ large into the magical realism of *Riders to the Sea* (1904) and indeed he was certainly aided in his understanding of pantheism by Schopenhauer's metaphysics. But Schopenhauer's philosophy only provided the helping hand; the real impetus came from Baruch de Spinoza's metaphysics, which Synge read just a matter of weeks before coming to an understanding of how animism influenced pantheism.[85]

In *Ethics*, Spinoza espoused a pantheistic philosophy that advocated that Nature is a manifestation of god as the absolute substance: 'As God is a being absolutely infinite, to whom no attribute expressing the essence of substance can be denied, and as he necessarily exists, if any other substance than God be given, it must be explained by means of some attribute to God'.[86] To argue otherwise would be, for Spinoza, absolutely 'absurd' because 'no other substance than God can be granted, and consequently not even be conceived'.[87] Spinoza rejected the metaphysics of mind-body dualism because he advocated a monist understanding of reality. As F.C. Copleston has suggested, for Spinoza, god 'was the Infinite, the ultimately real, possessed of an infinity of attributes and the character of infinity'.[88] 'Spinoza's *Ethics* [Synge] read very often', concluded MacKenna, further pointing out that the dramatist 'objected to those who considered Spinoza a pantheist: the abstraction which was Spinoza's idea of the Deity did not appeal to Synge.'[89] At first, Synge's rejection of Spinoza's pantheism seems strange because Spinoza argued that

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[83] *CW,* vol. 2: 3.
[84] TCD MS: 4378, f.48r.
[85] Synge first read Spinoza on 28 March, 1897 (TCD MS: 4418, f.23r) and he was still reading his work as late as April 1899, when Synge was encouraged to return to reading Spinoza by an indiscriminate woman named 'Chouska' (*CW,* vol. 2: 32). Synge mobilises this pseudonym in order to disguise the real identity of three women: Maria Zdanowska, a Polish student of sculpture; Hope Rea an English art historian (both of whom Synge met in Florence in February, 1899); and Margaret Hardon, an American student in Paris towards whom Synge had romantic pretensions. Synge's notes on *Ethics* postulate God as a substance where '*major ad minore pefectionem amor est* [love is the major and the minor of perfection]' (TCD: 4378, f 66v).
[86] Baruch Spinoza, *Spinoza's Ethics and on the Correction of the Understanding*, trans. Andrew Boyle (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1970), 11.
[87] Baruch Spinoza, *Spinoza's Ethics*, 11.
[88] F.C. Copleston, "Pantheism in Spinoza and the German Idealists," *Philosophy* 78, no. 21 (1946): 43.
[89] Stephen MacKenna, NLI MS: 13,276, f.7.

Nature is god. However, it is possible that Synge's objection was similar to that of Schopenhauer: 'it is precisely [Spinoza's] *Ethics* on which all pantheism is wrecked. If the world is a theophany, then everything man does, and indeed every animal does, is equally divine; nothing can be censurable and nothing can be more praiseworthy than anything else.'[90]

Spinoza's monist pantheism categorically denies free will because human thought and extension are infinite attributes of god, which is why Schopenhauer understood pantheism to be 'wrecked'[91] by Spinoza, because Spinoza's pantheism leaves humans without the discretion of agency. Synge's rejection of Spinoza, then, had nothing to do with the divinity of Nature but was to do with the determinism of the divinity of Nature. For Synge, if human thought and extension were just divine attributes of Nature, then how was it possible to live an autonomous existence? Unlike the settled populace of the Wicklow glens, Synge's tramps and tinkers are able to rage against the divine determinism of Nature and he was indebted to Schopenhauer for this trope. And while Schopenhauer may advocate a similar metaphysics to Spinoza, in that humans are determined, Schopenhauer understood this determinism to be driven by *wille* (will), which manifests itself as intense suffering. However, what Synge could take from Schopenhauer was the requisite knowledge of how to use Nature to alleviate suffering and regain autonomy, since Nature as Idea was the key to understanding the noumenon of phenomenal existence. Spinoza's monist philosophy had to be regulated by Schopenhauer's dualism. It is this dialectic between Spinoza's metaphysics, which postulate that Nature is divine, and Schopenhauer's metaphysics, which involve Nature as an Idea that alleviates suffering, that predicates Synge's Romantic science of pre-Christian pantheism in his Wicklow plays.

Synge's understanding of pantheism was certainly influenced by Schopenhauer's understanding of metaphysical unity. Schopenhauer advocated that the aesthetic experience of Nature was conducive towards the cognitive apprehension of metaphysical truth. Though Schopenhauer did not deny Romantic science, more often that not, metaphysical truth was only brought about by the subjective analysis of art as opposed to scientific objectivism and, for Schopenhauer, 'the kernel, of every particular thing' (the noumenal) could be attested in 'every blinding acting force of nature'.[92] The effects of aesthetic contemplation of the Natural order palliate the intense suffering of *wille* that is keenly manifested in myriad forms in the phenomenal world, and only a man or woman of genius (the pure subject of knowledge) is able to identify the noumenal within the Natural order. What separates the

[90] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Manuscript Remains in Four Volumes*, vol. 4, *The Manuscript Books of 1830-1852 and Last Manuscripts*, trans. E.F.J. Payne and ed. Arthur Hübscher and (Oxford: Berg, 1990), 218.
[91] Schopenhauer, *Manuscript Remains in Four Volumes*, vol. 4: 218.
[92] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 110.

intellect of genius from the average intellect is the ability to know (*wissen*) as opposed to recognise (*erkennen*) Nature as the Idea. Just like the man or woman of ordinary intellect, the pure subject of knowledge is able to recognise the beauty of Nature but the genius renders it sublime because he/she knows Nature and, for Schopenhauer, to know something is to understand the innermost essence of the Idea. To understand the Idea of the Natural order is to understand how *wille* operates in an alternative temporality that is devoid of sufficient reason, where:

> we no longer consider the where, the when, the why and the whither of things, but simply the *what*. Further, we do not let abstract thought, the concepts of reason, take possession of our consciousness, but instead of all this, devote the whole power of our mind to perception, sink ourselves completely therein, and let our whole consciousness to be filled by the calm contemplation of the natural object actually present, whether it be a landscape, a tree, a rock, a crag, a building or anything else. We *lose* ourselves entirely in this object, to use a pregnant expression; in other words, we forget our individuality, our will, and continue to exist only as pure subject, as clear mirror of the object, so that it is as though the object alone existed without anyone to perceive it, and thus we are no longer able to separate the perceiver from the perception, but the two have become one.[93]

Schopenhauer advocated that when the genius emerges from a state of pure contemplation of the Natural order as the Idea of existence, he/she is able to replicate that which the genius saw and thus alleviate the suffering caused by *wille*. And for Synge, this genius was the tramp and the tinker.

Synge understood that the Unity of pantheism could be felt throughout the cosmos, from the city to the country, but what Synge is specifically dramatising in his Wicklow plays is the animistic power of a divine Natural order and our ability to use Nature to regain a sense of autonomy that *wille* denies. It would be incorrect to suggest that Synge's understanding of pantheism borrows aspects of polytheism because, as Harrison suggests, pantheists argue that it 'is not logically possible to believe in literally many gods, and at the same time to believe that the universe is the only true divinity'.[94] Only in *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, a play that 'is set exclusively in the pagan past'[95] does Synge draw upon polytheistic belief. When Conchubor, Fergus and Lavarcham greet each other in Slieve Fuadh, they exchange those idiosyncratic greetings that Synge had extrapolated from Irish folk culture but, significantly, the greeting is pluralised in order to account for the polytheistic doctrine that grounds the play: 'The gods save you', Conchubor and Fergus say to Lavarcham, to which she replies, '[t]he gods save you and keep you kindly, and stand

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[93] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1: 178-79. Emphasis in original.
[94] Harrison, *Pantheism*, 9.
[95] Anthony Roche, "J.M. Synge: Christianity versus Paganism," in *A J.M. Synge Literary Companion*, ed. Edward A. Kopper Jr. (London: Greenwood, 1988), 109.

between you and all harm forever'.[96] Synge was concerned that the mythological Irish aristocracy 'might loosen [his] grip on reality'[97] because, as he wrote to John Quinn, 'these saga people when one comes to deal with them seem very remote; – one does not know what they thought or what they ate or where they went to sleep, so one is apt to fall into rhetoric.'[98] Synge's implication is clear: those with a privileged status do not know how to accommodate the capriciousness of the Natural order, which is why, in Alban, Naisi confides in Fergus that he fears if he returns to Emain he will be 'getting old and weary' as he dreads the Irish 'winter and summer, and the autumn and the spring-time, even when there's a bird in every bush making his own stir till the fall of night'.[99] And it is because the play is set in pre-Christian Ireland proper that Anthony Roche correctly argues that it 'has no opportunity to engage the dialectic [of Christianity versus paganism]'.[100]

The Shadow of the Glen does engage the dialectic between pre-Christian residual culture and Catholicism and if, in Alban, Naisi is concerned that he will grow weary of living a life in which the gods of Nature were a material existence, then this concern is replicated as pantheism in *The Shadow of the Glen* but with one significant adaptation: the contemporaneity of a multiplicity of gods has been forgotten. In Synge's Wicklow plays there is no longer many gods but just one god: Nature and its attributes, such as the fairies, that live within the landscape. And it is the fairies as an attribute of pantheism that specifically makes Synge's understanding of pantheism pre-Christian in its praxis. For Synge only those who are, quite literally, in touch with the Idea of Nature, can negotiate, orchestrate and appease *wille* and thereby regain autonomy over its divine determinism. As far as the dramatist was concerned, there was little doubt as to whom such a person could be.

'The Back Hills'[101]

After attending the premiere of *The Shadow of the Glen*, Joseph Holloway scribbled in his diary that Synge's plays 'could never pass with an Irish audience as a "bit of real Irish life"'.[102] Holloway's criticism directly refers to Synge's decision to stage what Arthur Griffith considered to be 'a staging of a corrupt version of the old-world libel on womankind – the "Widow of Ephesus," which was made current in Ireland by the hedge-schoolmaster'[103] and indeed, Synge scholarship has traditionally focussed on Nora Burke's

[96] *CW,* vol. 4: 185.
[97] *CL,* vol. 2: 56. J.M. Synge to F.J. Gregg, 12 September, 1907.
[98] *CL,* vol. 2: 121-22. J.M. Synge to John Quinn, 4 January, 1908.
[99] *CW,* vol. 4: 229.
[100] Roche, "J.M. Synge: Christianity versus Paganism," 109.
[101] *CW,* vol. 3: 37.
[102] Joseph Holloway, NLI MS: 1801, 9 October, 1903, f.561.
[103] Arthur Griffith, "All Ireland," *United Irishman*, 17 October, 1903, 1.

departure from her estranged husband (Dan Burke) with the Tramp.[104] But, for Synge, the reality of life amongst the Wicklow glens was the influence of residual pre-Christian pantheism on material conditions; Edward Stephens concurred with his uncle that the glens of Wicklow had an 'obvious impressionistic force in its physical features, and an indirect power in the conditions of life which they imposed.'[105] The analysis presented here will deviate from the typical gender reading that the play invites and, instead, it will focus on Nora's exit into the Natural order as an exit that is invited by the contemporaneity of pre-Christian pantheism.

The provenance of *The Shadow of the Glen* (hereafter referred to as *The Shadow*) lies in a story told to Synge by the Old Aran *seanchaí* (storyteller) Pat Dirane, about a man who played dead in order to catch his wife in an act of infidelity. Upon catching the two lovers in the act, the husband hit the other man 'with the stick so that the blood out of him leapt up and hit the gallery'.[106] Synge transposes this folklore to the 'last cottage at the head of a long glen in County Wicklow'.[107] This is Glenmalure, a glen that Synge knew very well. In August 1897, Synge visited Glenmalure to collect Harry Stephens's (Synge's brother-in-law) Pointer dog (Ben) from the cottage that belonged to the Harney family. The dog was left with the Harneys after he was injured while Harry Stephens was grouse shooting with his friend, a retired judge from colonial India, Willie Ormsby.[108] In his essay "An Autumn Night In The Hills," Synge recalls the 'odd sighs and movements' of the glen that night as it appeared to be shrouded in 'masses of shadow, and masses of half-luminous fog with black branches across them'.[109] As Paul Harrison suggests, pantheism 'revels in the beauty of nature and the night sky, and is full of wonder at their mystery and power',[110] and for Synge, these cosmological conditions were conducive towards the residual belief in pre-Christian pantheism where, all at once, the cosmos seems to become a divine spirit that threatens our free will:

> One evening when I was collecting [specimens for the study of natural history] on the brow of a long valley in County Wicklow wreaths of white mist began to rise from the narrow bogs beside the river. Before it was quite dark I looked round the edge of the field and saw two immense luminous eyes looking at me from the base of the valley. I dropped my net and caught hold of a gate in front of me. Behind the eyes there rose a black sinister forehead. I was fascinated. For a moment the eyes seemed to consume my personality, then the whole valley became filled with a

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[104] See, for example, Antoinette Quinn, "Staging the Irish Peasant Woman: Maud Gonne versus Synge," in *Interpreting Synge: Essays from the Synge Summer School: 1991-2000*, ed. Nicholas Grene (Dublin: Lilliput, 2000), 125-38.
[105] TCD SSMS: 6189, f.4.
[106] *CW*, vol. 2: 72.
[107] *CW*, vol. 3: 31.
[108] TCD SSMS: 6191, f.1238.
[109] *CW*, vol. 2: 192.
[110] Harrison, *Pantheism*, 2.

> pageant of movement and colour, and the opposite hillside covered itself with ancient doorways and spires and high turrets. I did not know where or when I was existing. At last someone spoke in the lane behind me – it was a man going home – and I came back to myself. The night had become quite dark and the eyes were no longer visible, yet I recognised in a moment what had caused the apparition – two clearings in a wood lined with white mist divided again by a few trees which formed the eye-balls. For many days afterwards I could not look on these fields even in daylight without terror.[111]

Pantheistic invocation such as this is repeatedly made in *The Shadow* as Nora Burke conducts a false wake for her husband. Roaming Glenmalure seeking 'a quiet decent corner where a man could sleep'[112] is the Tramp, and he arrives as an impromptu guest to the wake. Like Pegeen in *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), Nora is afraid of what lurks in the glen during the stillness of the night, a place that is so 'lonesome' in the 'dark night' that 'there aren't two living souls [that] would see the little light'[113] of the cottage. But the Tramp is not afraid of what lurks beyond to the extent that Nora finds it remarkable that the Tramp is able to 'be walking round in the long nights, and crossing the hills when the fog is on them, the time a little stick would seem as big as your arm, and a rabbit as big as a bay horse, and a stack of turf as big as a towering church in the city of Dublin?'[114]

With Dan Burke laid out on the table, talk soon turns to those malicious spirits that Synge specifically manifested in *Riders to the Sea*; the Tramp 'wouldn't lay [his] hand on [Dan Burke] for the Lough Nahanagan and it filled with gold'.[115] Irish loughs are steeped in residual belief in pre-Christian pantheism. For example, Lady Wilde wrote that '[d]own deep, under the waters of Lough Neagh, [the fairies] can still be seen, by those who have the gift of fairy vision, the columns and walls of the beautiful palaces once inhabited by the fairy race when they were the gods of the earth; and this tradition of a buried town beneath the waves has been prevalent for centuries amongst the people.'[116] The lough that the Tramp invokes is Lough Nahangan, a corrie lake at the head of Glendasan Valley that borders the north face of Camaderry Mountain in Wicklow and it too is steeped in pre-Christian cultural residue. While at the Harneys' cottage in Glenmalure Synge was told that after dark the lake is surrounded by 'strange noises in the cliff'[117] and that spirits were known 'to come down out of the clouds and [they] rifted the waters asunder'.[118] 'There was another time', the nameless lady of the Harney cottage continues, that a dog went into the lake 'and the inside

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[111] *CW*, vol. 2: 10.
[112] *CW*, vol. 3: 33.
[113] *CW*, vol. 3: 37.
[114] *CW*, vol. 3: 37.
[115] *CW*, vol. 3: 35.
[116] Lady Wilde, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland: With Sketches of the Irish Past*, vol. 2 (London: Ward and Downey, 1887), 189-90.
[117] *CW*, vol. 2: 189.
[118] *CW*, vol. 2: 189.

out of him came up on the top of the water'.[119] The Tramp abstains from touching Dan Burke's body because, like Maurya in *Riders to the Sea*, he assumes that the fairies will soon be surrounding the cottage in order to take Dan Burke away.

In order to ward off the fairies the Tramp asks Nora for a 'piece of grey thread and a sharp needle– there's great safety in a needle'.[120] That a needle could ward off the fairies was information that Synge acquired while on Aran, when Pat Dirane told Synge that if he were to place a sharp needle 'under the collar of your coat [...] not one of the [fairies] will be able to have power on you'.[121] Judith Dineen Remy has pointed out that 'the Tramp behaves like a regular glenman' and then proceeds to list the qualities of the regular glenman: 'full of superstition, fear of the supernatural and a love of whiskey'.[122] But this is far too reductive. Surely, what defines a "glenman" is his attitude towards the glen, how he negotiates the 'back hills' and the 'two sluigs where an ass and cart would be drowned'.[123] The negotiation of the back hills was something that the average inhabitant of Synge's Glenmalure found hard to do. Nora advocates that Dan was 'always upon the hills he was, thinking thoughts in the dark mist'[124] and, in a similar fashion, on his way into Glenmalure, the Tramp sees Michael Dara, Nora's lover-in-waiting, on the back hills 'with a drift of mountain ewes, and he running after them this way and that'.[125] Even Nora finds it hard to accept the Tramp's temperance as he wanders the glens 'hearing the winds crying, and you not knowing on what thing your mind would stay?'[126] This is Synge's dialectic of Spinoza's understanding of the divine determinism and Schopenhauer's postulation of *wille* in full force, because the divinity of Nature is conducive towards mental instability. If pantheism 'reveres and cares for nature, [because it is] a religion that joyously accepts this life as our only life, and this earth as our only paradise',[127] then Synge dramatises pre-Christian pantheism in *The Shadow* as a capricious god that denies free will to the inhabitants of Glenmalure. The realisation of the capriciousness of the divine determinism of Nature requires a pure subject of knowledge who can reflect on Nature, as god, in order to overcome the intense suffering that divine determinism is conducive towards.

Everywhere Synge went in Wicklow he was told about 'queer things them nights out on the mountains'.[128] At times, Synge is apt to explain the queerness as, for example,

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[119] *CW*, vol. 2: 189-90.
[120] *CW*, vol. 3: 41.
[121] *CW*, vol. 2: 80.
[122] Judith Dineen Remy, "Synge's Peasants: Characters Reflected In A Cracked Mirror" (PhD diss., The University of California: Irvine, 1981), 152-53.
[123] *CW*, vol. 3: 41.
[124] *CW*, vol. 3: 35.
[125] *CW*, vol. 3: 39.
[126] *CW*, vol. 3: 41.
[127] Harrison, *Pantheism*, 1.
[128] *CW*, vol. 2: 190.

sheep that 'coughed and choked with sad guttural noises in the shelter of the hedge'.[129] In a similar vein, as the Tramp walks through the night he too can explain the 'voice out of the thick mist' as the 'sheep [that] were coughing, and choking, like an old man, with the great rain and the fog'.[130] But at other times, Synge and the Tramp cannot explain those sounds that echo 'backwards and forwards among the hills'.[131] And ultimately, Synge can only attribute the power of the landscape to the fairies, or as he puts it, 'the fallen angels that ride across the hills'.[132] The Tramp's ability to understand the nature of the back hills is indexical of his ability as the pure subject of knowledge to understand pre-Christian pantheism as the divinity of nature and as a capricious god, which in turn allows him to alleviate *wille*. Throughout the dramatist's *oeuvre*, Synge fetishises the ability to understand the pantheism of the back hills of Wicklow; in his appositely titled playlet, *A Vernal Play*, the character Boinn revels in the beauty of the back hills 'From Kilmashogue / Across Slieve Ruadh all the hills have wrapt / New blueness from the raining. Hills as these / Young men in dreams have walked on [...].'[133] Unlike Nora, Michael, Dan or even Synge, the Tramp is able to understand that the cosmos is a divine spirit that needs to be respected and appeased and it is through the contemplation of the Natural order as Idea that the Tramp is able to reconcile *wille* and regain agency. In this way, the Tramp understands that the fairies are just one manifestation of pantheism. As a theology of multiplicity, pantheism suggests that there is a Unity 'in which there is no longer a distinction between the natural and the supernatural'[134] and that the powers, principles and forces that govern the Unified relationship between the natural and the supernatural 'govern intrinsically rather than extrinsically',[135] which is to say that the individual efficacy of forces such as the back hills of Glenmalure in *The Shadow* is always subject to an intrinsic pantheistic Unity that understand that the cosmos is divine; it is not just the fairies that lurk outside the cottage but rather, the capricious nature of the entire landscape.

'I cannot say it too often', Synge writes in his Aran notebook, that 'the supreme interest of [Inis Meáin] is the strange concord that exists between the people and the impersonal limited but powerful impulses of the nature that is round them.'[136] After writing this in his Aran journal, Synge returned to Dublin in order to theorise the precise nature of such impersonal and powerful impulses and he would have to look no further than the work of Herbert Spencer for inspiration. In his notebook he reflected on how pre-Christian pantheism could be identified in what Spencer classified as persistence of force:

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[129] *CW*, vol. 2: 192.
[130] *CW*, vol. 3: 39.
[131] *CW*, vol. 2: 195.
[132] *CW*, vol. 2: 216.
[133] *CW*, vol. 3: 192.
[134] Levine, *Pantheism*, 39.
[135] Levine, *Pantheism*, 39.
[136] TCD MS: 4384, f.43r.

> By the Persistence of Force we really mean the persistence of some Power which transcends ~~of~~ our knowledge and conceptions. The persistence of the universe is the persistence of that Unknown Cause, Power or Force which is manifested to us through all phenomena. The sole truth which transcends experience by underlying it is the Persistence of Force.[137]

As Levine suggests, 'the idea of Unity interpreted in terms of force' is 'the most prevalent version of pantheism, despite the high profile of the substance model among some of the best known pantheists (e.g. Spinoza).'[138] 'What we know about states of consciousness are objectively modes of force'[139] Synge argued and, ostensibly for Synge, those who were unable to negotiate the pantheism that was keenly felt in the Wicklow glens were prone to mental instability; as one man said to the dramatist, 'on the side of a mountain to the east of Aughavanna', there may be 'great knowledge of the fairies' in County Wicklow but there was also 'great witchery'.[140] Indeed, the dualistic understanding of pantheism postulates that 'the universe may have some kind of conscious purpose or direction' that is explained by communication between different parts of the Unity such as, for example, the spirit of Nature (the fairies) and human beings; thus, pantheism entertains the 'belief in extra-sensory perception, out-of-body voyaging and even magic'.[141] This is precisely what Synge's Tramp is able to do and in his playlet, *Aughavanna Play*,[142] with respect to the character Bartley and his roaming of the glens, the character Mary asks: 'What is it he'd look at if it wouldn't be a thing you can see?' To this the character Barbara explains that Bartley 'would be looking out in the dark nights and out walking around the time there'ld be a thick mist down on the earth'.[143] The implication is that like the Tramp, Bartley understands the pre-Christian pantheism of the Wicklow glens. The witchery of residual pre-Christian pantheism that is found in the back hills of Glenmalure is one of Synge's premier concerns in *The Shadow* and he is specifically interested in how it was able to divinely compel the character of Patch Darcy into self-sacrifice. Ultimately, the witchery of pre-Christian pantheism will attempt to summon Nora, but the Tramp will alleviate divine determinism through his ability to understand the Idea of Nature and therefore ensure that *wille* is assuaged.

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[137] TCD MS: 4379, ff.92r-92v.
[138] Levine, *Pantheism*, 40.
[139] TCD MS: 4379, f.91r.
[140] *CW,* vol. 2: 203.
[141] Harrison, *Pantheism*, 101.
[142] Synge's diary for 3 February, 1903 suggests that he was working on this play right up until the eve of the premiere of *The Shadow* on 8 October, 1903. His diary simply states 'Aughavanna play' (TCD MS: 4422, f.6r).
[143] TCD MS: 4393, f.45r.

'The Dark Lane Through the Wood'[144]

'Synge', writes Oona Frawley, relied heavily upon 'sophisticated urban concepts of nature' because he was too far removed from 'working the land'.[145] It can hardly be denied that Synge was guilty of fetishising the land and in his journal he privileges it as a commodity that was conducive towards his rejection of evangelical Protestantism: 'The Irish country, rains, mists, full insular skies, the old churches, ~~MSS, jewels everything in fact that was Irish became sacred in my eyes~~.'[146] Analysis such as this echoes the reductive analysis of Lady Wilde who, in one instance would praise Ireland as 'a land of mists and mystic shadows; of cloud-wraiths on the purple mountains; of weird silences in the lonely hills' that ultimately ensures that the 'Irish people [are] strangely sensitive to spiritual influences'.[147] In the next instance, however, she would dismiss these influences as 'the narrow limitations of common sense'.[148] Synge, however, did not see pre-Christian pantheism that was associated with the Natural landscape as the limits of rationality and while Synge was certainly far removed from the labour of the land, Frawley merely repeats a discursive analysis that questions whether or not Synge authentically represented the politics of the peasantry, a politics that was irretrievably subject to the dominance of ideology.

It is important to remember that in Synge's Ireland the labour of the land was far from a secular or profane activity because the rituals of pre-Christian sensibility were concomitant with the activity of labour, which necessarily invoked the functional presence of the supernatural. Frawley contends that Synge's dramatisation of the Irish landscape is dependent upon 'non-living memory' because it allows him 'to leap from the realm of the actual, self-experienced memory to a realm of imaginative memory that was nostalgia'.[149] However, an appreciation of Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian pantheistic belief as concomitant with the activity of harvest labour conducted by John Winterbottom, a thirty-six year old *petit-bourgeois* farmer from Sheenamore, County Wicklow, will suggest the contrary. For if, as Yeats suggested, 'our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself',[150] then the character of John Winterbottom and his counterpart in *The Shadow*, Patch Darcy, are forced to make a solipsistic retreat into their memory of

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[144] *CW,* vol. 3: 173.
[145] Oona Frawley, *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-Century Irish Literature* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005), 53.
[146] TCD MS: 4382, ff.53r-52r.
[147] Lady Wilde, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland: With Sketches of the Irish Past*, vol. 1 (London: Ward and Downey, 1887), 179.
[148] Lady Wilde, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland*, vol. 1, 280.
[149] Frawley, *Irish Pastoral*, 55.
[150] W.B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 28.

Nature, where the divine determinism is conducive towards suicide – which was, for Schopenhauer, the ultimate realisation of *wille*.

In August 1901, while walking in 'a desolate glen in the south of the county',[151] Synge met 'two policeman driving an ass-cart with a coffin on it'.[152] After walking a little farther, Synge met a local man who filled in the missing details for him:

> 'This night three weeks,' he said, 'there was a poor fellow below reaping in the glen, and in the evening he had two glasses of whisky with some other lads. Then some excitement took him, and he threw his clothes and ran away into the hills. There was great rain that night, and I suppose the poor creature lost his way, and was the whole night perishing in the rain and darkness. In the morning they found his naked foot-marks on some mud half a mile above the road [...] when they found his body [...] [it was] eaten by the crows.'[153]

John Winterbottom lived with his wife, Charlotte, and his three young children (Sarah [5], John [4] and Richard [3]). On 15 August Winterbottom 'kissed [his] little children and bid [Charlotte] good morning'[154] and walked two miles to Ballinagappogue to rick hay for Mrs. Byrne and, indeed, Winterbottom was known to locals as 'very industrious, doing labour work when the opportunity offered'.[155] In the heat of the day, Mrs. Byrne offered the men a barrel of porter to quench their thirst and as the sun began to set, Winterbottom, who had 'six glasses of porter during the day' and had subsequently been 'strange in his manner all day at the work, talking to himself'[156] was incapacitated, to the extent that his co-workers encouraged Mrs. Byrne to arrange transport for her employee. She declined, however, maintaining that he was able to walk home. Winterbottom was last seen kneeling outside Mrs. Byrne's gate but, nevertheless, his co-worker, Joseph Doyle of Ballymanus stated that 'there was nothing peculiar about him. He left him at the gate about half-past seven'.[157]

Upon realising that John had not returned home, at daybreak the next morning, Charlotte Winterbottom set out on foot with her daughter (Sarah) to Mrs. Byrne's farm to enquire of her husband's whereabouts. On arrival at the farm, Sarah recognised 'the heap of clothes as her father's',[158] outside the gate where John was last seen kneeling. The peelers were sent for and, a week later, it transpired that John Winterbottom had run five long miles through 'torrents'[159] in Bacchanalian excess to the back hills of the Slieve Maan forest in Aughavannagh, where he subsequently collapsed 'down by a ditch, at the side of a heap of

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[151] *CW,* vol. 2: 209.
[152] *CW,* vol. 2: 209.
[153] *CW,* vol. 2: 209-10.
[154] "Fatality in Wicklow," *Wicklow News-Letter and Arklow Reporter,* 31 August, *1901,* 3.
[155] "Fatality in Wicklow," 3.
[156] "Fatality in Wicklow," 3.
[157] "Fatality in Wicklow," 3.
[158] "Fatality in Wicklow," 3.
[159] "Fatality in Wicklow," 3.

rushes [...] about half a mile through the mountain, straight across from the public road' to be consumed by the elements and 'pecked by crows'.[160] Mrs. Winterbottom was immediately called for and she identified her husband's body 'by a shirt button sewn with black thread'[161] that had remained on a small piece of shirt that had not been torn off his body. At the inquest held in the Aughavannagh Hotel by the coroner of West Wicklow (Mr. Doyle of Baltinglass)[162] questions immediately arose as to whether Winterbottom had been kidnapped while he was drunk, but 'Sergeant Bannon stated that they found footprints corresponding with Winterbottom's on part of the road approaching the mountain'[163] and, furthermore, that one would 'have no means of getting there except to cross through the mountain'.[164] Matters were made worse by evidence given by Dr. O'Gorman (John Winterbottom's doctor), who said that he 'always thought [John] was a little peculiar in his mind'.[165]

In *The Shadow* Synge transforms the curious case of John Winterbottom into the curious case of Patch Darcy as a means of mobilising his praxis of residual pre-Christian pantheism as being conducive towards *wille*. 'If myself was easily afeard' of the Natural order, 'I'm telling you' the Tramp says to Nora, then he would 'have run up into the back hills with nothing on me but an old shirt, and been eaten with crows the like of Patch Darcy'.[166] The Tramp attests that he was 'the last one [that] heard his living voice in the whole world'[167] and Nora, who was 'very lonesome'[168] for Darcy asks the Tramp how he met his fate, because 'would anyone believe the things they do be saying in the glen?'[169]

> TRAMP. It was no lie, lady of the house [...] I was passing below on a dark night the like of this night...I heard a thing talking – queer talk, you wouldn't believe it at all, and you out of your dreams, – and 'Merciful God,' says I, 'if I begin hearing the like of that voice out of the thick mist, I'm destroyed surely.' Then I run, and I run, and I run, till I was below in Rathvanna. I got drunk that night, I got drunk in the morning, and drunk the day after, – I was coming from the races beyond – and the third day they found Darcy...Then I knew it was himself I was after hearing, and I wasn't afeard any more.[170]

The Tramp claims that he fled from Glenmalure to Rathvanna. However, Rathvanna does not exist in County Wicklow and on the original typescript for the play the Tramp claims

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[160] "Fatality in Wicklow," 3.
[161] "Fatality in Wicklow," 3.
[162] "The Strange Fatality near Aughrim," *Supplement to the Wicklow People*, 31 August, 1901, 3.
[163] "Fatality in Wicklow," 3.
[164] "The Strange Fatality near Aughrim," 3.
[165] "Fatality in Wicklow," 3.
[166] *CW*, vol. 3: 37.
[167] *CW*, vol. 3: 39.
[168] *CW*, vol. 3: 39.
[169] *CW*, vol. 3: 39.
[170] *CW*, vol. 3: 39.

that he heard strange noises puncturing the night air in 'Aughavanna',[171] the very same place that Winterbottom's body was found. As far as *The Shadow* is concerned, Winterbottom is synonymous with Darcy and in subsequent drafts of the play the place and space of Aughavannagh is repeatedly referred to.[172] The Tramp is forced to run to Rathvanna because he believes that he is being summoned by the pre-Christian pantheism of the Wicklow glens and, indeed, this is the same fate that met Winterbottom. Frazer taught Synge that it was perfectly normal to find that in the 'harvest customs of our European peasantry' the 'corn-spirit to be conceived now as immanent in the corn'.[173] Frazer's point was that at the time of the European harvest, it was not uncommon for reapers to give thanks and praise to the spirits of the harvest and to neglect this belief was to disrespect pantheism. Ostensibly, Winterbottom failed to do this and Darcy, a man who was known to be able to 'walk through five hundred sheep and [not] miss one of them, and he not reckoning them at all'[174] was summoned into self-sacrifice in order to appease the divinity of the Wicklow glens. It seems that the Tramp is the only one who understands this and Synge juxtaposes the Tramp's knowledge of pre-Christian pantheism with his personification of Catholic bourgeois materialism, Michael Dara, who maintains that Darcy is simply 'the man went queer in his head the year that's gone'.[175]

'The pantheist', suggests Levine, 'will try to justify belief in the Unity by arguing that its existence best explains certain experiences and certain facts about the world, experiences and facts that their objectives and practices take account of'.[176] For Synge the experience of the Natural order was all-encompassing and if the subject allowed it, then it would drive the subject beyond the realms of depression to the depths of despair and ultimately suicide: the ultimate goal of *wille*. Schopenhauer's metaphysics advocated that this world is anything but rational because we are all at the mercy of blind urges that make us believe that our existence in the world is worthwhile when, in fact, it isn't, and hope will always be deferred by absurdity. Schopenhauer's metaphysics are akin to Spinoza's pantheistic philosophy in that both advocated a unitary metaphysics but, unlike Spinoza, Schopenhauer advocated a reversed polarity where the world as it is represented is a summation of *wille*. The only way to appreciate *wille* is to summon an intellect of pure-knowingness so that, in turn, the intellect is conscious that *wille* can not only be identified in the world as it is represented, but also within the subject. An apprehension of *wille* is acquired through the contemplation of Nature (or music) and after contemplation the pure

[171] The Tramp originally says this: 'Then I run, and I run till I was below in Aughavanna' (TCD MS: 4339, f.33v).
[172] See, for example, TCD MS: 4339, f.19v. In this passage Michael Dara discusses marriage to Nora 'in the chapel of Aughavanna'.
[173] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 432.
[174] *CW*, vol. 3: 47.
[175] *CW*, vol. 3: 47.
[176] Levine, *Pantheism*, 350.

subject of knowledge recoils in disgust after understanding how the world is a self-perpetuating and self-divisive fabrication. However, if the Idea of Nature is not realised then *wille* cannot be alleviated and, instead, it will/shall become all-encompassing. In turn, this would force subjects like Winterbottom and Darcy will into intense suffering by what Synge, after reading Spinoza, understood to be the divine determinism of a capricious Unity. Levine has argued that in pantheistic belief, the 'Unity's divinity may have nothing to do with its being rational'[177] and for Synge, mental instability amongst the populace of the Wicklow glens was a manifestation of the Unity's capriciousness as a god and its attributes – the pre-Christian spirits of the landscape – that summoned supplicants to offer themselves as self-sacrifice. The constant power of pantheism on the psyche ensured that mental instability in the Wicklow glens took place with alarming regularity. At the Harney cottage Synge was told of how a local woman (Mary Kinsella) had spent so long in the glens that 'she went wrong in her head, and they had to send her away'.[178] Even Synge was in awe of the power of the 'grey and wintry sides of many glens' because as he walked amongst them he could 'half remember human words' as he began to 'converse with the mountains, moors and fens'.[179]

Turning once again to the *Wicklow News-Letter and Arklow Reporter*, it emerges that the curious case of Winterbottom/Darcy was to have an uncanny repetition in the same year that Synge wrote *The Shadow*, when the naked body of John Doyle, a native of Ballard, was found by a 'witness named Farrington' who stumbled across a body while 'on the mountain looking for sheep, and noticing two dogs he went in their direction'.[180] Doyle was found 'lying on a granite flat on that part of a Barravore mountain, Glenmalure, known as the "Black Banks"'.[181] The body may have been torn by dogs but, just as in the Winterbottom case, the deceased's clothes were found 'packed as if he had taken them off, and the boots were also similarly arranged'.[182] The body was subsequently identified by his brother, who recognised his kin by 'an enlarged thumb joint' and soon it transpired that Doyle was a frequent subject of 'hallucinations, and in the district he was looked upon as a religious maniac'.[183] Indeed, pre-Christian pantheism in Synge's Ireland suggested that lunacy was not the result of psychological imbalance but simply that 'the body [had] become the abode of an evil spirit, or the temporary home of a god.'[184] But for Synge this

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[177] Levine, *Pantheism*, 55.
[178] *CW,* vol. 2: 188.
[179] *CW,* vol. 1: 32.
[180] "Found Dead on a Mountain," *Wicklow News-Letter and Arklow Reporter*, 17 May, 1902, 7.
[181] "Found Dead on a Mountain," 7.
[182] "Found Dead on a Mountain," 7.
[183] "Found Dead on a Mountain," 7.
[184] W.G. Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland, a Folklore Sketch: A Handbook of Irish pre-Christian Traditions,* vol. 2 (New York: Kennikat, 1970), 168.

isn't necessarily a tragedy. In *When the Moon has Set*, 'the nearly crazy'[185] Mary Costello may have had her head 'perished with the night wind' as she spends her time with 'the rabbits running round on [the bog road] and they drowned in the dew'[186] but still, Synge privileges her idyll of 'the dark lane through the wood'[187] over the stupefying materialism of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy.

The Tramp's ability to identify the noumenal through the Idea of Nature and therefore circumvent divine determinism, and by corollary, *wille*, is confirmed when Dan Burke foils Michael and Nora's plans. As Dan Burke rises from his supposed death, Nora immediately turns to the Tramp and asks: 'Is it dead he is or living?'[188] In an earlier draft of the play, this line simply reads: 'Is he dead or living?'[189] The substitution of the two pronouns suggests that Synge wanted to foreground the Tramp's ability to identify the supernatural attributes of pre-Christian pantheism. And as Nora is forced to leave the cottage to follow feckless farmers on the 'back mountains when the wind is high',[190] Dan Burke, like Naisi in *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, suggests that Nora will 'be getting old with that life' as her 'teeth'll be falling and [her] head'll be the like of a bush where sheep do be leaping a gap,'[191] to which Michael interjects that a life spent roaming the glens of Wicklow will only lead to the 'fine Union below in Rathdrum.'[192] This is the Rathdrum Poor Law Union that was established in 1839, but the Tramp will not let Nora go there because he will lead her into a life where divine determinism that is conducive towards *wille* will be alleviated as she will soon begin to enjoy 'the cold and the frost, and the great rain, and the sun again, and the south wind blowing in the glens'.[193] If pantheism advocates that 'nature is our mother, our security, our peace, our paradise, our past and our future'[194] then the Tramp, a character who understands this perfectly, will protect Nora from the capriciousness of a divine landscape that manifests itself in myriad forms, such as 'the herons crying out over the black lakes'; and significantly, the Tramp assures Nora that he knows the difference between a malicious spirit such as that which was loose on the nigh her heard Patch Darcy, and just an 'old fellow wheezing the like of a sick sheep close to your ear'.[195] The Tramp, then, will attempt to turn Nora into a pure subject of knowledge so that she can contemplate Nature in order to understand the Idea of existence that alleviates *wille*, which is caused by the divine determinism of Nature.

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[185] *CW*, vol. 3: 159.
[186] *CW*, vol. 3: 173.
[187] *CW*, vol. 3: 173.
[188] *CW*, vol. 3: 53.
[189] *CW*, vol. 3: 52.
[190] *CW*, vol. 3: 53.
[191] *CW*, vol. 3: 55.
[192] *CW*, vol. 3: 55.
[193] *CW*, vol. 3: 57.
[194] Harrison, *Pantheism*, 56.
[195] *CW*, vol. 3: 57.

'A madman's narrative is not history',[196] concludes Dipesh Chakrabarty. Nevertheless, for Synge, Winterbottom's narrative and the narratives of countless other people that were a result of a sensibility invested in pre-Christian pantheism, are precisely that which requires incorporation into the archive because they consciously embody those so-called irrational beliefs that are indexical of subaltern praxis. These subaltern pasts resist historicisation not because they are minority pasts but because their associated ideological persuasion is incommensurable with politics; it makes little sense to progressive Catholic historicism to suggest that Winterbottom/Darcy was summoned to his death by a pre-Christian pantheistic Unity in the Wicklow glens. However, to foreground subaltern pasts is to highlight the rational limits of historical discourse, a quest that requires the historian to search for social justice that disrupts the ontology of the present. This ontological disruption is conducive to what Chakrabarty considers the 'contemporaneity between the non modern and the modern, a shared "now", which expresses itself on the historical plane'.[197] The contemporaneity between the non-modern and the modern is a supposition that constantly informs Synge's Modernist dramaturgy of pre-Christian cultural residue and it is equally identifiable in his understanding of pre-Christian pantheism. Frazer would have informed Synge that after the evolution to pantheism only 'the backward members of the community will cling by preference to the old animistic notions.'[198] But for Synge, animism was a material reality upon which pre-Christian pantheism was predicated. He certainly drew upon animistic beliefs in *The Shadow* and he would do the same in *The Tinker's Wedding*, a play that Synge considered far 'too immoral for Dublin'.[199]

'The Movements of May'[200]

The Tinker's Wedding was first drafted in 1902,[201] which makes the play concomitant with the writing of *The Shadow* and many of the pre-Christian pantheistic attributes that Synge lent to *The Shadow* can also be identified in *The Tinker's Wedding*. Like in *The Shadow*, Nature is a determining force but whereas Synge dramatised the Natural order in *The Shadow* as a means of specifically foregrounding The Tramp's ability to alleviate *wille* through the Idea of Nature, in *The Tinker's Wedding* the divine determinism of Nature is dramatised in order to foreground the tinkers' free will, which the habitations of Catholic propriety deny. Irish tinkers constitute a subculture that has 'existed on the margins of Irish

[196] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts," *Postcolonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (1998): 16.
[197] Chakrabarty, "Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts," 28.
[198] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 432-433.
[199] NLI MS: 778, f.20r. J.M. Synge to Max Meyerfeld, 3 January, 1906. In another letter on the 10 March, 1906, Synge reminds his German translator that the play is 'thought too immoral and anti clerical' (NLI MS: 788, f.24v).
[200] TCD MS: 4336, f.17r.
[201] TCD MS: 4348, ff.14v-32v.

society for perhaps centuries'.[202] With respect to questions of origin and genealogy, the tinkers' obfuscate answers; theories are discursive. However, Jim Mac Laughlin suggests that the Irish tinkers descended from the 'whitesmiths in the fifth century'.[203] In turn, these whitesmiths were said to have descended from 'the pre-Christian semonrige or "rivet-makers" who were a privileged minority caste in pre-Gaelic Ireland, but were subsequently demoted by the invading Gaels'.[204] Synge understood that the tinkers' (more than any other Irish class) held a strong attachment to the residue from pre-Christian Ireland; as Mary Burke suggests, in Synge's Ireland 'narratives [about tinkers] veered from intimating that tinkers possessed supernatural powers to dismissing them as unproductive, promiscuous and heathenish rogues'.[205] And it is the threat on this residual culture that is posed by the Catholic Church that Synge takes to task in *The Tinker's Wedding* as the dramatist repeats his tried and tested binary: the Priest is an index for the strictures of bourgeois materialism whereas the three tinkers (Michael Byrne, Mary Byrne and Sarah Casey) are an index for the creative vitality and free will that comes from living a nomadic lifestyle with 'the dogs barking, and the bats squeaking, and you saying over, it's a short while only till you die.'[206] And just like the Tramp in *The Shadow*, the three tinkers in the play are particularly influenced by the pre-Christian pantheism that Synge understood to be pervasive in the glens of Wicklow. And it is this understanding of pre-Christian pantheism, predicated upon the Idea of Nature, that informs their free will.

The Tinker's Wedding (hereafter referred to as *The Tinker's*) is set in the fictitious Rathvanna, the same place that the Tramp ran to after hearing the voice of Patch Darcy 'out of the thick mist'.[207] But Rathvanna replaces the real location of Rathdangan, featured in Synge's original draft,[208] a Wicklow village that borders the back hills of Lugnacuillaigh. The play was originally entitled *Movements of May*[209] and in pre-Christian Ireland 1 May was the beginning of *Beltane*, the cross-quarter day that marked the end of the dark days of *Imbolc* by the exposition of fertility rites. These rites were closely associated with pre-Christian pantheism and manifestations of the Natural order such as the Green Man, what Frazer classifies as the 'vernal spirit of vegetation',[210] were given particular credence during *Beltane.* In an earlier draft of *The Tinker's* a draft that included the Tinker children,[211] the

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[202] Mary Burke, *'Tinkers': Synge and the Cultural History of the Irish Traveller* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2.
[203] Jim Mac Laughlin, *Travellers and Ireland: Whose Country, Whose History?* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), 18.
[204] Mac Laughlin, *Travellers and Ireland*, 18.
[205] Burke "*The Well of the Saints* and *The Tinker's Wedding*," in *The Cambridge Companion to J.M. Synge*, ed. P.J. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 44.
[206] *CW,* vol. 4: 27.
[207] *CW,* vol. 3: 39.
[208] TCD MS: 4336, f.20v.
[209] TCD MS: 4336, f.17r.
[210] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 278.
[211] The Tinker Children were originally called Micky and Nanny (TCD MS: 4336, f.1v).

efficacy of the belief in the Green Man is repeatedly turned to as a means of foregrounding the divinity of Nature:

> 1ST CHILD. We'll be like the green man...
> 2ND CHILD. How would we be like the green man, and not a green rag on us at all?
> 1ST CHILD. We'll put a bit of rushes round our heads and then, we'll be the like of the green man surely, and it's a power of money we'll get for sweets beating that [can] through the fair.[212]

As the play went through subsequent drafts, Synge erased the Tinker Children and their talk of the Green Man but the invocation of pre-Christian pantheism is still clearly evident in *The Tinker's*. For Synge's tinkers, the pre-Christian pantheism of the landscape is an ideological reality; as Slavoj Žižek would have it, pantheism is an embedded practice of their material conditions because 'the ideology succeeds in determining the mode of [their] everyday experience of reality itself.'[213] Synge draws upon pre-Christian pantheism in *The Tinker's* as a means of exploring how the material conditions of pre-Christian pantheism are conducive towards a sense of free will that the material conditions of Catholic bourgeois Ireland denies.

The fulcrum of *The Tinker's* is a story that Synge heard at a Wicklow fair about two tinkers that 'went up to a priest in the hills and asked him would he wed them for a half a sovereign'.[214] The priest accepted the offer on the proviso that a tin can was offered. However, just as the ceremony was about to commence the tinkers failed to produce the tin can and so the priest shunned the couple as a 'pair of rogues and schemers'.[215] In a similar fashion, Sarah Casey seeks to be married to Michael Byrne by the parish priest but, significantly, the notion of marriage has come to Sarah Casey quite suddenly, to the extent that Michael believes she is 'driving me to it' and that, with a little luck, 'it's new thoughts [she will] be thinking at the dawn of the day'.[216] In keeping with his original emphasis on *Beltane* fertility rites, Synge allows Sarah Casey to admit that the only reason that she is thinking of marriage is because it is 'the spring-time [and it] is a queer time, and it's queer thoughts maybe I do think at whiles.'[217] Synge's implication, then, is that Sarah Casey's attachment to the residue of pre-Christian Ireland, specifically manifested as the pantheism that was heightened during *Beltane*, is determining her agency towards marriage with Michael Byrne because this cross-quarter day was marked by fertility rites. And while, of course, Sarah Casey and Michael Byrne do not need to marry in order to consummate a rite

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[212] TCD MS: 4336, ff.9v-10v.
[213] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 49.
[214] *CW*, vol. 2: 229.
[215] *CW*, vol. 2: 229.
[216] *CW*, vol. 4: 7.
[217] *CW*, vol. 4: 7.

of fertility, it allows Synge to compare and contrast the pre-Christian pantheism that was concomitant with *Beltane* against a marriage that is predicated upon the acceptance of the tinkers into the symbolic order of Roman Catholicism.

Synge creates a dialectic where the habitations of Catholic propriety are complicated by a specific manifestation of residual culture. The hypothesis of this dialectic is quite clear during the play; Sarah Casey may want to be subjected to a process of embourgeoisement, a necessary corollary of the temporality of modernity that is manifested within the Catholic habitus but, for Synge, and for the other tinkers, this position is untenable because neither dramatist nor character wishes to witness the decline of pre-Christian residual culture. In *The Tinker's*, Synge mobilises the tinkers' understanding of pre-Christian pantheism to foreground their own free will. Sarah Casey's decision to marry Michael Byrne might be catalysed by the pantheism of *Beltane* fertility rites, but ultimately Synge will demonstrate that the determinism of pre-Christian pantheism as a system of belief that ensures that an existence where Nature is an animating life in which 'the night's fine, and there's a dry moon in the sky',[218] is preferable to a life where the tinkers would 'be talking whisper-talk with the like of [the Priest] in the face of the Almighty God'.[219]

Levine points out that the 'pantheist tries to achieve the kind of accord with Unity, and integration with the cosmos, that results in well-being and happiness'.[220] The Tinkers have certainly achieved Unity with the cosmos, which is why Mary Byrne cannot quite understand Sarah Casey's insistence that the tinkers be brought into the Catholic Church's symbolic order:

> What is it the Almighty God would care of the like of us? You'd never see the Almighty doing a thing to the larks or to the swallows or to the swift birds do be crying out when the sun is set, or to the hares do be racing above in the fine spring and what way would he be following us in the dark nights when it's quiet and easy we are, and we never asking him a thing at all.[221]

Ostensibly, it is the tinkers' supposition that if a marriage ceremony is to take place, then it should be functionally constituted by the residue from pre-Christian Ireland. In 1952, speaking of the Killarney tinkers from County Kerry, P.J. Fleming told the Irish Folklore Commission that:

> Marriages do not take place before a Priest and the common belief is that when a pair wish to become man and wife they met someone in authority; an authority that they believe in – such as a King or Queen appointed by

[218] *CW*, vol. 4: 27.
[219] *CW*, vol. 4: 21.
[220] Levine, *Pantheism*, 352.
[221] TCD MS: 4336, f.5v.

> themselves, and that part of the ceremony is the "jumping over the Budget".[222]

Pre-Christian in its grammar, the jumping over the Budget, (a symbolic obstacle such as a piece of rope)[223] is eschewed by Synge in *The Tinker's* as Sarah Casey consciously decides to leave residual culture as just that and, instead, she chooses to integrate herself into the Catholic Church because she has as 'good a right to a decent marriage as any speckled female does be sleep in the black hovels'.[224] Ostensibly, the wedding that Michael and Mary Byrne have in mind is similar to the pre-Christian pantheistic wedding that Synge dramatises in *When the Moon has Set* as Colm marries Sister Eileen:

> COLM. [...] From out harmonised discord new notes will rise. In the end will assimilate with each other and grow senseless and old. We have incarnated God, and been part of the world. That is enough. [*He takes her hand.*] In the name of the Summer, and the Sun, and the Whole World, I wed you as my wife. [*He puts the ring on her finger.*][225]

This wedding is repeated in *Deirdre of the Sorrows* as Ainnle weds Deirdre to Naisi by invoking the power of the 'the sun and the moon and the whole earth' and the blessings of the 'water, and the wind, the sea, and all the hours of the sun and moon.'[226] But Synge eschews a pre-Christian pantheistic wedding in *The Tinker's* because he wishes to highlight that Sarah Casey's desire to be integrated into the Church's symbolic order is spurious and indicative of a bourgeois materialism that will allow her 'to be going off to the rich tinkers do be travelling from Tibradden to the Tara Hill'.[227] It is this materialism that Synge attempts to exploit in *The Tinker's* as he proceeds to hit two birds with one stone: to expose the corruption of the Catholic Church while at the same time privileging the tinkers' free will as being a manifestation of their lingering attachment to the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland.

With respect to marriage ceremonies, the Church was known for its corruption in Synge's Ireland. Tomás Ó Ciardha told the Irish Folklore Commission of a priest that lived in Bellgrove, County Wexford, who told one of his parishioners: 'every labouring man that I marry gives me a pound, but as you are in better circumstances I'd expect thirty shillings from you." The conversation continued thus:

> 'Begob I don't know!' says John 'I can afford to give you only a pound'
> 'Well it wont do,' says the priest.

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[222] P.J. Fleming, "Chillcuimin agus Ćilláirne," IFC MS: 1255, f.60. County Kerry.
[223] Kellow Chesney, *The Victorian Underworld* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972), 92.
[224] *CW,* vol. 4: 215.
[225] *CW,* vol. 3: 177.
[226] *CW,* vol. 4: 215.
[227] *CW,* vol. 4: 9.

> 'I'll tell you what we'll do,' says John 'I'll bring Katie over tonight, and you can read away until you have a pounds worth of marrying read, and it will do good enough. We'll go home and everything will be all right.'[228]

Similarly, Sarah Casey, 'a heathen tinker of the roads',[229] asks the Priest to 'marry us for not a halfpenny at all; for you're a kind man, your reverence, a kind man with the poor'; to this the Priest reacts: '[*with astonishment*]. Is it marry you for nothing at all?'[230] For the ceremony to take place, the Priest says he will 'do it for a pound only, and that's making it a sight cheaper than I'd make it for one of my own pairs is living here in the place.'[231] A bargain is eventually struck, with 'a crown along with ten shillings and the gallon can'[232] sufficing, and as the deal is struck the Priest, who has developed a penchant for 'playing cards, or drinking a sup, or singing songs, until the dawn of the day',[233] settles down for 'a smart drop'[234] while keeping an eye out for the Bishop who is 'coming in the morning' because the Bishop will be 'destroyed if he seen a thing at all'.[235] M.J.F. McCarthy, a critic of Catholic progressivism in Synge's Ireland, would go so far as to say that the Irish populace's 'addiction to drink, addiction to crime, and addiction to politics, are all traceable to that intellectual weakness and want of moral strength in our character which are perpetuated by our subjection and addiction to priests'.[236] Indeed, the clergy's addiction to drink was common in Synge's Ireland. Risteard Breathnach told the Irish Folklore Commission that the Irish clergy were all too fond of the consumption of alcohol and, in some cases, it led them to dressing up as tramps:

> There was a priest in Carrick in years gone by, and twas rumoured that he was very fond of tho sup. The news came to the Bishop's ears, and he came to find out if the thing were true. He dressed himself up as a tramp when he got near Carrick. When he got within a mile or two of the place he happened on a man breaking stones on the side of the road. They got into conversation and chatted about many things. "Who's the priest here at present?" The man told him[.] "By the way I hear that he's very fond of the drink, and I hear the bishop is watching him lately"[.] "Begob I don't know" says the man, "as far as I can hear the bishop is fond of it himself." The bishop said no more but came back home.[237]

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[228] Tomás Ó Ciardha, "The Priest & The Shoemaker," IFC MS: 107, f.291. County Wexford. For a similar tale see, P.J. Fleming, "Chillcuimin agus Ćilláirne," IFC MS: 1255, f.60. County Kerry.
[229] *CW,* vol. 4: 14.
[230] *CW,* vol. 4: 13.
[231] *CW,* vol. 4: 15.
[232] *CW,* vol. 4: 17.
[233] *CW,* vol. 4: 13. Pastimes such as these were common for the clergy in Synge's Ireland. Johnny Dinden of Clearlestown, County Wexford, told the IFC that his parish priest, Father Jones, 'used to go over to Kilmannon for a game of cards every night he'd have spare time'. See, Johnny Dinden "Béaloideas Ó Loc Gorman," IFC MS: 107, f.384. County Wexford.
[234] *CW,* vol. 4: 17.
[235] *CW,* vol. 4: 19.
[236] Michael J.F. McCarthy, *Priests and People in Ireland* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1914), 8.
[237] Risteard Breathnach, "The Bishop & Priest of Carrick," IFC MS: 107, ff.292-93. County Wexford.

It is Mary Byrne, 'the Beauty of Ballinacree',[238] that orchestrates the drinking session and, indeed, it is this character that Synge uses to juxtapose the free will of pre-Christian cultural residue with Catholic bourgeois culture. In an earlier draft of the play, Mary wakes up '[a] village Woman'[239] to discuss the threat that Catholicism poses on residual culture:

> WOMAN. My head's destroyed with your clattering since the sun went up. You'd have a right to be taking your rest like a Christian, and not be waking us up as if it was the like of the ducks, or geese, or the dumb beasts you were.
>
> MARY. [*derisively*] It's grand Christians they'll be in a short while...Grand Christians surely.[240]

The Priest can only assume that Mary Byrne is 'an old flagrant heathen'[241] and, after the Priest makes a hasty exit, she is forced to invoke the pre-Christian efficacy of pantheism by complaining that Sarah Casey has only decided to get married 'since the change of the moon'.[242] Mary Byrne attempts to coax Sarah Casey back into the Unity of pantheism, juxtaposing two very different cultural materialities:

> MARY. [*soothingly*]. It's a good right you have surely, Sarah Casey, but what good will it do? Is it putting that ring on your finger will keep you from getting an aged woman and losing the fine face you have, or be easing your pains, when it's the grand ladies do be married in silk dresses, with rings of gold, that do pass any woman with their share of torment in the hour of birth, and do be paying the doctors in the city of Dublin a great price a that time, the like of what you'd pay for a good ass and a cart?[243]

Mary Byrne, then, is anathema to the Roman orthodoxy that the Priest is a supposed index for and Synge would have been well aware that the confrontation between Mary Byrne and the Priest was strikingly similar to the infamous confrontations between the Church and Biddy Early – a custodian of pre-Christian cultural residue – in County Clare.

In 1865, Biddy Early (Bridget Connors, nee Flannery) was accused of witchcraft in Ennis, County Clare. Witnesses, however, refused to testify against her and the case was later dropped due to insufficient evidence. Early subsequently returned home to Dromore, a townland near Feakle (where she was born), County Clare,[244] where she continued to practise pre-Christian wisdom upon those in poverty-stricken conditions until her death in 1874. In Synge's Ireland Biddy Early was infamous because, as Angela Bourke argues, 'many stories are told about her confrontations with priests, usually depicted as officious

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[238] *CW,* vol. 4: 11.
[239] TCD MS: 4336, f.2v.
[240] TCD MS: 4336, f.6v.
[241] *CW,* vol. 4: 21.
[242] *CW,* vol. 4: 23.
[243] *CW,* vol. 4: 37.
[244] Meda Ryan, *Biddy Early: The Wise Woman of Clare* (Dublin: Mercier, 1991), 40.

and self-serving until she outwitted them'.[245] Accounts from the folk concur; Eoghan Ó Súilleabháin recorded a tale from an anonymous source, who testified that the 'priests ~~refused~~ hated her because they considered her a "witch" and they used to be warning their congregation not to show strangers where she lived.'[246]Biddy Early had the 'reputation of a witch or sorceress, who could cure all kinds of disease'[247] and in order to effect her ritual she would draw upon the pre-Christian residual culture. Before the healing ritual could begin she would first resort to a process of divination that would involve a bottle as her talisman. Meda Ryan points out that there is a certain disagreement 'as to whether the bottle was blue or black; the exact colour is disputed but, apparently, it was dark. It became the subject of intense interest, curiosity, superstition and conjecture.'[248] Ryan points out that the bottle was said to be 'nine inches in height with a six-inch stem which tapered into a bulbous shape'[249] and accounts from the folk conclude that the bottle was said to be a whiskey bottle.[250] Mary Byrne, a character that is often seen '[*holding the jug with both her hands* [and talking *in a stilted voice*],[251] bears some striking resemblances to Biddy Early. It is not that Mary Byrne uses her jug 'the time she was raging mad with the drouth'[252] to divine the future, but like Biddy Early, alcohol is certainly her talisman. And it is this talisman that Synge mobilises as a way of articulating the gap between the free will that is afforded by the tinkers' pre-Christian pantheism, and the Priest's Roman orthodoxy. While the Priest believes that 'it would be a queer job to go dealing Christian sacraments unto the like of [the tinkers]',[253] it is important to remember that the Priest, who enjoyed 'drinking his sup of porter with [the tinkers] at the fall of night'[254] adheres to a Catholic Roman orthodoxy that is symbolically central but internally barren. This disjuncture between pre-Christian and Catholic Ireland that alcohol exploits fuels a confrontation between the Priest and Mary Byrne that is reminiscent of the confrontations between Biddy Early and the clergy. And just like Biddy Early, Mary Byrne outwits the Priest as he is tied up in a sack and about to go 'headfirst in the boghole is beyond the ditch'.[255]

Alan Price has suggested that 'the Priest is not a Christian, but we see also comparing him to Mary, he is not a Pagan; he is something in between, inferior in important respects to both Christian and Pagan.'[256] What Price is attempting to explain here is that the

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[245] Angela Bourke, "The Baby and The Bathwater: Cultural Loss in Nineteenth-Century Ireland," in *Ideology and Ireland in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Tadhg Foley and Séan Ryder (Dublin: Four Courts, 1998), 83.
[246] "Death of Mrs. Early," IFC MS: 5100, f.111. County Limerick.
[247] "Thursday Evening, 29 July, 1869," *The Limerick Chronicle*, 29 July, 1869, 2.
[248] Ryan, *Biddy Early*, 41.
[249] Ryan, *Biddy Early*, 41.
[250] Mrs. Nagent, "Biddy Early," IFC MS: 707, f.165. County Clare.
[251] *CW*, vol. 4: 17.
[252] *CW*, vol. 4: 43.
[253] *CW*, vol. 4: 33.
[254] *CW*, vol. 4: 47.
[255] *CW*, vol. 4: 45.
[256] Alan Price, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Drama* (London: Methuen & Co, 1961), 130.

priest adheres to the beliefs of Popular Catholicism. This is correct, for while Synge employs alcohol to foreground the Priest's willingness to indulge in 'drinking a little sup in one town and another town',[257] there is also reason to believe that even the Priest is affected by the pre-Christian pantheism of the Wicklow glens. In *The Shadow* when the Tramp calls upon the efficacy of a needle to ward off the fairies he also '*begins stitching one of the tags in his coat, saying the 'De Profundis'* (From the Depths: an honorary prayer for departed souls) *under his breath*'[258] In a similar fashion, in *The Tinker's*, as the priest invokes 'the fire of heaven from the hand of the Almighty God', he begins '*saying a Latin malediction in a loud ecclesiastical voice*'.[259] Presumably this is the "De Profundis". While on Aran Synge was informed that the recitation of the "De Profundis" ensured that the fairies could not 'stand before you'[260] and so Synge's implication is clear: the Priest considers the tinkers to be manifestations of a residual belief in the fairies or, at the very least, the tinkers summon the contemporaneity of the fairies. As E. Estyn Evans writes, pre-Christian residual culture advocates that 'the fairies were particularly active in Maytime'[261] and, for Synge, the Priest's association of the tinkers with the fairies is a corollary of his pre-Christian pantheistic philosophy because the fairies, a race that live in the landscape, are a manifestation of that which pre-Christian pantheism venerates: the Natural order. Whether or not the tinkers that live freely in the Wicklow glens – where 'there's a warm sun in it, and a kind air, and you'll hear the cuckoos singing and crying out on the top of the hills'[262] – should be associated with the fairies matters little to Synge. What the dramatist is clearly interested in is the Catholic Church's identification of the tinkers with supernatural phenomena, which is why the Priest feels the urgent need to turn towards Popular Catholicism and recite the "De Profundis" as all at once the tinkers exclaim: 'Run, run. Run for your lives.'[263] The Priest, then, appears to have a residual belief in pre-Christian pantheism but it is because he does not understand the Idea of Nature as the tinkers do, that he is divinely determined by Nature to suffer from *wille*. In creating this binary opposition between pre-Christian residual culture and Catholic bourgeois culture, Synge is able to foreground the tinkers' free will as they decide to return to live a life in the Wicklow glens, all before asking the Priest: 'what did you want meddling with the like of us, when it's a long time we are going our own ways – father and son, and his after him, or mother and daughter, and her daughter again – and it's little need we ever had of going up into a church

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[257] *CW*, vol. 4: 37.
[258] *CW*, vol. 4: 41.
[259] *CW*, vol. 4: 49.
[260] *CW*, vol. 2: 180.
[261] E. Estyn Evans, "Peasant Beliefs in Nineteenth-Century Ireland," in *Views of the Irish Peasantry: 1800-1916*, ed. Daniel J. Casey and Robert E. Rhodes (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon, 1977), 48.
[262] *CW*, vol. 4: 31.
[263] *CW*, vol. 4: 49.

and swearing – I'm told there's swearing with it – a word no man would believe'.[264] Nature may have compelled Sarah Casey into a Catholic marriage but this is just Synge's way of comparing the eventual free will of the tinkers, which is predicated upon their ability to arrest the Idea of existence through Nature, with those manifestations of *wille* that Synge identified within Catholic bourgeois culture. It is significant, then, that the tinkers do not join the Catholic symbolic order, choosing instead to return to Nature and live an existence replete with autonomy.

The acceptance of the vestiges and traces from pre-Christian Ireland into the Catholic habitus is an impetus that consistently informs Synge's Modernist dramaturgy of pre-Christian cultural residue and, furthermore, it was a contemporaneous topic in critical and cultural discourse in the Ireland of Synge's time. In Synge's Ireland, Biddy Early was a difficult subject. The Catholic Church wanted to distance itself from her operation of pre-Christian custom, but in the face of cultural criticism concerning the backwardness of Catholic Ireland from members of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy such as Horace Plunkett, apologists for the Church such as the Rev. M. O'Riordan were forced to defend the pre-Christian cultural customs that Biddy Early mobilised in her praxis. In so doing, the Church was forced to legitimate Popular Catholicism. For while Plunkett would criticise Irish Catholics for being 'apathetic, thriftless, and almost non-industrial, [because] they require the exercise of strengthening influences on their moral fibre,'[265] members of the Catholic clergy would reply with equal venom. In response to Plunkett, O'Riordan, a member of the clergy and an advocate of Catholic progressivism, wrote a riposte entitled *Catholicity and Progress in Ireland*, in which he contrasted Biddy Early, 'a knowledgeable woman', whose name had 'spread far and wide from the hills of Clare where she resided' with English 'crystal gazers':[266]

> Would Sir Horace point out the difference between the *pishogue*-makers and the fashionable fortune-tellers who are called palmists? I will tell him; the latter make more dupes and money than the former, and the former are all but extinct in Ireland, whilst the latter are living and thriving in London and in other centres of material progress of the industrial spirit.[267]

In his preface to *The Tinker's*, Synge conjectures that the Catholic clergy will not mind 'being laughed at for half an hour with malice, as the clergy in every Roman Catholic country were laughed at through the ages that had real religion'.[268] And it is this gap between the pervasive Anglo-Irish and Catholic understanding of pre-Christian cultural residue that Synge exploits in *The Tinker's* as he wished to highlight that the foundations of

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[264] *CW*, vol. 4: 47.
[265] Horace Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century* (London: John Murray, 1904), 121.
[266] M. O'Riordan, *Catholicity and Progress in Ireland* (London: Keegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1905), 250-51.
[267] O'Riordan, *Catholicity and Progress in Ireland*, 250-51.
[268] *CW*, vol. 4: 4n.

the Church were built on a reluctant acceptance of the material conditions of residual pre-Christian praxis. What emerged from this cultural acceptance was Popular Catholicism and while Synge considered Popular Catholicism to be a corruption of the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland, he would certainly draw upon its efficacy in order to critique the habitations of Catholic modernity. As far as Synge was concerned, the cultural residue of pre-Christian sensibility should never have been Christianised because he understood that the pre-Christian pantheism of Nature, a philosophy that the tinkers had developed, was conducive towards free will and the negation of intense suffering.

Ultimately the gap between the Anglo-Irish and the Catholic understanding of pre-Christian cultural residue would be excessively exploited in *The Playboy of the Western World*, as Synge's attitude towards the residue from pre-Christian Ireland and its subsequent bastardisation in Popular Catholicism began to change in the wake of the personal attacks that were made after the premiere performances of *The Shadow* and *The Well of the Saints*. If O'Riordan refused to concede that the holy well had anything to do with Popular Catholicism because it was just 'one way of reducing the Catholic doctrine of the Invocation of Saints to practice' and, in any case, the 'Duke of Norfolk used to take his late son to the Grotto of Lourdes and to St. Winifred's Well',[269] then in *The Well of the Saints* Synge would suggest otherwise as he proceeded to exploit the disjunctive space between pre-Christian cultural residue and Popular Catholicism and, in doing so, those tell-tale signs of Anglo-Irish Ascendancy class insecurity began to emerge.

'Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Father, Father, Father'[270]

Popular Catholicism did not permeate material conditions in Ireland until the seventeenth century, when political circumstances[271] saw the Church become increasingly isolated from the laity; before the seventeenth century Popular Catholicism certainly existed but it was not tacitly accepted. Up until the eve of the Great Famine, the Catholic Church lacked internal discipline and religious zeal as they became naturalised by the habitus of Popular Catholicism. Throughout the nineteenth century Tridentine reform was imposed beginning with the Synod of Tuam in 1817. But the legislation was only ratified and subsequently decreed by Rome in 1825. For the Church, the decree could not come quickly enough. In 1824, Father John Carroll, the parish priest of Killinick, County Wexford, attempted to perform a magical exorcism on three-year-old Catherine Sinnott, who repeatedly suffered from epileptic fits. Carroll's parish had 'a great confidence in him as a holy man, and

[269] O'Riordan, *Catholicity and Progress*, 252.
[270] "Wexford Assizes: August 4th," *Dublin Evening Post*, 7 August, 1824, 3.
[271] These political circumstances were initiated in 1607 with the Flight of the Earls and the subsequent Plantation of Ulster that precipitated the implementation of the Catholic Penal Laws.

considered that he could work miracles'.[272] Upon entering the child's bedroom Carroll inverted a wooden tub over her body and 'leaped and pranced upon the tub' while screaming: 'Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Father, Father, Father'.[273] After he had finished jumping on the tub the priest 'unloosened his gaiter, and took off his stocking and rubbed his leg with his hand' and sat down on the tub while Catherine cried '"mammy, mammy, save me" and Father Carroll 'whistled a hornpipe.'[274] Just shy of four hours later, the tub was lifted and little Catherine Sinnott was pronounced dead. At the inquest held at the Wexford Assizes, it transpired that Father Carroll had been performing "miracles" in his parish for quite some time:

> Father Carroll then came up to where a woman of the name of Moran was lying speechless on the ground; the Priest came up with his hat off, to where Mrs. Moran was lying; he looked at her for some time; he then stamped twice with his foot, and said, "begone;' after which he spit upon her; he then threw himself on his back and rubbed the back of his hand for some time against the gravel, until he cut it; Father Carroll then walked up and down for some time close to Mrs. Moran; [the people watching] when [they] saw Father Carroll throw himself back [said] that he was mad, and [they] could prove it.[275]

Father Carroll was acquitted of murder by Mr. Justice Johnson on the grounds of diminished responsibility, but Johnson issued a harsh warning to those members of the laity that frequently resorted to pre-Christian cultural residue: 'the Peasantry of this Country are prone to believe that Catholic Priests are gifted with supernatural powers, and capable of performing Miracles' but to presuppose 'an individual is capable of usurping the attributed of the Divinity, is blasphemy in the extreme'.[276] It was not until the Synod of Thurles in 1850 (the first national Synod for the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland in almost seven hundred years) that the performance of pre-Christian cures and charms by the clergy finally began to recede from the Catholic habitus. What emerged from the Synod was that the orthodox priests 'were forbidden to take part in dances, horse-races and other social gatherings, and were obliged to read religious books regularly and to attend periodic theological conferences and spiritual retreats.'[277] And yet, 'internal reform was both gradual and uneven, and old habits and attitudes persisted – in some areas at least – until well into the second half of the nineteenth century.'[278] As Seán Ó Súilleabháin suggests, many priests were forced into silence,[279] that is to say, the priests may have believed that they had

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[272] "Wexford Assizes: August 4th," 3.
[273] "Wexford Assizes: August 4th," 3.
[274] "Wexford Assizes: August 4th," 3.
[275] "Wexford Assizes: August 4th," 3.
[276] "Wexford Assizes: August 4th," 3.
[277] S.J. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland: 1780-1845* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2001), 90.
[278] S.J. Connolly, *Priests and People*, 90.
[279] Seán Ó Súilleabháin, *Irish Folk Custom and Belief* (Dublin: Three Candles, 1967), 38.

magical powers of pre-Christian sensibility that Popular Catholicism invited, but they had to abandon them or else face the very real threat that they would be excommunicated. And it is this lingering attachment that the laity had to pre-Christian sensibilities found in Popular Catholicism – sensibilities that drew upon pre-Christian pantheism – that Synge interrogates in *The Well of the Saints*.

At the first reading of *The Well of the Saints* in a disused egg and butter shop on Dublin's Camden Street, Holloway turned to Synge before Frank Fay began the reading and offered his 'condemnation of people meddling with subjects, they knew little about', only to subsequently find that Synge 'had gone & done likewith with his latest dramatic effort'.[280] Contrary to Holloway's supposition Synge did, in fact, have a consummate understanding of the material that *The Well of the Saints* (hereafter referred to as *The Well*) dealt with: saints and holy wells. Considering Synge's diaries and notebooks in conjunction with Irish hagiography, it transpires that Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian cultural residue in *The Well* made it much more than a play about holy wells and saints. *The Well* is a play that critiqued Catholic progressive historicism, which is perhaps why, during "The Freedom of The Theatre" debate that Yeats organised in order to restore a sense of democracy in the wake of the *Playboy of the Western World* disturbances, John Butler Yeats dismissed Ireland's status as the land of saints and scholars because the country was full of 'Plaster Saints'.[281] Yeats's comment capitalises on a theory that was evident in critical and cultural discourse in the Ireland of Synge's time. Patrick Kenny believed that Ireland raised 'the saints so high above the sinners' that it was 'impossible for [the saints] to become efficient in their business'.[282] Kenny critiqued Catholic progressivism because, as far as he was concerned, 'the Irish priest relies on the terror of the slave rather than on the courage of the martyr, killing character to save it from doing wrong, instead of letting it grow and guiding it to do right in accordance with Catholic liberty'.[283] W.P. Ryan, who succeeded Kenny as the editor of *The Peasant*, may have been an advocate for progressive Catholicism, but a progressivism predicated upon the absence of historical dominance. His scathing attack on the historical dominance of progressive Catholicism pointed out, in no uncertain terms, that the Catholic clergy 'were not managers in their priestly capacity, as many had innocently imagined' and he berated the English for calling his fellow countrymen and women 'priest-ridden people'.[284] For Ryan, the cultural regeneration of Ireland was dependent upon a sea change in the national curriculum and that would necessarily require a reconsideration of the role of the clergy. The clergy needed to readjust their values especially the 'folk-lore

[280] Joseph Holloway, NLI MS: 1802, 17 June, 1904, f.308.
[281] William M. Murphy, *Prodigal Father: The Life of John Butler Yeats, 1839-1922* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 317. Also see, "The Freedom of the Play," *Irish Times*, 5 February, 1907, 8.
[282] Patrick Kenny, *The Sorrows of Ireland* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1907), 93.
[283] Kenny, *The Sorrows of Ireland*, 101.
[284] Ryan, *The Pope's Green Island*, 40-41.

conception of St. Patrick' because '[f]rom this even learned, Irish-minded priests find it difficult to get away'.[285] In fact, St. Patrick was a myth that needed to be thoroughly demythologised because, according to Ryan, he was 'a sort of magician' that practised the 'rough-and-ready illustration of the marvellous'.[286] The debunking of myths and the marvellous that the Catholic laity found in Popular Catholicism is what fuels Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian pantheism in *The Well.*

The provenance of *The Well* lies in two sources, one primary, the other secondary. The secondary source is Andrieu de la Vigne's *Moralité de l'aveugle et du boiteux*, which Synge read in Professor Louis Petit de Julleville's *Histoire du theâtre en France: La Comédie et les Mœurs en France au Moyen Age.*[287] Synge first began studying with de Julleville in 1895,[288] but eight years later, when Synge began writing *The Well* he returned to his former professor's work and made notes on the morality tale that was first performed in 1456.[289] Synge's verbatim notes on "*Moralités Religieuses*" (Religious Morality) include the following summary of de la Vigne's play:

> *La moralité d'André de la Vigne s'ouvre au moment où le saint vient d'expirer. Son corps est resté exposé au fond du theatre, et l'on va tout à l'heure l'emporter à l'église en procession solennelle. Deux mendiants sont en scène; l'un d'eux est aveugle, et ne marche qu'en tâtonnant, l'autre est boiteux, et gît au milieu de la route. Mais n'ayone pas trop grand' pitié d'eux. Ce son deux paresseux, deux ivrognes; quoiqu'ils gémissent d'une voix plaintive; l'aveugle en distant:*
>
> *L'aumosne au povre disetteux,*
> *Qui jamais nul jour ne vit goutte.*
>
> *et le paralytique:*
>
> *Faites quelque bien au boiteux*
> *Qui bouger ne peult pour la goutte.*
>
> [The morality tale of André de la Vigne opens at the moment when the saint is about to expire. His body is left exposed at the bottom of the theatre, and it was quickly carried away to church in a solemn procession. Two beggars are in the scene, one of them is blind, and only walks around

[285] Ryan, *The Pope's Green Island*, 226.
[286] Ryan, *The Pope's Green Island*, 226.
[287] See, L. Petit de Julleville, *Histoire du Theâtre en France: La Comédie et les Mœurs en France au Moyen Age* (Paris: Librairie Léopold Cerf, 1886), 100-103.
[288] Synge first began studying with de Julleville on Monday 29 April, 1895. His diary simply states: 'cours de Julleville' (TCD MS: 4416, f 54v).
[289] Synge's diary for 3 October, 1903 records thus: 'Petit de Julleville[,] *Theatre en France* [sic]' (TCD MS: 4422, f.21v). For Synge's detailed notes on Andrieu de la Vigne's *Moralité de l'aveugle et du boiteux*, see, TCD MS: 4393 36r-34r.

> groping, the other is limping, and lies down in the middle of the street. But don't have too much sympathy for them. These are two lazy souls, two drunks; be that as it may they moan in a plaintive voice; the blind one saying:
>
> Alms to the poor beggars
> Who cannot live a single day without a drop of spirits.
>
> and the paralytic:
>
> Be good to the lame
> Who cannot move for the drink].[290]

The primary source that informs *The Well's* dramaturgy is a story that was told to Synge on Aran by Old Mourteen (Máirtín Ó Conghaile). Old Mourteen, with his idiosyncratic 'gleam of pagan malice'[291] took Synge to the church of the *Ceathair Aluinn* (The Four Beautiful Persons) where the dramatist was shown a holy well that was said to cure blindness and epilepsy. As the two men sat looking at the well, another islander (nameless to the archive) approached Synge and told him of the well's miraculous effect on a blind child from County Sligo whose mother dreamt of the well. Both mother and son arrived on Inis Mór by curragh, whereupon she 'walked up to this well, and she kneeled down and began saying her prayers. Then she put her hand out for the water, and put it on his eyes, and the moment it touched him he called out: "O mother, look at the pretty flowers!"'[292] Synge transposes these two sources to County Wicklow where he chooses to focus on two blind beggars, Mary and Martin Doul and the trials and tribulations that they face as they are temporarily relieved of their blindness by holy groundwater that is a corollary of pre-Christian pantheism's veneration of Nature.

In November 1899, Synge suddenly decided to stop his research into Irish hagiography and it was Spinoza's *Ethics* that may have precipitated his rejection of this scholarship. Synge may have begun reading Spinoza in March 1897 but as late as October 1898[293] he could still be found pondering over the *Ethics*, before he seems to have put the work to one side. And then, quite suddenly, in April 1899 Synge returned to Spinoza's philosophy 'as a change from the saints'[294] because he was struggling to accept hagiographical discourse: 'my daily readings of the saints and Stoics have lost their interest'.[295] November saw his final rejection of Irish hagiography:

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[290] *CW*, vol. 3: 265.
[291] *CW*, vol. 2: 56.
[292] *CW*, vol. 2: 57.
[293] Synge was still reading *Ethics* on 13 October, 1898 (TCD MS: 4419, f.109v).
[294] *CW*, vol. 2: 32.
[295] *CW*, vol. 2: 32-33.

> *Nov. 23.* I am sick of the ascetic twaddle of the saints. I will not deny my masculine existence nor rise, if I can rise, by facile abnegation. I despise the hermit and the monk and pity only the adulterer and the drunkard. There is one world of souls and no flesh and no devil.[296]

While it is far too reductive to suggest that Synge rejected hagiography because of Spinoza, it is plausible to suggest that he decided to shun hagiographical scholarship because the work of Spinoza and Schopenhauer had presented Synge with a creed which promoted the notion that the divinity of Nature could be used to rise above the moribund concerns of everyday existence. The Saint in *The Well* is informed by this logic and over the course of the play it transpires that the Saint may not actually be a saint after all, but a Protestant tramp who exploits the Catholic laity's residual attachment to Popular Catholicism.

It is true that individual saints first conducted the evangelisation of the Irish populace and, as J.N. Hillgarth has suggested, these saints were 'holy men who lived a life which alternated periods as hermits with periods as wandering preachers'.[297] This is precisely the character that Synge draws in *The Well*, where the Saint is characterised as 'a wandering Friar'.[298] However, the distinction between *The Well* and the material conditions of the fifth century that Hillgarth describes is that Synge set the play in '*some lonely mountainous district on the east of Ireland, one or more centuries ago*'.[299] This is Greenane, near Ballinatone, County Wicklow (the play briefly held the title *The Crossroads of Grianan*)[300] and if the play was first performed in 1905 then Synge sets the play anytime between 1705 and 1805. If Popular Catholicism was naturalised into cultural hegemony in the seventeenth century then eighteenth-century Ireland witnessed its hangover, but still, there were said to be at least three thousand holy wells in the country;[301] the laity's fascination with Popular Catholicism had not died. Religious literature on the lives of the saints did exist in eighteenth century Ireland, but not all the laity could read and such literature was predominantly sold by travelling pedlars; coming into possession of such a work was difficult. Irish Popular Catholicism in the eighteenth century placed a strong emphasis on the lives of the saints, which is why Martin Doul says that he has 'heard the priests a power of times making great talk and praises of the beauty of the saints.'[302] However, while an emphasis was placed upon holy wells and saints, the efficacy of this belief was predicated upon a pseudo-mythology of a saint not, as Synge dramatises, a saint

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[296] *CW,* vol. 2: 34.
[297] J.N. Hillgarth, *Christianity and Paganism, 350-750: The Conversion of Western Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 118.
[298] *CW,* vol. 3: 69.
[299] *CW,* vol. 3: 69.
[300] *CW,* vol. 3: 262. Synge's letter to Max Meyerfeld points out that the space and place of the play is 'Bállinatone, Grianan'. See, NLI MS: 778, f.6v, J.M. Synge to Max Meyerfeld, 12 August, 1905.
[301] Michael P. Carroll, *Irish Pilgrimage: Holy Wells and Popular Catholic Devotion* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 20. Also see, Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, "The Pattern," in *Irish Popular Culture: 1650-1850*, ed. James S. Donnelly Jr. and Kerby A. Miller (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1998), 208.
[302] *CW,* vol. 3: 85

that arrives in a community out of the blue; in essence, the saint is at least ten centuries too late. Synge's implication, then, is clear: the Saint in *The Well* is akin to a wandering saint from the fifth century and his Saint is similarly faced with an Irish populace that gives considerable credence to those pre-Christian sensibilities found in Popular Catholicism. But there is one significant difference. The Roman orthodoxy of Synge's Saint is in considerable doubt; as Mary Doul suggests, the saint is 'a simple fellow, and it's no lie'.[303]

Timmy, a blacksmith that proves to be the Saint's closest ally throughout the play, heralds the Saint's arrival in Greenane. However, while Timmy may claim that the Saint is a servant of 'the Almighty God',[304] in an earlier draft of *The Well* these words are visibly struck out in pencil and right up until the penultimate draft of the play Timmy claims that the Saint is 'a holy man' and a 'sort of saint I think they call him'.[305] The Saint seems to be a precursor to the charlatan of *The Playboy of the Western World.* In that play, Christy Mahon is followed by a group of Mayo girls that are 'after walking four miles to be listening to [him]'[306] carrying presents such as 'a brace of duck's eggs', 'a pat of butter', 'a little cut of cake' and 'a little laying pullet' that was 'crushed at the fall of night by the curate's car';[307] in a similar fashion, the 'young girls' of Greenane are 'walking after the saint' while 'carrying things in their hands, and they walking as easy as you'd see a child walk, who'd have a dozen eggs in her bib'.[308] And just like Christy, who says that 'this is a fine country for young lovely girls',[309] the Saint believes that 'young girls' are the 'cleanest holy people you'd see walking the world'.[310]

Just as Timmy is about to tell the two blind tramps of the Saint's imminent arrival, Martin Doul asks Timmy if he had 'met a thing wasn't right and you coming on the road'.[311] In a letter to his German translator, Max Meyerfeld, Synge defines 'a thing [that] wasn't right' as 'a thing that is uncanny, mysterious, supernatural'[312] and it is significant that Timmy is associated with the supernatural. In Irish folk belief the blacksmith was 'looked upon as a man of extraordinary powers – this attribution to him may well have been derived from the time when iron was first introduced to this country, over 2000 years ago',[313] suggests Ó Súilleabháin. The blacksmith's powers were particularly efficacious against a certain attribute of the divinity of Nature: the fairies. Iron as a talisman clearly attracted Synge's interest and in *The Golden Bough* he would have read how Frazer

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[303] *CW,* vol. 3: 83.
[304] *CW,* vol. 3: 81.
[305] *CW,* vol. 3: 80.
[306] *CW,* vol. 4: 107.
[307] *CW,* vol. 4: 99.
[308] *CW,* vol. 3: 83.
[309] *CW,* vol. 4: 107.
[310] *CW,* vol. 3: 83.
[311] *CW,* vol. 3: 75.
[312] *CW,* vol. 3: 74.
[313] Ó Súilleabháin, *Irish Folk Custom and Belief*, 27-28.

repeatedly draws upon the efficacy of iron as a talisman for warding off the fairies;[314] in his notes to Frazer's work, Synge wrote that iron is 'disliked by the spirits, a superstition dating back perhaps from the time when iron was a novelty'.[315] Yeats was also taken by Timmy's relationship with the Saint and he encouraged Synge to include 'another passage about the spells of smiths and women which suggest that he has been reading S. Patrick's hymn. He might naturally have done so.'[316] The hymn that Yeats refers to is *St. Patrick's Breastplate*, which contains lines that ward against:

> False Prophets' Incantations,
> Against Black Laws of Heathen Nations,
> Vain Heretics' Rites and Idols' Spell,
> 'Gainst Witches' Charms, 'gainst the Smiths of Hell,
> And Evil Druids, and, as well,
> Against Unlawful Knowledge vile
> That doth man's flesh and spirit defile…
> Christ keep me to-day![317]

True to Yeats's advice, Synge did include lines to this effect as the Saint requests the Greenane populace to 'be saying a prayer for your own sakes against false prophets and heathens and the words of women and smiths, and all knowledge that would soil the soul or the body of man.'[318] In doing this, Synge creates a curious disjuncture. For when Timmy describes how he met the Saint 'on the road', he equates the Saint to 'a thing wasn't right'.[319] Ostensibly, Timmy has seen some residual pre-Christian supernatural power in the Saint, which is perhaps why Mary Doul exclaims '[t]he Lord protect us from the saints of God'[320] as the Saint approaches. It is significant that Timmy has identified the pre-Christian sentiment in the Saint because it affords Synge the opportunity to suggest that the Greenane populace are seemingly predisposed to identify aspects of pre-Christian residual culture. Turning once again to Synge's letters to Meyerfeld, the dramatist suggests that his lines on 'the words of women and smiths' are 'almost a quotation from an old hymn of Saint Patrick. In Irish folklore smiths were thought to be magicians, and more or less in league with the powers of darkness.'[321] With the punitive utterance of *St. Patrick's Breastplate* Irish hagiography maintains that all pre-Christian malevolent spirits should be banished and,

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[314] For example see, Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 39. In this passage Frazer discuses a German folktale that draws upon iron as a talisman to ward off the tooth-fairy: 'in Germany it is said to be an almost universal maxim among the people that when you have had a tooth taken out you should insert it in a mouse's hole. To do so with a child's milk-tooth which has fallen out will prevent the child from having toothache. Or you should go behind the stove and throw your tooth backwards over your head, saying, "Mouse, give me your iron tooth; I will give you my bone tooth." And after that your other teeth will remain good.'
[315] TCD MS: 4378, f.57r.
[316] *CW*, vol. 3: xxi.
[317] *St. Patrick's Breastplate*, adapted by Katherine M. Buck (London: Alfred H. Mayhew, 1926), 6.
[318] *CW*, vol. 3: 91.
[319] *CW*, vol. 3: 75.
[320] *CW*, vol. 3: 133.
[321] NLI MS: 778, f.6V. J.M. Synge to Max Meyerfeld, 12 August, 1905.

significantly, Timmy is not banished; in fact at the end of the play the Saint invites 'Molly Byrne and Timmy the smith' into the parish Church so that he can 'make [their] marriage and put my blessing on you all'.[322] The Saint, then, is just what Timmy says he is: 'a sort of saint'.[323]

According to Irish hagiography those members of the laity that offended the saint's honour either through the telling of lies or by the stealing of his or her crozier and/or bell were said to be struck down by divine power. Conversely, those that venerated the saint and his/her power were said to be miraculously cured of whatever ailed them. Irish folk belief attached considerable importance to the saint's Vestments, which were said to 'remain dry in a rainstorm or when thrown into water'.[324] However, the populace of Greenane fail to abide by this belief and Molly Byrne attempts to mock the Saint's divine power by asking Martin Doul to 'put his big cloak on you, the way we'd see how you'd look, and you a saint of the Almighty God'.[325] In a similar tone, the Saint admits that the only vestment he wears is a bunch of 'old sacks, and skin covering [his] bones'.[326] It is possible to entertain the supposition that Synge's Saint is not really a saint at all, but rather a tramp that attempts to cure the Douls of their blindness by summoning the powers of pre-Christian pantheism. In his prose essay entitled "The Vagrants of Wicklow," Synge remarks that '[a]mong the country people of the East of Ireland the tramps and tinkers who wander round from the West have a curious reputation for witchery and unnatural powers'.[327] Significantly, Synge insinuates that the Saint has arrived in Greenane from Aran:

> TIMMY. Did ever you hear tell of a place across a bit of the sea, where there is an island, and the grave of the four beautiful saints?
>
> MARY DOUL. I've heard people have walked round from the west and they speaking of that
>
> TIMMY. [*impressively*]. There's a green ferny well, I'm told, behind of that place, and if you put a drop of the water out of it, on the eyes of a blind man, you'll make him see as well as any person is walking the world.[328]

In eighteenth century Ireland, the Church certainly encouraged pilgrimages to holy wells and in some cases parish priests also made the pilgrimage so that once the supplicant had extracted the water from the well, the priest would perform a Catholic ritual of Tridentine reform (the confession and/or the Mass) so that the ritual had the official stamp of Roman Catholicism, rather than the stamp of pre-Christian pantheism. This, then, is the

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[322] *CW*, vol. 3: 151.
[323] *CW*, vol. 3: 80.
[324] Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *The Hero in Irish Folk History* (Dublin: Macmillan, 1985), 46.
[325] *CW*, vol. 3: 85.
[326] *CW*, vol. 3: 101.
[327] *CW*, vol. 2: 203.
[328] *CW*, vol. 2: 79.

consummation of Popular Catholicism, for while the folk gave pre-Christian credence to the well, it was made holy by the Church through an adjectival prefix and, in some cases, in order to ensure that the Catholicity of the pilgrimage was unequivocal, the priest presided over the ceremony, orchestrating the supplicants. And yet, at the very same time, the Church officially prohibited priests from 'act[ing] the Fairy doctor' because it involved the 'blessing of water to be sprinkled over sick persons or cattle or fields.'[329] Ostensibly, the Church prohibited priests to perform this ritual because the groundwater was concomitant with pre-Christian, as opposed to Catholic, belief.

In her study of pre-Christian cultural residue Lady Wilde argues that there was 'no superstition stronger in Ireland than a belief in the curative power of the sacred wells that are scattered over the country' because these wells were 'held sacred by the Druid priests'.[330] Dorothy Ann Bray's hagiography of Irish saints concludes that 'the saints are still presented as persons whose due is pious and reverent regard, as larger-than-life Christians in whom grace and righteousness abound' but still, the 'real life figures of the saints seldom, if ever appear'.[331] This is why, as Bray concludes, it is far too easy 'to draw a comparison between the Christian saint and the Irish druid; both perform a priestly role in society, and are the keepers of arcane knowledge, medicine and prophecy' but nevertheless, 'the saint matches and surpasses, the supernatural power of the druid.'[332] It is not that the Saint is a druid but a tramp that has wandered 'round from the West [with] a curious reputation for witchery and unnatural powers'.[333] The Saint certainly invites the power of wizardry; Bride, a member of the community, is astonished 'to watch [the Saint] moving his hands'[334] as he recites *Saint Patrick's Breastplate*. Bray concedes that there is a strong similarity between the saint as a 'divine magician' and the 'the figure of the shaman in tribal societies' because the 'Irish saints are frequently involved with the elements of nature'.[335] Synge's Saint as a divine magician of Nature underlies Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian pantheism in *The Well.*

The Greenane community cheerfully accept the Saint into their lives because their material conditions are saturated in Popular Catholicism. What is particularly surprising about the Saint's arrival with holy water from Aran in the glens of Wicklow is that supplicants were expected to make a pilgrimage to the holy well and only in rare cases did 'pilgrims [...] not visit a holy well' and, if this was the case, the supplicant would make a

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[329] Michael P. Carroll, *Irish Pilgrimage: Holy Wells and Popular Catholic Devotion* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 48.
[330] Lady Wilde, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland*, vol. 2: 161.
[331] Dorothy Ann Bray, *A List of Motifs in the Lives of the Early Irish Saints* (Helsinki: Scientiarum Fennica, 1992), 11, 10.
[332] Bray, *A List of Motifs*, 15.
[333] *CW,* vol. 2: 203.
[334] *CW,* vol. 3: 91.
[335] Bray, *A List of Motifs*, 15.

visit to a 'holy island or some other holy place'.[336] John C. Messenger's ethnography of Aran life concludes that the water in the well of the Four Beautiful Persons was 'considered holy, [and] capable of "bringing the grace of God and the saint,"' and while the well is said to have cured 'partially blind islanders', the restoration of sight only materialised if the supplicant paid 'nine visits to the well on successive Sundays'.[337] However, Synge's supplicants, Mary and Martin Doul, have never been anywhere near the well of the Four Beautiful Persons, let alone visited it on nine Sundays in a row, which throws the curative powers of the Saint into considerable doubt.

From Frazer, Synge would have understood that a 'beneficent use of homeopathic magic is to heal or prevent sickness'[338] and in Synge's Ireland, the holy well was the 'material outcome of, as well as a connecting link in, the chain or primitive customs and thoughts thereby engendered, extending from pagan times.'[339] Thus, the holy well was considered to be 'the haunts of spirits' and these spirits 'proved propitious if remembered, but vindictive if neglected'.[340] Furthermore, Michael P. Carroll points out that 'the wells held sacred in pagan Ireland were sacred because the water was deemed *harmful* to human beings'.[341] A well's groundwater, then, is the consummation of pre-Christian pantheistic belief because what pantheism borrows from animism is the belief that 'every animal, every tree, sometimes every rock and stream, has its own spirit or divinity'.[342] The Saint's water is not holy in the Catholic sense of the word, but the holy water of pre-Christian belief that is riddled with those harmful spirits that lurked in the Natural order. It is significant that upon curing the Douls, the Saint immediately draws upon the spiritualism of Nature that is exemplary of the divinity of the Unity: 'May the Lord who has given you sight send a little sense into your heads, the way it won't be on your two selves you'll be looking – on two pitiful sinners of the earth – but on the splendour of the Spirit of God, you'll see an odd time shining out through the big hills, and steep streams falling to the sea.'[343] According to Irish hagiography, the whole purpose of the saint was that he/she reimposed Christian benevolence within a community and he/she is able to do this 'by inspiring the hearts of the community to pious acts and to involvement in church ceremonies'.[344] However, as the play draws to a close, the Saint stands back and watches as the Douls are expelled from Greenane for disrespecting the community's belief in Popular Catholicism:

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[336] Patrick Logan, *The Holy Wells of Ireland* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1980), 16.
[337] John C. Messenger, *Inis Beag: Isle of Ireland* (New York: Holt Reinehart and Winston, 1969), 97.
[338] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 29.
[339] W.G. Wood Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths, a Folklore Sketch: A Handbook of Irish Pre-Christian Traditions*, vol. 2 (New York: Kennikat, 1970), 49.
[340] Wood Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths*, 49.
[341] Michael P. Carroll, "Rethinking Popular Catholicism in Pre-Famine Ireland," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34, no. 3 (1995): 355. Emphasis in original.
[342] Harrison, *Pantheism*, 57.
[343] *CW*, vol. 3: 101.
[344] Ó hÓgáin, *The Hero in Irish Folk History*, 48.

> MARTIN DOUL. Go on now, holy father, for *if* you're a fine saint itself, it's more sense in a blind man, and more power maybe than you're thinking at all. Let you walk on now with your worn feet, and your welted knees, and your fasting, holy ways have left you with a big head on you and a thin pitiful arm.[345]

Once it transpires that those that are blind have more sight that those that are not, Martin Doul ridicules his wife by saying that 'if it was yourself you seen, you'd be running round in a short while like the old screeching madwoman is running round the glen';[346] even in Greenane in the eighteenth century pre-Christian pantheism has eroded the psyche of those that lived amongst the glens. The Douls' wish to return to blindness is soon granted, but not by any Saintly intervention but rather, due to the lack of it and this was a common folktale in Synge's Ireland.[347] The fact that the Saint cannot cure the Douls of their blindness serves to suggest that the Douls' disrespect for the water from the well of the Four Beautiful Persons has angered the spirits of the divine Unity that were said to reside in the water and, furthermore, that the Saint is not really a Catholic saint after all. If the Saint really were a Catholic saint then surely the efficacy of the ritual would be lasting rather than temporary. Therefore, it is significant that the Greenane laity invest the Saint with the powers of Popular Catholicism because it allows Synge to critique the Catholic laity's fascination with a residual culture that the Catholic Church bastardised. Like Christy Mahon in *The Playboy of the Western World*, the Saint is a charlatan who exploits the beliefs of a community; the populace of Greenane are so desperate for a miracle that they welcome a tramp with the water of pre-Christian pantheism into their lives, believing that the Saint has the powers of Popular Catholicism.

After reading Spinoza and Schopenhauer, Synge understood that if the divinity of Nature were contemplated then it would allow the pure subject of knowledge to negotiate the moribund concerns of everyday existence. However, the Saint's knowledge of pre-Christian pantheism can only temporarily negotiate the quotidian concerns of *wille*. At first this might seem strange because as far as Synge was concerned tramps and tinkers were the masters of pre-Christian pantheism, as they had a consummate understanding of Nature as Idea. If we recall that Schopenhauer maintained that the efficacy of magical rituals – such as curing blindness – was predicated upon the ability to control *wille* then the Saint cannot control the Douls' *wille*. But this is not a mistake by Synge. The Saint's understanding of the Idea of Nature could never be as efficacious as that of the vagrants and itinerants of

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[345] *CW*, vol. 3: 149. Emphasis added.
[346] *CW*, vol. 3: 97.
[347] See, Seán Ó Súilleabháin, "Synge's Use of Irish Folklore," in *J.M. Synge Centenary Papers: 1971*, ed. Maurice Harmon (Dublin: Dolmen, 1972), 26; see, Ó hÓgáin, *The Hero in Irish Folk History*, 21-23; see, Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, "The Word, the Lore, and the Spirit: Folk Religion and the Supernatural in Modern Irish Literature," in *Irish Writers and Religion*, ed. Robert Welch (Colin Smythe: Gerrards Cross, 1992), 47.

Wicklow because the Saint was, in fact, a Protestant that had a deep sentiment for the residue of pre-Christian Ireland.

'The Saint is Really a Protestant!'[348]

After the premier of *The Well*, Willie Fay received an objectionable letter from Abbey actress Maire Garvey, who wrote to announce that Synge's latest play was guilty of debunking Catholic priests. Fay subsequently passed on Garvey's sentiments to the dramatist, who took exception to sentiment:

> Dear Mr. Fay,
>
> I have just come home from a long day in the country and found your letter waiting for me.
> [...]
>
> In your letter you quote your objector saying '*these things are not true*'. What put the smile into my head was a scene I saw not long ago in Galway when I saw a young man behaving most indecently to a girl on the road side while two priests sat near by on a seat looking out to sea and pretending not to see what was going on. [...] The way the two priests sat stolidly looking out to sea with this screaming row going on at their elbows tickled my fancy and seemed to me rather typical of many attitudes of the Irish church party...the man in question – in my play – may have been a tinker, stranger, sailor, cattle-drover – God knows what – types with which no priest would dream of interfering. Tell Miss G. – or whoever it may be – that I write of Irish country life I know to be true and I most emphatically will not change a syllable of it because A. B. or C. may think they know better than I do.[349]

Synge readily admits that 'although the priests are learned men, and great scholars, they don't understand the life of the people the same as another man would'.[350] Synge's task, then, was to understand the politics of the people, but in *The Well*, these politics are refracted through the kaleidoscope of his Ascendancy gaze. Six months before *The Well* opened at the Abbey, Synge was anticipating organised resistance under the guise of what he classified as 'a Neo-patriotic-Catholic clique'[351] and in anticipation of this resistance the dramatist made it his intention to disrupt Catholic bourgeois sentiment:

> MARY DOUL. Let the two of you not torment me at all. [*She goes out left, with her head in the air*].

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[348] *CW*, vol. 3: xxii.
[349] NLI MS: 13,617, ff.7r-7v. J.M. Synge to W.G. Fay, February 1905. Synge does not stipulate the date on which he wrote the letter, apart from 'Thursday night'. Certainly, during this month Synge was in Dublin. See, *CL*, vol. 1: xxiv. Emphasis in original.
[350] *CW*, vol. 2: 239.
[351] *CW*, vol. 3: xxii.

> MARTIN DOUL. [*stops work and looks after her*]. Well, isn't it a queer thing she can't keep herself two days without looking on my face?
>
> TIMMY. [*jeeringly*] Looking on your face is it? And she after going by with her head turned the way you'd see a priest going where there'd be a drunken man in the side ditch talking with a girl.

And so, 'on the spur of the moment', Synge told Miss Garvey 'that the said man in the side ditch was a Protestant and that if the priest had touched him he would have got six months with hard labour for common assault.'[352] Shocked and appalled by Synge's suggestion that a priest would turn a blind eye to a drunk Protestant in a ditch with a (presumably) Catholic girl, Garvey 'seemed to have thought that [Synge] was sneering at the priest for not doing his duty', to which the dramatist replied that the very idea had 'never entered [his] head'.[353] However, to return to Synge's letter to Willie Fay, Synge pointed out that 'the man in question' in the ditch was a type 'with which no priest would dream of interfering,'[354] the suggestion being that a Catholic priest would not meddle in a Protestant's affairs. Holloway was also offended by Synge's disrespect for the Catholic Church and he failed to stomach the passage 'about the priest and the pair in the ditch'[355] because it contained 'more than a slight touch of irreverence'[356] and that was without considering the fact that Synge used language 'as freely as a coal-lever or a Billingsgate-fishwife'.[357] Willie Fay was in a tailspin. 'I realised', Fay writes in his dairy, 'that every character in the play from the Saint to Timmy the Smith was bad tempered', and so he asked Synge if 'the Saint might be made into a good-natured easy going-man' but 'Synge would not budge. He said he wanted to write "like a monochrome painting, all in shades of the one colour". I argued that all drama depended on contrast and on tension. All in vain.'[358] And the man in the ditch wasn't the only Protestant in the play.

Synge had mooted the Saint's religious persuasion as early as 1896. Between February and April of that year, Synge found himself in Rome.[359] and while staying in Rome he quickly adapted a daily routine: Italian language lessons with Signor Conte Polloni and Italian literature lessons at the Collegio Romano in the morning, before afternoon excursions to the Vatican to admire the Pietà, the Sistine Chapel and, on one

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[352] *CW*, vol. 3: xxiv.
[353] *CW*, vol. 3: xxiv.
[354] *CW*, vol. 3: xxiv.
[355] Joseph Holloway, NLI MS: 1803, 11 January, 1905, f.23.
[356] Holloway, NLI MS: 1803, 11 January, 1905, f.23.
[357] Holloway, NLI MS: 1803, 11 January, 1905, f.23.
[358] W.G. Fay and Catherine Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre: An Autobiographical Record* (London: Rich and Cowan, 1935), 168.
[359] On 5 February, 1896, Synge arrived in Rome where he stayed until 30 April. While he found his feet he stayed at the Hotel Continental (5-7 February) and Hotel Pension Hayden (7-17 February). Cherrie Matheson put the dramatist in contact with Signor Count Polloni and Synge stayed at Polloni's house at 73 via Aureliana from 17 February until 30 April. See, *CL*, vol. 1: xxi.

occasion, the Pope.[360] The week before Synge quit Rome for Paris, his diary reads thus: 'Vaticano Statute & Sistina. Protestant comedy';[361] even at the spiritual home of the Catholic Church he was thinking of how to write a Protestant comedy and even though the diary entry is laconic and the Protestantism of the Saint is not directly alluded to in the play, Protestantism as subtext is mobilised because, as the dramatist admitted to his friend and walking companion, Padraic Colum: 'the Saint is really a Protestant!'[362] This is why Timmy informs the Greenane parishioners that 'there's a holy man below';[363] according to the Protestant religion, saints are considered to be holy men and/or women; it is only in the Catholic Church that that they are revered through canonisation. David Miller's analysis of Irish holy wells concludes that wells only remained with the Catholic habitus because 'they functioned as a kind of predictive magic'.[364] And so, if the Saint in Synge's play is a Protestant then he is also a Protestant that is able to command pre-Christian cultural residue. The Saint, then, is analogous to those esoteric members of the Ascendancy that looked towards the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland in order to manipulate what R.F. Foster considers to be a 'Protestant magic'[365] that belied class insecurity.

In Arnold's work Synge would have read how Irish Protestantism was suited towards magical belief because the 'Celtic element catches them, and turns their religion all towards piety and unction.'[366] Arnold continued: 'Protestantism has the appearance of an intellectual system' but 'the inside reality of an emotional system: this gives it its tenacity and force, for what is held with the ardent attachment of feeling is believed to have at the same time the scientific proof of reason'.[367] By this discursive logic, the magus figures of Irish Protestantism had appropriated the 'fairy-like loveliness of Celtic nature'[368] but, at the same time, their religion was tempered by scientific rationality. This is why D.P. Moran criticised the Ascendancy individual as being prone to think that 'Catholics are superstitious and he believes in spooks himself; he thinks they are priest-ridden and he would like to go back to Paganism'.[369] This isn't far from the truth. Yeats criticised Catholic pedantry because it was conducive towards a 'dread of leaving the mind alone among impressions

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[360] Synge writes this on 3 March, 1896 (TCD MS: 4417, f.11r).
[361] Synge writes this on 25 April, 1896 (TCD MS: 4417, f.18v).
[362] *CL,* vol. 1: 94. J.M. Synge to Lady Gregory, 31 September, 1904. In this letter to Gregory, Synge also points out that 'Miss Laird has been frozen out because she is a Protestant' (*CL,* vol. 1: 94). Miss Helen S. Laird (Honor Lavelle) was an original member of the Irish National Theatre Society and she played Maurya in the premiere of *Riders to the Sea.*
[363] *CW,* vol. 3: 80.
[364] David W. Miller, "Mass Attendance in 1834," in *Piety and Power in Ireland, 1760-1960: Essays in Honour of Emmet Larkin*, ed. Stewart J. Brown and David W. Miller (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 177.
[365] For more on this see, R.F. Foster, *Paddy & Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Penguin, 1995), 212-32.
[366] Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, 104.
[367] Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, 104-105.
[368] Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, 133.
[369] D.P. Moran, "Protestants and The Irish Nation," *Leader*, 27 July, 1901, 342.

where all seems heretical'.[370] It was because the Catholic Church denied the existence of Popular Catholicism while tacitly incorporating it, that Yeats was wont to describe 'that slackness and vagueness which is today Catholic'.[371] Synge was of the same persuasion and his understanding of a pre-Christian pantheism that was manifested as a divinity of Nature conducive towards creativity, vitality and the abundance of autonomy, was only mobilised in *The Well* in order to give assurance to his own class, which is perhaps why the *Freeman's Journal* took particular exception to Synge's dramatisation of Catholicism as 'a decayed mythology, useful for incantation or imprecation, but having no further concern with soul or body';[372] the newspaper opined that Synge's 'presentation of the peasant religion, lacking in reverence and expressed in a jargon of profane familiarity, is an artistic blunder and a constant offence.'[373] In conclusion, the *Freeman's Journal* argued that '[b]ehind this representation of popular religion is the subtle irony of the latter-day French school', which Synge used to satirise a doctrine 'that has ceased to be paternal'.[374] But this is precisely what pre-Christian pantheism advocates; after reading Spinoza and Schopenhauer, the dramatist understood that Nature is god and that the contemplation of it could alleviate *wille*. While this is certainly the case in *The Shadow* and *The Tinker's*, in *The Well*, Synge seems to suggest that the Protestant Saint's ability to negotiate Popular Catholicism's reliance on pre-Christian pantheism is not as efficacious as the ability of tramps or tinkers but still, the dramatisation of pre-Christian pantheism could be used to critique Catholic progressive historicism, as his notes from de Julleville testify: 'theatre [can be] used by [a] protestant to attack the Pope'.[375] Mrs. Synge could take some comfort in Synge's dramatisation of a Protestant Saint and as she remarked to her family, if holy water could be upset from the Saint's hands, then her son's 'associations with Nationalists had at least not brought him under the thumb of Rome.'[376]

Synge's dramatisation of the Saint as a Protestant is significant because it marks Synge's first defence of Protestantism, the very foundation of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy habitus. The *Dublin Evening Herald* could see that while 'Mr. Synge's play' could not be considered 'from any national standpoint' it was certainly 'an example of the modern drama'.[377] But this didn't wash with Holloway, who desperately wanted to return to *caoineadh* (keening) or, even better, remove Synge from the Abbey Theatre: 'Though depressing, Synge's Isle of Aran incident "Riders to the Sea" was alright in tone, why not

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[370] W.B. Yeats, *Memoirs* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 195.
[371] Yeats, *Memoirs*, 195.
[372] "Irish National Theatre," *Freeman's Journal*, 6 February, 1905, 5.
[373] "Irish National Theatre," 5.
[374] "Irish National Theatre," 5.
[375] TCD MS: 4393, f.5r.
[376] Mrs. K. Synge, quoted in *J.M. Synge: 1871-1909*, ed. David H. Greene and Edward M. Stephens (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 180.
[377] F.M'C, "Irish National Theatre," *Dublin Evening Herald*, 6 February, 1905, 3.

follow up its success by *other* influential works?'[378] But, by now, Synge's attitude towards the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland was beginning to change and in *The Playboy* he would dramatise a culture of subalternity in order to sublimate his own class insecurity. '*The Play-Boy*', writes W.P. Ryan in his critique of progressive Catholicism, may have 'been written by a rather moderant [sic] genius', but he would have had to write the play after he had 'took drink enough to bring him at once a relief from his suffering and a certain psychic intoxication.'[379] But if this were the case, then Synge's suffering was just as great as that of the Irish populace, who were subjugated by the priests into what Kenny understood to be a 'decaying life'.[380] It is little wonder, then, that during the disturbances that greeted *The Playboy of the Western World* one spectator hurled his own performance analysis at the character of Shawn Keogh: 'What a priest-ridden fellow you are.'[381]

[378] Joseph Holloway, NLI MS: 1803, 11 January, 1905, f.22. Emphasis added.
[379] Ryan, *The Pope's Green Island*, 306.
[380] Patrick Kenny, *Economics for Irishmen* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1907), 156.
[381] "The Playboy of the West," *Irish Times*, 2 February, 1907, 13.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CHANGELING OF THE WESTERN WORLD

> 'Very well then,' he said to me bitterly one night, 'the next play I write I will make sure I will annoy them.' And he did. And soon as I cast eyes over the script of *The Playboy of the Western World* I knew we were in for serious trouble.
>
> - W.G. Fay[1]

The Well of the Saints (1905) left Willie Fay, the Abbey's resident producer, with an acute headache. In the wake of the hostile reception to *The Well of the Saints* one of the Abbey Theatre's finest actors, Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, decided to leave the company, citing irreconcilable differences over the direction that the company was taking. Shortly after the opening of *The Well of the Saints* the company decided to turn professional, with a directorate of W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge. Nic Shiubhlaigh pointed out that she had 'no desire to act professionally or otherwise, with any theatrical project unlike the one I helped to launch in 1902.'[2] The actor felt that Synge's plays were rubbing Irish nationalism in the mud and, privately, she admitted that she had grave concern over 'the national ideals of the movement [because they] were in danger of being shelved'.[3] In truth, Nic Shiubhlaigh was right. Whether the Abbey liked it or not, the company had made a Faustian pact with Irish nationalism by virtue of branding itself as the Irish National Theatre Society and, whether Synge liked it or not, his plays certainly debunked Catholic, bourgeois nationalism. Nic Shiubhlaigh's curtain call gave the cue for the exodus of other influential Abbey figureheads including Æ (George Russell) and to add insult to injury, Fay was left with an account book in disarray; *The Well of the Saints* was a commercial failure.[4]

Fay was used to offering his counsel to the more rebellious members of the company, who refused to obey what he classified as the 'approved rules of the theatrical

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[1] W.G. Fay and Catherine Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre: An Autobiographical Record* (London: Rich and Cowan, 1935), 211-12.

[2] Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years: Recollections of Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, as told to Edward Kenny* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1955), 73. For a full account of why Nic Shiubhlaigh decided to leave the company see, Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years*, 71-74. Also see, Adrian Frazier, *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman and The Struggle for the Abbey Theatre* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1990), 121-28.

[3] Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years*, 71.

[4] Fay concluded that: '[t]he great majority, thinking of religion and themselves, abominated the play on both counts. It had bad press and we lost money and audience over it'. See, Fay and Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre*, 169. Similarly, George Roberts remembered that '[t]he play was not at all popular on its first performance. At that time we were not accustomed to very large audiences, but there was an exceptionally small audience for the first performance of "The Well of the Saints." The second and third performances were even worse. I remember counting the people in the house on one of these nights and there were less than 20 present'. See, George Roberts, "Memoirs of George Roberts," *Irish Times*, 2 August, 1955, 5.

game'.[5] The rebel Synge would not play by the rules. According to Fay, Synge deeply resented 'the crass ignorance, the fatuity, the malevolence with which *The Well of the Saints* had been received'.[6] Synge's next play, *The Playboy of the Western World (*1907), was the dramatist's manifestation of what Fay considered to be Synge's 'anger in *excelsis*.'[7] When *The Playboy of the Western World* (hereafter referred to as *The Playboy*) was first performed the audience expected 'to see on the stage noble Irish chiefs wearing grand cloaks, lined inside with red silk and embroidered on the outside with beautiful harps of green satin, slaying Ireland's enemies by the score and delivering orations in Latin and Greek'.[8] Instead, they watched in amazement as an insular community in the west of Ireland – the symbolic repository of cultural nationalism – nonchalantly accepted a "murderer" into their midst. Such explicit debunking of Irish culture prompted so-called riots. However, what greeted the premiere of *The Playboy* were organised disturbances that, at the very best, incited the unorganised spectator to participate in a disturbance; Declan Kiberd is apposite when he points out that 'those who disrupted the performance were no random collection of hotheads, but some of the most sensitive and intelligent thinkers of the time'.[9] Turning to the newspapers that documented *The Playboy*'s opening week, journalists constantly and consistently referred to the 'renewed disturbances last night at the Abbey Theatre during the performance of Mr. Synge's comedy'[10] as the auditorium was filled with the singing of rebel songs such as "The West's Asleep".[11] And even though the disturbances entailed considerable venom,[12] the closest *The Playboy* came to inciting a riot was a brief episode of sectarian violence as 'some blows were interchanged' between Republicans and Unionists. But that singular punch-up happened in the theatre on one particular evening (29 January) and the police were said to have 'prevented [Republican and Unionist] from coming into collision'; it was only on Westmoreland Street that 'two members of the rival parties got into fisticuffs, and one student was arrested'.[13] Accordingly, the analysis presented in this dissertation will refer to *The Playboy* riots as *The Playboy* disturbances.

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[5] Fay and Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre*, 212.
[6] Fay and Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre*, 211.
[7] Fay and Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre*, 213. Emphasis in original. Also see, Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years*, 81.
[8] James P. Conway, *For and Against the Irish Players: From a Public Debate by Irishmen Before Irishmen and Irish Women* (New York, 1911), 4. Conway's article appears in a pamphlet and does not indicate a publishing house. This material was accessed in NYPL: Berg Coll MSS Synge.
[9] Declan Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1993), xvi.
[10] "The Playboy of the West," *Irish Times*, 2 February, 1907, 13.
[11] "Police In," *Irish Independent*, 29 January, 1907, 5.
[12] Joseph Holloway summarised popular opinion when he wrote that *The Playboy* was 'not a truthful or just picture of the Irish peasants but [...] the outpouring of a morbid, unhealthy mind, ever seeking on the dungheep of life for the nastiness that lies concealed there'. See, Joseph Holloway, NLI MS: 1801, 9 October, 1903, f.561.
[13] "The Playboy of the West," *Irish Times*, 2 February, 1907, 13.

Yeats maintained that it was people with 'no books in their houses'[14] that had instigated the Playboy disturbances and while this might be true, we would do well to remind ourselves that *The Playboy* was performed under the auspices of a literary theatre.[15] It is plausible to conjecture that those that rioted were familiar with literature, hence their decision to attend a performance by a literary theatre. However, if we are to believe Yeats, those that rioted were unfamiliar with literature, which means that something other than the misreading of literature caused the disturbances. Scholars are in general agreement that this "something else" was Synge's (mis)representation of the Irish populace under the auspices of Catholic bourgeois nationalism and salacious profanity is invariably invoked to substantiate the argument. But like so many things with Synge, there are often deeper and darker motives at work. This chapter proposes an alternative reading of the disturbances that invites the contemporaneity of sex and violence to substantiate Synge's dramatisation of changeling belief in Irish folk culture and its manifestation in the "Clonmel horror" of 1895. Sex and violence are structurally integral to both the Clonmel horror and the dramaturgical content of *The Playboy*. It is necessary, then, to consider how Synge understood these dramaturgies to be concomitant with changeling belief.

'Savage Paganism'[16]

As a postgraduate student in Paris, Synge attended Anatole le Braz's lectures about the similarities between life in Breton and Ireland. Le Braz taught Synge about the three 'defining features of primitive Irish life': 'savage violence' 'savage sexuality' and 'savage paganism'.[17] It is without coincidence that *The Playboy* was predicated on these features. According to Sinéad Garrigan Mattar, for le Braz the first feature was 'savage violence'.[18] Synge found this in the case of a 'Connaught man' named Ó'Máille who 'killed his father with the blow of a spade when he was in passion' and then fled to the Aran Islands (Inis Meáin) where the 'impulse to protect the criminal is universal'.[19] Ó'Máille, the son of a petit-bourgeois Mayo farmer, managed to escape to America before returning to Galway, accounts for Christy Mahon's attempted parricide. The second defining feature is 'savage sexuality'[20] and Synge found this in the case of James Lynchehaun, a Mayo man who

[14] "Abbey Theatre Scene," *Evening Telegraph*, 29 January, 1907, 4.
[15] The precursor to the Abbey Theatre was the Irish Literary Theatre that Yeats founded with Lady Gregory, George Moore and Edward Martyn. It was founded in 1899 and it transformed into the Abbey Theatre in 1904.
[16] Sinéad Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 173.
[17] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173. Garrigan Mattar extrapolates these three defining features from several of le Braz's works, with which Synge was familiar. However, these defining features are given significant treatment in Anatole le Braz, *Le Théatre Celtique* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1905).
[18] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.
[19] *CW*, vol. 2: 95.
[20] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.

assaulted his employer, Mrs. MacDonnell, by biting – as Susan Brady points out in *The Playboy* – her 'nostril on the northern shore'.[21] By all accounts Lynchehaun was a mercurial and attractive man with shrewd verbal ability. Even when he beat Mrs. MacDonnell within an inch of her life, she referred to him as 'a fine, young, strong, dark, animal-looking man'.[22] This accounts for Christy's ability to seduce Pegeen and woo the Mayo girls. The third defining feature of primitive Irish life was 'savage paganism'[23] and the savage paganism that was manifested in the Clonmel horror of 1895 would provide the dramatist with more than enough dramaturgical content.

Looked at from an alternative perspective, it is reasonable to postulate that *The Playboy* had been permeating Synge's thoughts since 1895 when the Clonmel horror became an overnight tabloid sensation. In March of that year, Bridget Cleary, a successful twenty-six year-old dressmaker from a townland just outside Clonmel in South Tipperary was ritually immolated because she was feared to be a fairy changeling. The folklore of changelings advocates that the fairies would often steal women, small children and, on rare occasions, even men, and leave a fairy changeling in place of the human.[24] On 23 March 1895, newspapers of all political persuasions began to report Bridget's mysterious death; the graphic turn of events were clearly accounted for by Katie Burke (née Kennedy), Bridget's eleven-year-old second cousin and 'an eye-witness of nearly everything'.[25] Burke took the stand at the Clonmel Magistrates' Court on 27 March and the correspondent for the *Irish Times* that attended the trial published Burke's story the following morning. It transpires that on approximately 6 March Bridget fell chronically ill with bronchitis and when the local doctor (Dr. Crean) and the parish priest (Father Ryan) could not attenuate her affliction, the community turned to the local herb doctor, Dennis Ganey, who diagnosed Bridget as a fairy changeling. Bridget was immediately subjected to what the *Times* classified as 'savage orgies',[26] which included pouring a cocktail of freshly passed urine and hen's excrement over Bridget's body. Abjection such as this continued until the morning of 14 March when, from outside the house, Katie heard members of her family and the local community holding Bridget down as they attempted to give her medicine, while Michael Cleary (Bridget's husband and a cooper by trade) 'asked his wife to answer her name, in the name of God. She answered her name in the name of God [...] She had only her nightdress

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[21] *CW,* vol. 4: 97.
[22] Mrs. MacDonnell, quoted in James Carney, *The Playboy and The Yellow Lady* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1986), 5.
[23] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.
[24] For more on this subject see, Maria Leach and Jerome Fried, "Changeling," in *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, ed. Maria Leach and Jerome Fried (London: New English Library, 1972), 208-209.
[25] "The Burning of the Woman Cleary," *Irish Times*, 28 March, 1895, 5. For an objective and expedited account of how Bridget was burnt alive see, "The "Witch-Burning" at Clonmel," *Folklore* 6, no. 4 (1895): 373-84.
[26] "Ireland," *Times*, 26 March, 1895, 8.

on. She was put on her back on the fire. She screamed.'[27] The situation died down until the evening:

> Bridget Cleary was dressed and she got up. Witness's mother got tea ready. Then Bridget Cleary sat down by her husband's side, and the latter wanted her to take three bits of bread before she would take any of the tea. She eat [sic] two bits. Her husband said that if she did not eat the third bit down she would go. He knocked her down when she would not eat it and he put his hand on her mouth, and she would not eat it. Then he got a red stump and told her he would put it down in her mouth if she would not eat it. She did not eat it. Then he caught her and laid her on the fire. Then she took fire. He got lamp oil and put it on her – (sensation) – and she blazed up.[28]

As Angela Bourke suggests, 'the last resort is to threaten a changeling with fire. This is said to banish it for good, and so force the return of the abducted human'.[29] Michael Cleary made all those present – including Katie – watch Bridget thrash with unimaginable pain on the floor; such was the extremity of her writhing that she broke both of her legs. In the stillness of the night, Michael Cleary and Patrick Kennedy (Bridget's first cousin) wrapped Bridget in an old sheet and walked 'about a quarter of a mile uphill from the house'[30] whereupon 'the corpse [was] stuffed into a hole in a dyke'.[31] The two men returned to the house at five o'clock in the morning. The Royal Irish Constabulary found the shallow grave on 22 March as newspapers reflected on how 'the character of an enlightened Christian community [was] maligned'[32] by what the *Cork Examiner* could only conclude to be Ireland's 'prevailing moral darkness'.[33]

Although Synge never commented directly on the death of Bridget Cleary, he would surely have known about it. When the Clonmel horror made headline news Synge may have been in Paris since 1 January, but when he returned to Dublin on 28 June the Clonmel horror would only have been three months passed. People in all walks of life were still talking about it; the extent to which the Clonmel horror permeated discourses of popular culture can hardly be overstated. By way of example, to suggest how probing the Clonmel horror was on *fin-de-siècle* Ireland, it is worth briefly pointing out that it even managed to orbit the trial of Oscar Wilde in London, where Wilde was being convicted of sodomy; on 13 April *United Ireland* ran articles on the Clonmel horror and Wilde's case

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[27] "The Burning of the Woman Cleary," 5.
[28] "The Burning of the Woman Cleary," 5. It should be pointed out that the reference to 'sensation' in this quote is in reference to those present in the Clonmel Magistrates' Court; the *Irish Times* published a verbatim account of Burke's testimony that was made on 27 March.
[29] Angela Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary: A True Story* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 30.
[30] Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 112.
[31] "Tipperary Horror," *Cork Examiner*, 29 March, 1895, 5.
[32] "Tipperary Horror," *Cork Examiner*, 5.
[33] "Tipperary Horror," 5.

side by side.[34] Writing in *The Nineteenth Century*, Wilde's friend (and closet homosexual) E.F. Benson, published an article concerning the Clonmel horror that reads, according to Angela Bourke, like 'a masked or coded commentary on Wilde's fate'.[35] Following the trial, homosexuality began to be denoted (in print) by the appellation "fairy", for while fairies were allowed to exist within the imagination, if they were identified within everyday existence they were promptly removed. The Clonmel horror, then, irrevocably changed the way Victorian Great Britain and Ireland perceived the fairies. At every turn Synge would have read or heard about the Clonmel horror; his newspaper of choice, the *Irish Times*, reported on the case almost daily over a three-week period: 26 March-13 April 1895. Indeed, when the Clonmel horror hit the headlines, both Lynchehaun and Michael Cleary were awaiting a trial ten days apart from each other and both men were being represented by the same counsel. Both were to be incarcerated into Dublin's Mountjoy Prison before being transferred to Maryborough Prison where the two men may have worked alongside each other.[36] The *Dublin Evening Mail* reminded its readers that those who had watched Bridget Cleary die were akin to those who hid the Lynchehaun in Achill, County Mayo, and although there weren't 'many Lynchehauns or witch-burners in Ireland' it was also true that 'sympathizers with [these] crimes [were] very numerous in Ireland'.[37]

Bourke has pointed out that in Ireland 'unofficial traditions about a fairy supernatural [...] [persisted] well into the twentieth century',[38] and in the wake of the Clonmel horror, Ireland was brought back to the pre-Christian future as it was generally agreed that 'this appalling episode proves that fairies are not everywhere discredited, that here and there in this storied island, with its large mass of heathen lore, a few people settled in some remote, wild region [...] blindly cling to old traditions'.[39] If Synge's drama privileges pre-Christian cultural residue then the Clonmel horror provided the dramatist with the perfect dramaturgical material to foreground le Braz's third defining feature of primitive Irish life. The 'savage paganism'[40] of the Clonmel horror curiously resonates with le Braz's other defining features of primitive Irish life: savage sexuality and violence. Synge needed to caution himself against his anger in excelsis, which had reached boiling point in the wake of *The Well of The Saints* because he knew that even twelve years after the Clonmel horror, the 'savage paganism'[41] would still be familiar to his Catholic bourgeois audience. With le Braz's postulates of primitive Irish life firmly in his mind, the dramatist

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[34] See, "The Tipperary Wife Burning," *United Ireland,* 13 April, 1895, 3. See, "The Oscar Wilde Scandal," *United Ireland*, 13 April, 1895, 3.
[35] Angela Bourke, "Hunting Out the Fairies: E.F. Benson, Oscar Wilde and the Burning of Bridget Cleary," in *Wilde the Irishman*, ed. Jerusha McCormack (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 43.
[36] Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 199.
[37] "The Tipperary Horror," *Dublin Evening Mail*, 27 March, 1895, 2.
[38] Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 10.
[39] "The Tipperary Horror," *Cork Examiner*, 28 March, 1895, 2.
[40] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.
[41] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.

turned his attention to 'a queer lot' of 'Christian sinners'[42] in Mayo, where, according to Synge, the 'fairies are more numerous [...] than in any other county'.[43]

Synge maintained that it did 'not matter a rap' what critics thought he based *The Playboy* upon, insisting: 'I wrote the play because it pleased me, and it just happens that I know Irish life best, so I made my methods Irish.'[44] As *The Playboy* was in rehearsal, Synge 'sat silent, holding his stick between his knees, his chin resting on his hands' and when Oliver St. John Gogarty questioned whether the play was just 'a satire to show up, for one thing, how lifeless and inert was the country',[45] the dramatist suddenly snapped: 'he gave [Gogarty] a short glance and looked straight in front of himself, weighing [Gogarty] up and thinking how hard it would be to get the public to appreciate his play as a work of art, when one who should know better was reading analogies and satire into it already. He shook [Gogarty's] question off with a shake of his head.'[46] However, if *The Playboy*'s dramaturgy did not hold its origin in real-world events, then not only would this have been the first of Synge's plays to not draw upon such a provenance, it would also contradict his own private discourse with Stephen MacKenna, in which he acknowledged his debt to the cases of Ó'Máille and Lynchehaun in order to 'controvert critics who said it was *impossible*'.[47] Synge began work in earnest on *The Playboy* in 1904 and in that year the changeling motif made a guest appearance in *Riders to the Sea* (1904), when Maurya divines 'the fearfullest thing' as her son, Bartley, is taken away by 'the grey pony, and there was Michael upon it – with fine clothes on him, and new shoes on his feet'.[48] As Chapter One suggests, changeling belief is written into the dramaturgy of *Riders to the Sea* but it is subdued in comparison to *The Playboy* because in *Riders to the Sea* the dramatist did not concern himself with the pre-Christian magical rituals that were concomitant with the residual belief in changelings. Detectable underneath the layers of carnivalesque debauchery is Synge's capitalisation on an acute cultural anxiety in fairy changelings, which was named but unknowable to Irish Catholicism. *The Playboy*, then, was going to deal with the savage sexuality, violence and paganism that were concomitant with the Clonmel horror so that Synge could seek revenge on those bourgeois members of Catholic Ireland that had protested at his previous works.

Changeling belief is necessarily dependent on Irish folklore, a cultural discourse that Yeats held in a higher regard than any religious doxology: 'Folk-lore is at once the

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[42] *CW,* vol. 4: 59, 56.
[43] *CW,* vol. 2: 80.
[44] J.M. Synge, quoted in A.F., "I Don't Care a Rap," *Dublin Evening Mail*, 29 January, 1907, 2.
[45] Oliver St. John Gogarty, *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street: A Phantasy in Fact* (London: Rich and Cowan, 1937), 282.
[46] Gogarty, *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street*, 282.
[47] *CL,* vol. 1: 333. J.M. Synge to Stephen MacKenna, 17 April, 1907. Emphasis in original. In an earlier draft of *The Playboy*, Synge directly references the Lynchehaun case (*CW,* vol. 4: 311) case and in an interview with *Freeman's Journal* he explicitly refers to the case. See, "Abbey Theatre Scenes," *Freeman's Journal*, 30 January, 1907, 8.
[48] *CW,* vol. 3: 19.

Bible, the Thirty-nine Articles, and the Book of Common Prayer'.[49] Like Yeats, Synge also had a keen interest in folklore, maintaining that it required a 'frank imagination'.[50] When Yeats met his 'new man [a] TCD graduate' he wrote to Lady Gregory that he had 'started [Synge] in folklore'.[51] This may have been the case but unlike Yeats's, Synge's analysis of it was entrenched within the discourse of comparative social science. Comparative social science advocated that human beliefs were a palimpsest that relegated magical and religious belief under the critique of science and even Yeats's father wanted his son to see the efficacy of comparative social science: 'My dear Willie – Again I am writing [...] Religion once was – the Queen of Sciences'.[52] It would be incorrect to say that Yeats was not interested in comparative social science – he certainly was – but he would misapply the critique; as Garrigan Mattar points out, '[i]t could never be argued that Yeats was a student of comparativism in the way Synge was'.[53] Le Braz had taught Synge that Irish folklore was symptomatic of '*des situations fortes* (strong situations)' because such situations were redolent of '*une action pleine de mouvement et de vie* (the full of the material of life)'.[54] Synge was aware that changeling folklore, as characterised in changeling belief, was ripe with dramaturgical potential, which is why Synge valorises 'the dramatic emphasis of the folk-tale'.[55] Gregory Castle has argued that Synge 'went beyond [the] practice of faithfully retelling stories and legends to challenge the anthropological authority behind the retellings'.[56] This is true because Synge's dramatisation of changeling belief is at once challengingly imaginative and scientific. In an unpublished essay entitled "On Literary and Popular Poetry" the dramatist advocated that 'the intellect [of] cultivated people in Ireland are beginning to take in the legends' and that the 'folk songs of this country is [...] not the task of any isolated professor'.[57] Synge encouraged the introduction of a popular analysis of folklore within Irish popular culture because it would afford the opportunity for the nation 'to realize that the song and story of primitive men were full of human and artistic suggestion'.[58] In the essay, Synge goes on to suggest that literature predicated upon folk culture will have an inherent 'brusqueness of attack' because other arts are simply 'losing themselves in mere technical experiments while the peasant music and poetry were full of

[49] W.B. Yeats, *Uncollected Prose,* vol. 1, ed. John P. Frayne (London: Macmillan, 1970), 284.
[50] *CW,* vol. 2: 5.
[51] W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, vol. 2, *1896-1900*, ed. Warwick Gould, John Kelly and Deirdre Toomey (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 250. Synge met Yeats on 21 December, 1896 as his diary records: '[*f*]*ait la conassaince de W.B. Yeates* [Made meeting with W.B. Yeats]' (TCD MS: 4417, f.42r). W.B. Yeats to William Sharp, 4 July, 1898.
[52] J.B. Yeats, *Letters To His Son: W.B. Yeats and Others*, 1869-1922, ed. Joseph Hone (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), 169. J.B Yeats to W.B. Yeats, 25 December, 1913.
[53] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 53.
[54] Anatole le Braz, *Essai Sur L'Histoire du Théatre Celtique* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy,1904), 46-47.
[55] *CW,* vol. 2: 107.
[56] Gregory Castle, *Modernism and The Celtic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 137.
[57] TCD MS: 4382, f.51v.
[58] TCD MS: 4382, f.51v.

exquisitely delicate emotions'.[59] This brusqueness of attack is rephrased in Synge's preface to his poetry where he argues that 'before verse can be human again it must learn to be brutal'.[60] In *The Playboy* Synge's verse is certainly brutal, and the dramatist maintained that he 'used one or two words only, that I have not heard among the country people of Ireland'.[61] But while Synge may have promoted a popular analysis of folklore and folk culture, his own analysis was methodical and his investigation into the brutality of folk vocabulary and custom was scientific.

Ever since the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859), comparative anthropologists had been quick to trace a Darwinian genealogy from savage belief to peasant custom and at the turn of the century, folklore, that essential rubric of the Revival, was under close Darwinian scrutiny. When it came to folklore there were, Yeats said, 'two boats going to sea'; there was 'the little boat of science' which would ultimately be 'shipwrecked', or alternatively there was the 'great galleon of tradition, and on board [there are] the great poets and dreamers of the past.'[62] To Yeats's chagrin, it appeared that Synge had boarded the wrong boat and in January 1907 *The Playboy* broadsided the golden galleon with a certain brusqueness of attack by dramatising a scientific account of changeling belief. It can only be reductive to suggest that the Clonmel horror introduced Synge to changeling belief because he must have been aware beforehand of its currency in Irish cultural discourse. Nevertheless, of all the books that Synge recorded in his diary as having read up until the time of the Clonmel horror, none of them discuss changeling belief; the closest Synge would have come to encountering changeling belief in terms of critical and cultural scholarship is in books such as George Petrie's *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland*[63] and William Wakeman's *Handbook of Irish Antiquities*[64] but these books are solely concerned with the antiquarian study of megalithic monuments and early Christian architecture, not with residual pre-Christian sensibilities. It wasn't until September 1898 that Synge would have read scholarship on changeling belief in James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*[65] and Alfred Nutt's "An Essay upon the Irish Vision of the Happy Otherworld and the Celtic Doctrine of Re-birth," which accompanied *The Voyage of Bran*.[66] Synge's decision to read Frazer and Nutt must have been informed by his first visit to Aran, during which he encountered people that actually applied changeling belief to rationalise their immediate reality. Comparative social

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[59] TCD MS: 4382, f.51v.
[60] *CW,* vol. 1: xxxvi.
[61] *CW,* vol. 2: 53.
[62] W.B. Yeats, *Letters to the New Island*, ed. Horace Reynolds (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1934), 204.
[63] Synge read this on 15 April, 1892. TCD MS: 4413, 17r.
[64] Synge read this on 18 March, 1892. TCD MS: 4413, 3r.
[65] Synge read this on 12 September, 1898. TCD: MS 4419, f.94r.
[66] Synge first read this on 21 September, 1898. TCD MS: 4419, f.98v.

scientists concurred that changeling belief was a narrative structure and on Aran Synge would have understood that the insensible was made comprehensible by the efficacy of a narrative:

> My intercourse with these people has made me realise that miracles must abound wherever the new conception of law is not understood. On these islands alone miracles enough happen every year to equip a divine emissary. Rye is turned to oats, storms are raised to keep evictors from the shore, cows that are isolated on lonely rocks bring forth calves, and other things of the same kind are common.[67]

Within Synge's dramatic treatment of changeling belief we can detect his notes on comparative anthropology, comparative sociology and Celtology. What was particularly alarming to comparative anthropologists and Celtologists alike, was their unanimous conclusion that changeling belief was far from passive but an in ideological persuasion that reflected material conditions. As Nutt pointed out, in relation to the Clonmel horror, 'whilst the husband wanted to get quit of his wife, her father and cousins believed, more or less strongly, that it was a fairy substitute they were torturing'.[68] Changeling belief as a narrative structure had an immediate impact that deeply resonated with Synge; years later, when engaged to Molly Allgood, his term of endearment for the young actor was "changeling". Molly had a tendency to flirt with the Abbey actor Dossy (Udolphus) Wright, and Synge, always prone to fits of envy, was unsurprisingly jealous. At times he seems to be able to trust Molly's relationship with Dossy: 'I am *glad* Dossy is there to look after you. Nish! Never say I am jealous again.'[69] But at other times he is utterly ashamed of Molly's behaviour:

> Glendalough House
> Glenageary
> Kingstown
> Friday night
>
> My dear little changeling,
>
> I am writing this to you in my bed at one o'clock as I am not able to sleep [...] It seems to be a different occasion of walking with Dossy Wright that I heard of – some time when he had B.O.D. [Brigit O'Dempsey, another Abbey actress] on one arm and you on the other – so I was more hurt than ever. [...] [Y]ou have been doing all the little things you know I cannot bear as soon as ever you get away out of my sight. Don't you want me to

[67] *CW,* vol. 2: 128.
[68] Alfred Nutt, "An Essay upon the Irish Vision of the Happy Otherworld and the Celtic Doctrine of Re-birth," in *The Voyage of Bran, Son of Febal, To The Land of The Living: An Old Irish Saga*, vol. 2, trans. and ed. Kuno Meyer (London: David Nutt, 1897), 232n.
[69] J.M. Synge, *Letters to Molly: John Millington Synge to Maire O'Neill, 1906-1909*, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 1971), 225. J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood, 4 December, 1907. Emphasis in original.

> have full trust in you, changeling? Don't you know that a suspicious love is more degrading than ennobling? [A]nd yet everytime that I am beginning to trust you fully – I always trust you in one sense – you do some foolish thing that upsets everything again.
>
> [...]
>
> The cocks are crowing themselves hoarse under my window so I'd best ring down the curtain and have a sleep[.]
>
> Believe me
> my worthy changeling
> Yours fervently
> J.M.S.[70]

Synge uses "changeling" as his chosen term of endearment because Molly encapsulated everything that the changeling stood for within the Irish popular consciousness of Synge's time: a mysterious and capricious figure that was not everything that it seemed. Just like a fairy changeling, Molly had the potential to encompass what Synge sought in a partner in one instant and then, without warning, her demeanour would change and she would become another person, if only fleetingly. The term, "changeling", then, was mobilised in *fin-de-siècle* Great Britain and Ireland in order to characterise those with a mercurial disposition and Irish folk culture accounted for this irrational change in temperament by blaming the fairies.

The alteration of reality that changeling belief precipitates says as much about those who apply its precepts as about those who are accused of being changelings. Those who are forced to apply the precepts of changeling belief are just as mentally unsure and insecure as those who are considered to be changelings. For changeling belief isn't really indexical of the fairies at all, but rather, it is indexical of the fragility of the human psyche. Years before Synge met Molly he identified a changeling in his nephew and later co-benefactor of his literary estate, Edward Hutchinson Synge. Edward had a vexed and troubled psyche that eventually led to his temporary confinement in Bloomfield Mental Hospital, County Dublin, in 1936, before he went on to achieve an illustrious career as a physicist in Trinity College Dublin. He would later recall that when was ill in the spring of 1897 (two years after the Clonmel horror), Synge 'held very odd and altogether ridiculous views upon me, believing me to be a changeling whom the happenings of his own life had somehow or other brought into existence [...] a sort of double being'.[71] On one level Synge considered changeling belief to be a narrative structure that he could apply in order to find sense within the nonsense and therefore gain a degree of psychological appeasement. But on a different

[70] Synge, *Letters to Molly*, 6. J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood, 20 July, 1906.
[71] Edward Hutchinson Synge, quoted in W.J. McCormack, *Fool of the Family: A Life of J.M. Synge* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000), 128.

level, Synge considered the changeling to be alternative to the self, and as Bourke points out changelings were often described as 'alternative selves'[72] by those that identified them.

Changeling belief was particularly embarrassing to the enlightened rationality of Catholic bourgeois rectitude because it was indexical of a consciousness that was irregular and insecure. When this mental imbalance was coupled with those creatures that characterised the pre-modern – the fairies – then changeling belief was promptly explained as being symptomatic of a consciousness that was still in the throes of evolution. But to Synge this mattered not, and within his subtle dramatisation of changeling belief it is possible to detect the socialist sentiment of a dramatist that was particularly recalcitrant to Catholic cultural imperialism. Ostensibly, not one member of the Catholic middle classes expected to be confronted by changeling belief and its vicissitudes on the national stage. When presented with changeling belief, the Catholic audience turned Yeats's self-styled drama of the drawing room into a savage state of affairs. In her letter to the editor of the *Irish Times*, Ellen Duncan, curator of Dublin's Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, argued that the people of Ireland 'do not ask what Mr. Yeats calls "the drama of the drawingroom [sic]" to give us types; we ask it to give us real men and women. It is the same with the drama of the village.'[73] In a similar line of thought the *Dublin Evening Herald* theatre critic drew an apposite comparison between Synge and Yeats: 'Mr. Synge differs from Mr. Yeats in being a dramatist, pure and simple. The latter seems never to be able to forget that he is a poet'.[74] Not only did Synge's account of changeling belief give the people of Ireland real men and women, it also gave credence to radical beliefs, radical actions and radical results.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to explore the relationship *The Playboy* has with changeling belief in Irish folk culture. While Deborah Fleming has suggested that Synge 'rejected the importance of Irish fairy lore so carefully studied by Yeats',[75] conclusions such as these are far too simplistic. The analysis presented in this chapter attempts to reconcile this reductive logic by concentrically engaging with *The Playboy*'s dramaturgical content in order to highlight the striking parallels between *The Playboy*, the Clonmel horror and changeling belief. Orbiting these three cultures of performance is Yeats and while the discourse will look beyond Yeats, we will rarely lose sight of him. In private, Synge pointed out to Yeats that the efficacy of his dramaturgy 'comes from the shock of new material'[76] and Synge's dramatisation of changeling belief was radically shocking, especially to

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[72] Angela Bourke, "Hunting Out the Fairies," 38.
[73] Ellen Duncan, "The Playboy," *Irish Times*, 31 January, 1907, 5.
[74] "Mr. Synge's New Play," *Dublin Evening Herald*, 6 February, 1905, 3.
[75] Deborah Fleming, *"A Man Who Does Not Exist": The Irish Peasant in the Work of W.B. Yeats and J.M. Synge* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 78. For similar conclusions see, for example, Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (Cork: Mercier, 1966), 117; like Fleming, Corkery posits that 'for the fairy religion, [Synge] had only little feeling'.
[76] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955), 531.

Yeats.[77] Yeats fetishised the fairy changeling and just a year before the Clonmel horror he had staged *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), in which he pitted a resolute Catholic priest against a fairy changeling. Synge's dramatisation of changeling belief, however, was far from romantic and therefore it was diametrically opposed to Yeats's valorisation of changeling belief. What Yeats found particularly shocking was Synge's juxtaposition of changeling belief with evolutionary theory and while Synge did not make the juxtaposition explicit in the play, Yeats must have hoped that nobody would detect Synge's subtle manifestation of changeling belief or even worse, Synge's appropriation of the events that took place during the Clonmel horror. Thus, *The Playboy's* dramaturgical provenance in changeling belief will be substantiated by Irish folklore, anthropological and evolutionary arguments on changeling belief that Synge read, newspaper accounts of the Clonmel horror and current scholarship in order to distil the social ramifications that Synge's changeling of the western world had on an Irish culture that wrestled with the discontents of Catholic modernity.

Away with the Fairies

The symbolic capital of the fairies in Synge's Ireland was inordinate. However, they existed in three very different landscapes of desire. In one respect, the fairies were the fantasies of the middle and upper classes; whether it was through pictorial representation on the nursery wall or through theosophical investigations in the drawing room, these class formations allowed the fairies to stalk their unconscious so that they could escape the anxiety of modernity. In a similar vein, the Catholic peasantry had a tenacious attachment to the fairy faith because of its ability to explain the unexplainable and the fairies are the *sine qua non* of pre-Christian residual culture. However, to the majority of Catholic bourgeois Ireland, the fairies were childish and backward, only fit for children's bedtime stories or peculiar esoteric Protestants with too much time on their hands. The fairies were stigmatised in national-popular newspapers and journals as 'a sort of fever rash more symbolic of disease than health', with suggestions that it was extremely '[s]trange that when the peasant has ceased to believe in Fairies public writers should pretend to believe in them.'[78] The middle classes denounced the fairies as 'a symptom of decay'[79] on account of the bourgeois allegiance to the Catholic Church. In the decades after the Famine those members of the Irish populace that still continued to believe in the fairies were considered to go against

[77] For more on how Synge's dramatisation of changeling belief collided with and colluded against Yeats's appreciation of fairy changelings see, Christopher Collins, "J.M. Synge, W.B. Yeats and the Changeling of the Western World," in *Staging Thought: Essays on Irish Theatre, Scholarship and Practice*, ed. Rhona Trench (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), 219-34.
[78] M, "Fairies and Folk-Lore," *All Ireland Review* 1, no. 42 (1900): 3.
[79] M, "Fairies and Folk-Lore," 3.

epistemological and ontological presuppositions established during the Enlightenment.[80] Antonio Gramsci points out that while most intellectuals are predisposed to consider folklore as outdated and old-fashioned, folklore is, in fact, an important 'conception of the world and life'[81] that allows the subaltern classes to standardise their immediate reality. For Gramsci folklore is not a pre-modern rationalising tenet but rather, 'the residue of traditional conceptions of the world'.[82] Writing about the efficacy of a popular culture movement, Gramsci advocates that if the subaltern is to be enfranchised then the movement has to be firmly grounded within the 'humans of popular culture as it is, with its tastes and tendencies and with its moral and intellectual world, even if it is backward and conventional'.[83] The Revival certainly grounded itself in Irish folklore because of its national-popular sovereignty. However, for hegemony to be consummated Gramsci maintained that the dominant class (in this case the Catholic bourgeoisie) must take the subaltern worldview as its own and, in the Ireland of Synge's time, this was far from achievable. Nevertheless, the fairies still lingered within the melancholic corridors of the Catholic bourgeoisie as a named but unknowable cultural discourse. If we recall Slavoj Žižek's postulate that the symptom allows 'the subject to organize his enjoyment – that is why even after he completed interpretation, the subject is not prepared to renounce his symptom; that is why he "loves his symptom more than himself"',[84] then the fairy faith was symptomatic of the unconscious *jouissance* (painful pleasure) that the symptom calls forth. Synge questioned how Catholic bourgeois Ireland could have so easily lost its conscious belief in fairies; fifty years ago, before the Famine, this class formation had believed in the fairies. The fairies may have dispersed and died with the implementation of Roman orthodoxy, but they still continued to linger within Irish folk culture and as Chapter Two suggests, the Catholic clergy often encouraged belief in the fairies because of their attachment to Popular Catholicism.[85]

Synge frequently encountered stories of how the fairies shared the material conditions of folk culture: the fairies traded horses, milked cows, laughed, danced, drank and smoked their way through everyday life. Irish folk culture divided the fairies into four

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[80] Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), 14.
[81] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. and ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 360.
[82] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 34.
[83] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 102.
[84] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 74.
[85] Within the archives of the IFC there are many informants who testify to the Catholic clergy's belief in the fairies in the Ireland of Synge's time. See, for example, Seán Ó Flannagáin, "Conveying the Priest," IFC MS: 433, ff.35-36, County Clare; Michael Keenan, "Fourth Story by M. Keenan," IFC MS: 815, f.25, County Cavan. Also see, Pádraig Ó Héalaí, "Priest Versus Healer: The Legend of the Priest's Stricken Horse," *Béaloideas: The Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society* 62, no. 3 (1994): 171-88.

distinct categories: Trooping fairies, Solitary fairies, Tutelary fairies and Nature fairies.[86] The Trooping fairies were subdivided into the Heroic and Homely fairies. The Heroic Trooping fairies are the aristocrats of the fairy kingdom. Ruled by a king and queen they exist within a cultural framework of medieval nobility; as K.M. Briggs points out, 'they hunt, they ride in procession [...] [and] [t]he best example of them in Britain is the Dana O'Shee of Ireland'.[87] The Homely Trooping fairies are the working classes of the fairy kingdom and, in the main, they are agricultural labourers that avoid human contact, choosing only to appear to humans to thank them for their generosity. The Solitary fairies are similar in kind to the Homely Trooping fairies in that they are self-supporting creatures that are predisposed to haunt a particular area. However, unlike the Homely Trooping fairies the Solitary fairies are malevolent tricksters that test the kindness of humans and punish them for their selfish ways. The Tutelary fairies are creatures that attach themselves to human families to offer bittersweet favours. In an Irish context an example of a Tutelary fairy is the supernatural death messenger (that appears in *Riders to the Sea*: see Chapter One) – the *Ban Sí* – that warns families of an impending death.[88] The Nature fairies are those creatures that are concomitant with pre-Christian pantheism and, as Chapter Two suggests, these fairies relish in their malevolence towards humans.

Due to their mercurial nature fairy changelings lay halfway between the Homely Trooping and Solitary fairies.[89] Changelings varied in size and were known for their fiendishness (characteristics of the Solitary fairies) but they rarely impinged on human existence and were only encountered when they required human agency (characteristics of the Homely Trooping fairies). Irish folk culture interacted with fairy changelings through *seanchaís* (story tellers) that told *síscéalta* (fairy stories) and while presumably not all listeners to the stories actually believed the narrative, over time, credibility was attached to the fairy changeling, which afforded folklore and superstition cultural capital. While to disbelievers the changeling was indexical of the extraordinary, in folk belief changelings could be made to exist if something extra to the ordinary warranted their existence. As Angela Bourke explains: 'Viewed as a system of interlocking units of narrative, practice and belief, fairy-legend can be compared to a database: a pre-modern culture's way of storing and retrieving information and knowledge of every kind'.[90] Folk culture in *fin-de-siècle* Ireland, then, was more inclined to go away with the fairies, than actually send the fairies away as the detritus of residual culture.

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[86] K.M. Briggs, "The English Fairies," *Folklore* 68, no. 1 (1957): 271. While the title of Briggs's article concerns English fairies she begins the discussion with the types of fairies that are peculiar to Great Britain and Ireland.
[87] Briggs, "The English Fairies," 270-71.
[88] Briggs, "The English Fairies," 271.
[89] Briggs, "The English Fairies," 271.
[90] Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 29.

In the Ireland of Synge's time fairy changelings were an acute cultural concern to the extent that the British House of Commons deliberated over the countless Irish accounts of, 'deaths produced by cruel endeavours to cure children and young persons of such maladies generally attempted by quacks and those termed "fairy men" and "fairy women"'.[91] Deaths as a result of the identification of fairy changelings were frequent in Ireland although they were rarely reported publicly, but when they were, the report was particularly alarming. In 1826 in Tralee, County Kerry, Anne Roche acting under the 'delusion of the grossest of superstitions' believed that four-year old Michael Leahy was a fairy changeling and with an accomplice, Mary Clifford, she exorcised the changeling by drowning it in the River Flesk. When asked: 'How can you ever hope to see God after this?', Roche and Clifford pointed out that they were merely putting 'the fairy out of [the child].'[92] Whereas the British Empire regarded folklore with a modernist gaze, the habitations of Catholic modernity viewed folklore through a Romantic lens. With the establishment of the discourse of comparative social science the Empire felt that it was better equipped to understand the actions of those members of the Irish populace, such as Roche and Clifford, that gave cultural credence to the fairy changeling; comparative social science snipped the Romantic umbilical cord that linked folklore and folk culture to bourgeois modernity. Catholic Ireland was not averse to a science of folklore as long as it benefitted state-orientated nationalism. The problem was that the science that was being applied to fairy folklore was far from beneficial; according to comparative social science, those that believed in the fairies were mentally ill or, even worse, backward and unable to evolve.

Synge, the Modernist, did not view folklore Romantically. Folklore and comparative social science lay cheek by jowl in Synge's mind and the application of science separated him from his Revivalist colleagues, which is why, in his notebook, the dramatist concluded:

> Blake taught that true imagination was a view of the eternal symbols of Being, but who may know in his own mind or that of others these symbols from *mere hallucinations*. I am driven back on science of all the names most abused. If science is a learning of the truth [of] natural being, and imagination the two when perfect will coincide. The law of evolution is one understood by a force of imagination ~~and~~ a few more such effort and man will be as god. This then is the task of all.[93]

Yeats maintained that if he had 'not made magic [his] constant study [he] could not have written [his] Blake book nor would "The Countess Kathleen" have ever come to exist. The

[91] *The Census of Ireland for The Year 1861*, Part III, *Vital Statistics*, vol. 2, *Reports and Tables Relating to Deaths* (Dublin: Alexander Thom, 1864), 36.
[92] "Superstition," *Examiner*, 6 August, 1826, 12.
[93] TCD: MS 4350, f.59v. Emphasis added.

mystical life is the centre of all that I do & all that I think & all that I write'.[94] For Yeats, as it was for William Blake, magic, mystery and metaphysics summoned the very kernel of artistic integrity from the dark corridors of the subconscious. But in Synge's terse notebook entry, it is possible to understand the extent to which Synge's conception of the concomitance of art and science differed from Yeats's. John Wilson Foster has suggested that in the Revival 'three kinds of writers engaged themselves with the folktale: the popularizer, the scholar, and the artist'.[95] Synge certainly wasn't a populariser, but he was a scholar and an artist and his aesthetic was underpinned by science; as Declan Kiberd points out, *The Playboy* 'is a tribute to Synge's ability to assimilate so many folk themes and techniques without ever becoming patronising or "folksy".'[96]

Synge was introduced to the applicable uses of the changeling belief on Aran in May 1898, when Old Mourteen (Máirtín Ó Conghalile) recounted how the fairies attempted to snatch his child:

> [...] for three nights the house was filled with noises. "I never wear a shirt at night," he said, "but I got up out of bed, all naked as I was, when I heard the noises in the house, and lighted a light, but there was nothing in it." Then a dummy came and made signs of hammering nails in a coffin. The next day the seed potatoes were full of blood, and the child told his mother that he was going to America. That night it died, and "Believe me," said the old man, "the fairies were in it".[97]

In this scenario Old Mourteen understands that his child is a changeling because the precepts of the belief maintain that when the fairies snatch a child, they leave an identical child with abnormal habits in its place. Quite quickly the changeling child becomes wizened before a sudden death, which is an index for the irreversible substitution of the human child. Before the changeling dies it must be banished and this belief held cultural currency on Aran as late as 1960.[98] But were the fairies really to blame for the child's death? Or was it that the child's death was made sensible by the rationale of the fairy faith? Throughout *The Aran Islands* Synge is careful to document how the islanders used the fairies in order to explain the unexplainable, be that bloody potatoes, horses that galloped across the island at night, or indeed, the sudden death of children; on Aran the fairies were consummate scapegoats. Later, upon reading a draft of Synge's *The Aran Islands*, Lady Gregory would complain to Synge that *The Aran Islands* 'would be greatly improved by the addition of

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[94] W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats,* vol. 1, *1865-1895*, ed. John Kelly (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 303. W.B. Yeats to John O'Leary, 23 July, 1892.
[95] John Wilson Foster, *Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival: A Changeling Art* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), 206.
[96] Kiberd, *Synge and the Irish Language*, 162.
[97] *CW,* vol. 2: 51.
[98] John C. Messenger, *Inis Beag: Isle of Ireland* (New York: Holt Reinehart and Winston, 1969), 99.

some more fairy belief'.[99] Gregory had penned this note to Synge in October 1901 after she had read (aloud) the first three parts of *The Aran Islands* to Yeats in Coole Park; Synge had left the manuscript as he departed for *Inis Méain* on 20 September. Gregory's advice was duly noted, which is contrary to Greene and Stephens's supposition that 'Synge did not take the advice'.[100] Synge did indeed take the advice; section four of *The Aran Islands* is replete with 'talk of the music of the fairies'[101] that includes, but is not limited to, talking rabbits and, quite significantly, fairy changelings:

> I asked if he ever heard the fairy music on the island. [...] "...One time three men were out at night in a curragh, and they saw a big ship coming down on them. They were frightened at it, and they tried to get away, but it came on nearer them, till one of the men turned round and made the sign of the cross, and they didn't see it any more." Then he went on in answer to another question: "We do often see the people who do be away with them. There was a young man died a year ago, and he used to come to the window of the house where his brothers slept, and be talking to them in the night."[102]

Nevertheless, Synge was recalcitrant towards what he classified as an 'unmodern [...] Cuchulainoid National Theatre'[103] and instead of fetishising the fairy faith, he would use his ethnographic field notes in order to create a Modernist dramaturgy that was predicated upon comparative social science.

'Neither a Safe nor Proper Book'[104]

The Golden Bough appraised fairy changelings as a narrative facet that was indexical of belief in primitive religion, which was characterised by a credal interchange between magical and religious belief. In June 1898, Synge returned to Dublin from the Aran Islands and started to juxtapose the changeling folklore he had collected on Aran with *The Golden Bough* at the request of Yeats, who had just finished reading Frazer's work while he was drafting *The Wind Among The Reeds*.[105] It is true that Yeats had been told of changeling belief when he visited Aran to collect folklore for *The Speckled Bird*, in the summer of 1896, and in that unfinished work, the character called Roche wishes 'to write a book to

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[99] Lady Gregory, quoted in *J.M. Synge: 1871-1909*, ed. David H. Greene and Edward M. Stephens (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 121.
[100] Green and Stephens, *J.M. Synge: 1871-1909*, 121.
[101] *CW*, vol. 2: 156.
[102] *CW*, vol. 2: 165.
[103] *CL*, vol. 1: 74. J.M. Synge to Stephen MacKenna, 28 January, 1904.
[104] Robert Fraser, "Introduction," in James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), ix.
[105] For Yeats's insistence that Synge should read *The Golden Bough*, see, Deirdre Toomey, "Killing the Da: Synge and The Golden Bough," in *Sir James Frazer and the Literary Imagination*, ed. Robert Frazer (London: Macmillan, 1990), 157.

reconcile Catholicism and modern science'[106] but what differentiates Synge's understanding of such a proposed reconciliation is that for Synge the reconciliation was unachievable. Ostensibly, for Synge, Catholicism was incompatible with comparative social science and unlike Yeats he would use comparative social science's critique of changeling belief in order to renegotiate the hegemony of Catholic progressive historicism; as Anthony Roche points out, 'Synge [did] not record fairy lore for its own sake'.[107] Synge's notes on Frazer's schema of primitive religiosity suggest that primitive religion could be found in communities where rituals are 'magical rather than propitiatory,' because there is '[n]o Priest proper'[108] to guide communal life. Frazer taught Synge that religion was only found in 'those higher intelligences who have breadth of view enough to comprehend the vastness of the universe and littleness of man. Small minds cannot grasp great ideas [...] Such minds hardly rise into religion at all.'[109] Sensibilities that could not rise to religion could be found lingering between magic and religion and Synge sedulously replicated Frazer's scientific schema of pseudo-priests and magical rites in *The Playboy*.

Throughout *The Playboy* the absence of Father Reilly is his presence (Brian Brady, who directed *The Playboy* at the Abbey in 1995 had a mute Father Reilly on stage to highlight his impotence) and it quickly transpires that he is not a priest proper because he neglects his pastoral responsibilities. Frazer argued that communities that supplicated to primitive religion would characterise the credal interchange between magic and religious belief in a figure that would be betwixt and between a Christian priest and what Frazer classified as a 'primitive philosopher'.[110] Like the Saint in *The Well of the Saints*, this figure would be unable to take on the pastoral responsibility of a priest. Likewise he would not be solely dependent on 'that sovereignty over nature which he had reluctantly abdicated'.[111] Therefore, in communities that privileged primitive religiosity there would be a priest, but it would not be a proper priest in the Christian sense. The Mayo community is in desperate need of pastoral care; Sara Tansey freely admits that 'you'd be ashamed this place, going up winter and summer with nothing worth while to confess at all',[112] but in admitting this she cheerfully ignores the 'savage violence'[113] that has recently occurred in the Mayo community, such as 'the way Jimmy Farrell hanged his dog from the licence and had it screeching and wriggling three hours at the butt of a string, and himself swearing it was a

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[106] W.B. Yeats, "The Speckled Bird: A Novel by Mr. W.B. Yeats, A Section From The Novel with a note by Curtis Bradford," *Irish Writing* 31 (1955): 18.
[107] Anthony Valentine Roche, "The Otherworld Drama of John Millington Synge" (PhD diss., The University of California: Santa Barbara, 1984), 51.
[108] TCD MS: 4378, f.52v.
[109] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 57.
[110] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 56.
[111] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 56.
[112] *CW*, vol. 4: 97.
[113] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.

dead dog, and the peelers swearing it had life';[114] or the time when the Widow Quin attacked her husband 'with a worn pick, and the rusted poison did corrode his blood the way he never overed it and died after.'[115]

Father Reilly turns a blind eye to the valorisation of a communal totem, 'a foxy divil with a pitchpike on the flags of hell',[116] in his parish. The valorisation of a totem figure was, for Frazer, another signature element of primitive religiosity and he argued that religion is predicated on totemism found in primitive tribes where 'the rites consist of an imitation of the effect which the people desire to produce; in other words, their magic is homeopathic or imitative.'[117] It is this steadfast clinging to the elementary principles of primitive religiosity within the community, that legitimises the contention that Father Reilly is not a priest proper. The curate's physical absence suggests that the community is so far removed from the Good Shepherd that the 'Holy Father' shouldn't even 'bother with this place' because the community consists of 'a queer lot these times to go troubling the Holy Father on his sacred seat.'[118] Shawn Keogh, Synge's personification of the Catholic bourgeoisie and a man that was described by one rioter as a 'priest-ridden fellow',[119] disseminates Father Reilly's Catholic doctrine in the community but his idle threats to the 'old Pagan',[120] Michael James Flaherty, of 'the curse of the priests' and 'the scarlet-coated bishops of the courts of Rome'[121] hold little jurisdiction because the members of the community are more interested in poisoning Connaught clergymen than returning to the fold. In Mountain Stage, County Kerry, Synge recorded a phrase he overheard about a 'woman [that] suckles lamb in which doctor detects the elements of a Christian in Cahirciveen'[122] and this is transposed into *The Playboy* as the Widow Quin nonchalantly accepts Pegeen's accusation that she used to indulge in gastronomic black magic in order to poison the Connaught clergy:

> PEGEEN. [*with noisy scorn*]. It's true the Lord God formed you to contrive indeed! Doesn't the world know you reared a black ram at your breast, so that the Lord Bishop of Connaught felt the elements of a Christian, and he eating it after in a kidney stew.[123]

It is important to remember that the Mayo community is Catholic; the members of the community simply have trouble adhering to Roman orthodoxy and it is because there are no

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[114] *CW*, vol. 4: 73.
[115] *CW*, vol. 4: 89.
[116] *CW*, vol. 4: 75.
[117] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 31.
[118] *CW*, vol. 4: 59.
[119] "The Playboy of the West," *Irish Times*, 2 February, 1907, 13.
[120] *CW*, vol. 4: 65.
[121] *CW*, vol. 4: 65.
[122] TCD MS: 4401, f.6r. Synge recorded this in September 1905.
[123] *CW*, vol. 4: 89.

priests proper that the obligations of Catholicism are unobserved. Without this obligation the populace punctuate their lives with the fairy faith, the vestigial *sine qua non* of Irish pre-Christian sensibility.

Angela Bourke maintains that the fairies are commonly encountered 'in deserted or dangerous places: at the top of cliffs [and] on lonely roads' or at occasions of social transition such as 'between formal betrothal and marriage.'[124] Synge set *The Playboy* on a 'scruff of a hill' in a shebeen that was well off the beaten track and from the exposition, we learn that Pegeen Mike has been left alone on 'a long night and with great darkness'[125] to plan her marriage to Shawn Keogh. According to Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, communities were particularly fearful of the fairies in 'the evening [...] [because] the otherworld closed in and its dangers waited outside the front door.'[126] Indeed, Christy, the outsider, *is* waiting outside the front door and he joins the action in foul humour – an idiosyncrasy of the changeling.[127] Christy admits that he killed his father on a Tuesday and claims that since then he has been 'walking wild for eleven days',[128] which means that his ontology is possibly that of a changeling. Changeling folklore maintains that human beings are irrevocably changed into fairy changelings in ten days[129] and in the Clonmel horror those that witnessed the immolation said that the ritual happened after nine days of suspicion '[a]t about half past eleven [because] the question should be answered before 12 [midnight].'[130] And so if Christy has been walking for eleven days then, assuming he deserted the scene of the crime immediately, he arrives in the Mayo community on Friday night. Friday was the day that the fairies had the most power over humans,[131] which explains why the Mayo folk, with no priest to guide credal obligation, nonchalantly accept the outsider into their community. The acceptance of an outsider into a community may seem harmless but the fairy faith advocated strict codes of behaviour between outsiders and insiders, as Diarmuid Ó Giolláin suggests:

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[124] Angela Bourke, "The Virtual Reality of Irish Fairy Legend," *Éire-Ireland: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Irish Studies* 31: no. 1-2 (1996): 10, 12.
[125] *CW,* vol. 4: 61.
[126] Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, "The Fairy Belief and Official Religion in Ireland," in *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, ed. Peter Narváez (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 201.
[127] W.G. Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland, a Folklore Sketch: A Handbook of Irish pre-Christian Traditions,* vol. 2 (New York: Kennikat, 1970), 14.
[128] *CW,* vol. 4: 73, 79.
[129] Hoff and Yeates, *The Cooper's Wife is Missing*, 166.
[130] "The Tipperary Burning Case," *Irish Times*, 2 April, 1895, 5. Bridget Cleary was immolated on 14 March, but Bourke concludes that her death would have been in the very early minutes of 15 March. Thus, if Bridget was immolated on the 14 March, then nine days previously would have been 6 March. Bourke concludes that on 13 March, 'Michael Cleary and his father-in-law, with help from Mary Kennedy and Johanna Burke, had nursed the feverish Bridget *for over a week*, watching her conditions deteriorate' (Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 75. Emphasis added). Thus, Bridget would have ostensibly fallen into fever on 6 March.
[131] Katherine Briggs, *The Fairies in English Tradition and Literature* (London: Bellew, 1989), 106. Although Briggs's analysis pertains towards English fairies she regularly discusses Irish fairies and traditions. For example: 'The Irish fairy beliefs are the most explicit and generally held, and here and there are many strands and varieties of belief. The fairies are of all sizes and various characters. [...] There is a close connection between them and the dead' (Briggs, *The Fairies in English Tradition and Literature*, 87-88).

> Anything which upset the natural order of the community tended to be linked to the disorderly world outside. The diagnosis of misfortune indentified the culprits as fairies [...] Various categories of outsiders could be easily confused [as fairies] since the only important distinction was between insiders and outsiders.[132]

Once Christy has entered into the community all that is needed to postulate that he is a fairy changeling is enough circumstantial evidence to surpass reasonable doubt.

In 1902 W.G. Wood-Martin published his treatise on residual pre-Christian sensibilities in Ireland and concluded that the characteristic trait of a fairy changeling was that they could be 'easily recognised by their tricky habits, and by constantly complaining and crying for food'.[133] This suggests why, when Christy enters the shebeen, '[*h*]*e goes over to the fire, sighing and moaning. Then he sits down putting his glass beside him and begins gnawing a turnip, too miserable to feel the others staring at him with curiosity.*'[134] Bourke points out that in Irish folk culture any 'ill-treatment meted out to a changeling may be visited in revenge on the abducted human, so a suspected changeling is supposed to be treated with cautious respect',[135] which is why Christy's behaviour elicits the following response from Michael James Flaherty: '[*patronizingly*]. Let you come up then to the fire. You're looking famished with the cold.'[136] Bourke also points out that changelings' 'behaviour is often intolerable'[137] and, indeed, Pegeen finds Christy's behaviour insufferable:

> PEGEEN. [*with a sign to the men to be quiet*]: You're only saying it. You did nothing at all. A soft lad the like of you wouldn't slit the wind-pipe of a screeching sow.
>
> CHRISTY. [*offended*]: You're not speaking the truth.
>
> PEGEEN. [*in mock rage*]: Not speaking the truth, is it? Would you have me knock the head of you with the butt of the broom?
>
> CHRISTY. [*twisting round on her with a sharp cry of horror*]: Don't strike me...I killed my poor father, Tuesday was a week, for doing the like of that.[138]

Changelings were said to be capable of awful deeds without remorse and were known to tell outlandish and heinous lies.[139] This would account for Christy's patricide with 'the help of

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[132] Ó Giolláin, "The Fairy Belief and Official Religion in Ireland," 203.
[133] Wood-Martin, *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland*, vol. 2: 14.
[134] *CW,* vol. 4: 67.
[135] Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 30.
[136] *CW,* vol. 4: 67.
[137] Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 30.
[138] *CW,* vol. 4: 71-73.
[139] Carole G. Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 60.

God'[140] where he 'just riz the loy and let fall the edge of it on the ridge of his skull, and he went down at my feet like an empty sack, and never let a grunt or groan from him at all'.[141] Indeed, those that are present in the shebeen cannot quite believe that Christy shows no remorse:

> PHILLY. [*retreating with* JIMMY]: There's a daring fellow.
>
> JIMMY. Oh, glory be to God!
>
> MICHAEL. [*with great respect*]: That was a hanging crime, mister honey. You should have had a good reason for doing the like of that.[142]

With respect to changeling belief, the Catholic Church promoted the belief that 'the power of the priest was superior to that of the fairies and that the sign of the cross or touch of the priest's stole would put the fairies to flight'.[143] But Father Reilly, not a priest proper, never appears to exorcise the changeling of the western world. However, he is certainly present because he sends his words of advice to Pegeen via the Widow Quin:

> PEGEEN. [*pointing to* CHRISTY]. Look now, is he roaring, and he stretched out drowsy with his supper, and his mug of milk. Walk down and tell that to Father Reilly and to Shaneen Keogh.
>
> WIDOW QUIN. [*coming forward*]. I'll not see them again, for I've their word to lead that lad forward for to lodge with me.
>
> PEGEEN. [*in blank amazement*]. This night, is it?
>
> WIDOW QUIN. [*going over*]. This night. 'It isn't fitting,' says the priesteen, 'to have his likeness lodging with an orphaned girl.' [*To* CHRISTY.] God save you, mister![144]

Furthermore, in Act Two, Shawn Keogh entices Christy to leave the community with 'the blessing of Father Reilly itself'.[145] Changelings were also said to be 'witty and mentally precocious'[146] and this would also explain Christy's hyperbole and talismanic performance at the races where Christy is crowned as 'the champion of the world I tell you, and there isn't a hap'orth isn't falling lucky to his hands to-day.'[147] Séamas Mac Philib maintains that '[t]he most common way in which [a changeling] betrays his real identity is through some

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[140] *CW*, vol. 4: 73.
[141] *CW*, vol. 4: 73.
[142] *CW*, vol. 4: 73.
[143] Joan Hoff and Marian Yeates, *The Cooper's Wife is Missing: The Trials of Bridget Cleary* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 105.
[144] *CW*, vol. 4: 87.
[145] *CW*, vol. 4: 115.
[146] Séamas Mac Philib, "The Changeling: Irish Versions of a Migratory Legend in their International Context," *Béaloideas: The Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society* 59 (1991): 125.
[147] *CW*, vol. 4: 139.

unusual behaviour when he has been left alone and thinks himself unobserved'[148] and indeed, when Christy is left alone in the shebeen he adopts some peculiar behaviour that the Mayo girls have 'never seen to this day'.[149] Behaviour such as taking '*the looking-glass from the wall and* [*putting*] *it on the back of a chair; then* [*sitting*] *down in front of it*' and congratulating how he will 'be growing fine from this day, the way [he'll] have a soft lovely skin on [him] and won't be the like of the clumsy young fellows do be ploughing all times in the earth and dung.'[150] Matters are made worse by the appearance of Christy's father, Old Mahon. As far as the community is aware, Old Mahon died eleven days ago when Christy 'turned around with [his] back to the north, and [he] hit a blow on the ridge of his skull, laid him stretched out, and he split to the knob of his gullet'.[151] Mahon's return from the dead was an act that only the fairies could accomplish. In Irish folk culture, the fairies were known to return from the Otherworld in order to take humans away with them, just as Michael returned to take Bartley away in *Riders to the Sea*. Thus, even if Christy hasn't been identified at this point, the appearance of his father adds further weight to the hypothesis that Christy is a fairy and as the community begins to lose its grip on reality, a narrative structure is immediately applied in order to rationalise communal anxiety, and Christy measures appositely against the elementary principles of changeling folklore. The community resorts to the fairy faith because, as Bourke suggests, belief in the fairies is not 'controlled by a two-way switch' but rather it is 'much more like a sliding switch than one with on/off settings.'[152] With no priest proper to offer pastoral guidance the community implicitly turns to changeling belief in order to make sense of the entrance of 'a young gaffer who'd capsize the stars.'[153] And as Christy's lies are uncovered, the community decides to exorcise what its members are forced to consider as a changeling in their midst. Therefore, the second signature of primitive religiosity that Synge recorded from *The Golden Bough*, magical rituals, were an immediate and very reasonable corollary to the community. But as Synge was well aware, they were also a reasonable corollary to an insular community near Clonmel, South Tipperary.

[148] Mac Philib, "The Changeling: Irish Versions of a Migratory Legend in their International Context," 125.
[149] *CW,* vol. 4: 99.
[150] *CW,* vol. 4: 95.
[151] *CW,* vol. 4: 103.
[152] Angela Bourke, "Reading a Woman's Death: Colonial Text and Oral Tradition in Nineteenth-Century Ireland," *Feminist Studies* 21, no. 3 (1995): 580.
[153] *CW,* vol. 4: 153.

'Whatever Flames Upon the Night'[154]

W.B. Yeats shunned *Märchen* fairy tales (stories where the fairies exist in a fantasy land) because they had no impact on everyday life; when collecting lore from the folk he would doctor the sensory data of the stories so that they were concerned with a material existence. As Garrigan Mattar points out, '[i]f the stories as they came to him were hampered by either rationalizing or sentimental glosses then these were trimmed away'.[155] Yeats desperately wanted his spectator to give credence to the literal existence of the fairies, even though he was aware that he was trying 'to bring back a little of the old dead beautiful world of romance into this century of great engines'.[156] Nevertheless, Yeats valiantly defended the fairy faith, claiming that 'the Irish peasantry still believe in fairies'[157] and furthermore, that the fairies were talismans for 'some fibrous darkness'.[158]

Yeats's staunch belief in the existence of the fairies was diametrically opposed to that of the Catholic middle classes who tried to kill the fairies with kindness: 'We doubt if the peasant ever believed in [the fairies] at all. He believed in stories; for they fed his imagination, but it is a long time since the peasants believed in fairies or ghosts as beings having power and influence over his life.'[159] The Catholic middle classes came to this conclusion because they maintained that the fairy faith was indexical of an uncivilised consciousness. Yeats was particularly sensitive to this attack from Catholic Ireland: 'Perhaps the fairies exist', Yeats admitted, but 'an assumption of their existence is the only fit theory to build a selection of fairy tales on'.[160] Yeats wrote this in 1889 to Dr. George Coffey, Keeper of Antiquities in the Irish National Museum and he signed off with a patronising comment on those committed to the scientific enquiry of Irish folklore: 'Oh these scientists [...] There is not much difference in the *substance* which a scientist understands; in the *mood* of the story teller there is the most extraordinary difference. The mood belongs to literature.'[161] The occurrence of the Clonmel horror proved that the fairies were an ideological persuasion that was functionally constituted as 'power and influence over [the folk's] life'.[162] Comparative social scientists such as Andrew Lang believed that the events of the Clonmel horror had 'not only pained and grieved all readers, but have

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[154] W.B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Russell K. Alspach (London: Macmillan, 1965), 931.
[155] Sinéad Garrigan Mattar, "Folklore," in *W.B. Yeats in Context*, ed. David Holdeman and Ben Levitas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 249.
[156] W.B. Yeats, *Prefaces and Introductions: Uncollected Prefaces and Introductions by Yeats to Works by Other Authors, and to Anthologies*, ed. William H. O'Donnell (London: Macmillan, 1988), 58.
[157] Yeats, *Prefaces and Introductions*, 58.
[158] W.B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 429.
[159] M, "Fairies and Folk-Lore," 3.
[160] Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats,* vol. 1: 146. W.B. Yeats to George Coffey, 14 February, 1889.
[161] Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats,* vol. 1: 146. W.B. Yeats to George Coffey, 14 February, 1889. Emphasis in original.
[162] M, "Fairies and Folk-Lore," 3.

astonished the student of popular belief.'[163] And so, in the wake of the Clonmel horror, the darkness that surrounded Yeats's writing table in March 1895 irrevocably altered not only the substance of the fairy tales but also, and perhaps more importantly, the mood of the fairy tale. For Yeats, the student of popular belief, the Romantic days of the fairy tale were numbered.

Scholars of the Clonmel horror are generally agreed that what precipitated the ritual immolation was the community's belief that Bridget was a fairy changeling. However, Hubert Butler postulates an alternative thesis, citing claims of infidelity between Bridget and the local eggman. The eggman, who remains nameless to the archive, used to collect eggs from Bridget and sell them to a wholesale distributor in Clonmel. Butler suggests that Michael Cleary 'suspected his wife of a tenderness for the eggman and just as a grain of grit will provoke an oyster to secrete a pearl, so the eggman from Clonmel unlocked the door to fairyland'.[164] Bourke also suggests that Bridget might have been unfaithful to Michael with the emergencyman, William Simpson, pointing out that for 'the pretty young dressmaker, the emergencyman, with his neatly trimmed moustache and wing-collar he wore on formal occasions, may have been more attractive than her cooper husband'.[165] Certainly, Tom Mac Intyre's *What Happened Bridgie Cleary* (2005) dramatised a twisted love triangle between the Cleary couple and William Simpson and within the confines of Mac Intyre's play, Simpson asks Bridget why they never eloped, to which Bridgie replies: 'That cuddent have happened, William – we cuddent have gone away together'.[166] The parallels to Michael Cleary's marital shame are striking when one looks at *The Playboy*. Within the context of the Clonmel horror, if Bridget was considered a changeling because she may have had an amorous connection with the eggman and/or Simpson, then it is important to remember that fairies were known to induce female mortals into being *leannán sí* (fairy lovers) so that they could take women to the Otherworld as midwives.[167] Pegeen, who has an amorous connection with Christy, claims (in an earlier draft) that she has been 'dropped to Hell' when 'the like of his love the flower of the world'[168] suddenly disappears. The connection to hell is common in changeling belief; the fairies took humans away to the Otherworld, where the fairies would keep them captive. In its attempts to implement Roman orthodoxy in Ireland, the Church weaned Irish folk culture off its belief in the fairies by equating the Otherworld with hell. In *The Playboy*, Shawn uses hell to question Christy's ontology: 'Oh, isn't he a holy terror' and then likens Christy to the devil: 'I'm thinking Satan hasn't many

[163] Andrew Lang, "Changelings," *Illustrated London News*, 25 May, 1895, 651.
[164] Hubert Butler, *Escape from the Anthill* (Mullingar: Lilliput, 1986), 65.
[165] Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 86.
[166] Tom Mac Intyre, *What Happened Bridgie Cleary* (Dublin: New Island, 2005), 92.
[167] Briggs, *The Fairies in English Tradition and Literature*, 115.
[168] *CW,* vol. 4: 175.

have killed their da in Kerry and in Mayo too'.[169] According to folklore accounts, the changeling was perceived to be Satan incarnate, a lore that Synge was fully aware of after spending time on Aran with Old Mourteen, who taught Synge about 'the Catholic theory of the fairies':[170]

> When Lucifer saw himself in the glass he thought himself equal with God. Then the lord threw him out of Heaven, and all the angels that belonged to him. While He was 'chucking them out,' an archangel asked Him to spare some of them, and those that were falling are in the air still and have power to wreck ships, and to work evil in the world.[171]

If Synge identified Molly as a changeling because of the threat of her infidelity, then Michael Cleary and Shawn Keogh respectively maintained the same supposition over Bridget and Pegeen's infidelity; in *The Playboy* Christy emerges as a fairy because of his ability to seduce Pegeen but after Christy admits that he has been 'walking wild for eleven days',[172] the populace are able to postulate that his traits are characteristic of changelings. Bourke reminds us, 'those who were said to consort with the fairies were usually marginal, transitional or eccentric, and unable to have children'[173] and, furthermore, with respect to the fairy faith, a 'woman's sexuality, when not controlled within the orderly progressions of marriage and pregnancy, was seen as horrifically powerful'.[174] Pegeen, a woman that would 'go helter-skeltering after any man would let you a wink upon the road'[175] allows herself to consort with Christy even though she is waiting 'on a sheep-skin parchment to be with Shawn Keogh of Killakeen'[176] and therefore, as far as Shawn is concerned, Christy Mahon with 'a score of divils in him',[177] seems to be a fairy because of his ability to lure Pegeen away from him. But with the amount of evidence amassed, Shawn implicitly conjectures that Christy's ontology is that of a fairy changeling; when Shawn enters the shebeen he maintains that he heard a man 'groaning wicked like a maddening dog' outside.[178] Fairy changelings were invariably found sick and crying and when Christy joins the action, he is repeatedly described by Shawn as being 'queer,' 'fearless,' 'dirty,' 'savage' and 'wicked';[179] all the adjectives that are used to describe fairy changelings. And while the

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[169] *CW*, vol. 4: 171.
[170] *CW*, vol. 2: 56. However, de Jubainville had informed Synge about this theory in March, 1898 as his notes from de Jubainville's lectures testify: 'The Tuatha D came directly from Heaven' (TCD MS: 4378, f.65r).
[171] *CW*, vol. 2: 56.
[172] *CW*, vol. 4: 73, 79.
[173] Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 93.
[174] Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 93. Interestingly, Carlo Gébler's novel on the Clonmel horror, *The Cure*, interrogated the sexual relationship between Michael and Bridget Cleary. Within the confines of prose fiction Bridget's method of appeasing her husband's anger at her inability to become pregnant was 'to make love more passionately and more often' (Carlo Gébler, *The Cure* [London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994], 32).
[175] *CW*, vol. 4: 89.
[176] *CW*, vol. 4: 91.
[177] *CW*, vol. 4: 17.
[178] *CW*, vol. 4: 117, 61.
[179] *CW*, vol. 4: 75, 115, 155, 167.

application of the fairy faith by the community in both Mayo and Clonmel 'was a currency, neutral in itself', it was certainly 'capable of facilitating important interventions'.[180]

Changeling belief in both the Clonmel horror and *The Playboy* necessarily invites the contemporaneity of savage sex, violence and paganism. To return to Synge's unpublished prose essay, "On Literary and Popular Poetry," the dramatist admits his admiration for folk culture because such culture was 'indifferent to mere rules which tend to hamper the direct expression of emotion.'[181] The Clonmel horror demonstrated Irish folk culture's indifference to the normative rules of society (i.e. do not murder), but Synge understood why the community of the Clonmel horror was indifferent to the rules because Frazer had taught him that primitive communities were prone to the 'transference of evil misfortune [which is] laid upon...Scapegoats, Sin eaters[.] Expulsion of evil spirits becomes periodic scourging.'[182] The Mayo community makes a solipsistic retreat to changeling belief in order to exorcise the evil spirit: the changeling of the western world. As far as this analysis is concerned, the postulation that Christy is the gender-inverted image of Bridget is necessarily reductive. However, the conjecture that Synge appropriated the homeopathic magical ritual that was concomitant with changeling belief is entirely plausible. Synge worked hard to get the tone of the immolation just right. In previous drafts, he had written menacing lines such as: '[*fiercely*]. Burn him will you. Don't be afraid' and others: 'Lift a coal of fire Pegeen and scorch his leg'.[183] Throughout *The Playboy* drafts the dramatist consistently insists upon '*a large open fire-place, with turf fire*',[184] on stage, just like 'the fairy house'[185] of the Clonmel horror where there was a fireplace big enough to fit the whole of Bridget Cleary across the grate.[186] In the Clonmel horror Michael Cleary 'got a red stump and told [Bridget] he would put it down her mouth',[187] and in *The Playboy* Synge decides upon a similar torture scene:

> SHAWN. I'm afeard of him. [*to Pegeen*] Lift a lighted sod will you and scorch his leg.
>
> PEGEEN: [*blowing the fire with a bellows*]. Leave go now young fellow or I'll scorch your shins.

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[180] Angela Bourke and Patricia Lysaght, "Legends of the Supernatural," in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. 4, *Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, ed. Angela Bourke, Siobhán Kilfeather, Maria Luddy, Margaret Mac Curtain, Gerardine Meaney, Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, Mary O'Dowd and Clair Wills (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), 1285.
[181] TCD: MS 4378, f.50v.
[182] TCD: MS 4378, f.56v.
[183] *CW,* vol. 4: 170, 172.
[184] *CW,* vol. 4: 57.
[185] Melissa Sihra, interviewed by Christopher Collins. Dublin, Ireland. 5 July, 2010. Dr. Sihra, who visited the Cleary's house in Ballyvadlea, South Tipperary on 2 August, 2005, asked for directions to the house, which informants referred to the house as 'the fairy house'.
[186] Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 82.
[187] "The Burning of the Woman Cleary," *Irish Times*, 28 March, 1895, 5.

CHRISTY. You're blowing for to torture me? [*His voice rising and growing stronger.*] That's your kind, is it? Then let the lot of you be wary, for if I've to face the gallows I'll have a gay march down, I tell you, and shed the blood of some of you before I die.

[...]

MEN. [*to Pegeen*] Bring the sod, will you.

PEGEEN. [*coming over*] God help him so. [*Burns his leg*].

CHRISTY. [*kicking and screaming*] Oh, glory be to God![188]

In both the exorcisms in Mayo and Clonmel, the changelings are fully aware that the community is using the fairies as a cover for heinous crimes, hence why Bridget confided in her cousin, Mary Kennedy, that her husband was 'making a fairy of me now'[189] and in a similar fashion Christy exclaims: 'You're blowing for to torture me? [*His voice rising and growing stronger.*] That's your kind, is it?'[190] Séan McMahon has argued that 'what Synge ignored or failed to notice, or deliberately suppressed, was that his characters were Irish Catholics whose religion, puritanical and pallid [...] was a part of their lives.'[191] However, Bridget and Christy were burnt because both communities were desperately looking for a narrative structure to rationalise their immediate reality and as Bourke advocates, belief in fairy changelings 'afforded a way for people driven to desperate remedies to rationalize their actions and live with the consequences.'[192] The communal application of changeling belief is, however, permeated with Catholic belief; God is invoked during the ritual immolation of Christy and during the Clonmel horror the rosary was recited, as Bridget was burnt alive.[193] If Louis Althusser maintained that ideologies 'are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them'[194] then what McMahon has ignored, or failed to notice, is that while Synge's Mayo folk are Catholics in the normative sense of the word, their application of changeling belief, in keeping with the hallmarks of primitive religiosity (a credal interchange between magic and religion), problematises their Catholic understanding of Roman orthodoxy. Changeling belief is not merely an ideological construct but an ideological perspective that necessitates action; changelings are not an index of passive ideology but rather an ideology that necessitates the functionalism of homeopathic magical ritual. If the functionalist understanding of ritual maintains that the performance of ritualised behaviour is concerned

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[188] *CW,* vol. 4: 169, 171.
[189] Butler, *Escape from the Anthill*, 64.
[190] *CW,* vol. 4: 169.
[191] Séan McMahon, "'Leave Troubling The Lord God': A Note on Synge and Religion," *Éire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies* 11, no. 1 (1976): 134.
[192] Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 30.
[193] "The "Witch-Burning" at Clonmel," 382.
[194] Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1977), 233.

with communal regulation, then the changeling in Mayo and South Tipperary was immolated in a desperate attempt to harmonise the social structure that had rapidly developed an anti-structure. However, if we recall Frazer's supposition that homeopathic magic/magical ritual necessitates that 'the magician infers that he can produce any effect he desires merely by imitating it',[195] then the burning of the fairy changeling is a ritual that is fundamentally flawed because the very act of burning the changeling means that the human that has been taken away with the fairies will be burnt too, which is why John C. Messenger's ethnographic field notes on changeling belief contain informants 'who bear scars from being burned when their souls were rescued by this expediency'.[196] However, in both the Clonmel horror and *The Playboy* the burning of the changeling fails and because of this an alternative postulation must be drawn on the efficacy of changeling belief; a postulation that reveals the significance of savage sexuality and violence.

With respect to the Clonmel horror contemporaneous anthropological discourse in Synge's Ireland concluded that there was malice aforethought. Again, we return to suppositions on the 'savage paganism'[197] of changeling belief as a corollary of 'savage sexuality' and 'savage violence'.[198] Alfred Nutt equated the Clonmel horror with 'the antique conception of life and sacrifice'[199] and after reading *The Golden Bough* Synge was familiar with the provenance of changeling belief in sacrificial rituals, which is why, in his notebook he jotted: 'the custom of the peasant probably a survival of human sacrifice'.[200] In years to come, René Girard would categorise sacrificial rituals as the symbolic expression of communal violence that is channelled into a rite in order to stop a community from cannibalising itself.[201] From this perspective Christy is tortured on the premise that he is a fairy changeling, but his changeling ontology holds its provenance within the cathartic release of communal violence, which up until this point had been focussed on hanging dogs from trees and walking miles on end to see a lady with half a nose: Mrs. MacDonnell.[202] Edward Clodd and Andrew Lang were far more direct with their suppositions than Nutt was. In discussing 'the late melancholy events in a peasant family in Tipperary', Andrew Lang concluded that 'it is not unlikely that the unfortunate woman really had developed some hysterical change in character. But she did not wholly disappear into fairyland'.[203] In a similar line of thought, Clodd maintained that although the 'evidence goes to show that the belief in changelings prevails among the Irish peasantry, and has often led to inhuman acts,

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[195] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 26.
[196] John C. Messenger, *Inis Beag: Isle of Ireland* (New York: Holt Reinehart and Winston, 1969), 101.
[197] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.
[198] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.
[199] Nutt, "An Essay upon the Irish Vision of the Happy Otherworld," 232.
[200] TCD MS: 4378, f.56v.
[201] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (London: Athlone, 1988), 8.
[202] *CW*, vol. 4: 73, 97.
[203] Lang, "Changelings," 651.

it seems clear that other and baser motives prompted the foul deed.'[204] According to anthropological discourse, Bridget was never away with the fairies but rather, the fairies were a scapegoat for the mental instability that ultimately precipitated her immolation and the same conjecture can be substantiated in *The Playboy*. Suppositions such as these that not only belied the jingoistic claptrap of the Yeatsian fairy faith but also struck fear into the very heart of the Catholic bourgeoisie, because as Carole G. Silver has suggested, in 'both fantasy and reality, changelings were increasingly associated with the Darwinian notion of groups or races that had not ultimately triumphed.'[205]

Disturbances in the Drawing Room

As *The Playboy* reached its final stages of rehearsal, Willie Fay 'begged' Synge 'to take out the torture scene in the last act, where the peasants burn Christy with lit turf' but it was easier to 'move the Hill of Howth'[206] than change Synge's mind over his implicit appropriation of changeling exorcism, which the dramatist had drafted over thirteen times. Lady Gregory was quick to warn Yeats of the approaching catastrophe and an ominous tone can be detected in her letter: 'You never looked like a tiger with its cub as Synge did last night with *Playboy*.'[207] Suspecting the worst, Yeats did not attend the opening night of *The Playboy* because, in Holloway's opinion, Yeats refused 'to be associated with Synge's Comedy in [...] bad language & glorification of murder.'[208] The abandonment of the golden galleon of fairy folklore freed Yeats to attend a reception with Professor Herbert Grierson in Aberdeen, where he did champion *The Playboy*.[209] But behind closed doors, Grierson suspected something was wrong with Yeats, citing Yeats's loquacity, which suggested his nervous disposition: 'he began to talk and so far as I know he has continued to do so ever since',[210] remarked a confused Grierson after Yeats left. During the reception with Grierson Yeats rambled on and on about *The Playboy* and in turn Grierson may have discussed the fairies with Yeats. Grierson would later publish an essay in *The Dublin Review* (April 1911)[211] concerning Yeats's knowledge of the fairies, and although Grierson wouldn't have known it at the time, the praise he no doubt bestowed upon Yeats at his reception in January

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[204] Edward Clodd, "The Witch-Burning Case in Ireland," *Times*, 1 August, 1895, 5.
[205] Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples*, 85.
[206] Fay and Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre*, 212.
[207] Lady Gregory, quoted in Ann Saddlemyer, ed., *Theatre Business: The Correspondence of the First Abbey Theatre Directors: William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge*, (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1982), 205n. Lady Gregory to W.B. Yeats, 12 January, 1907.
[208] Joseph Holloway, NLI MS: 1805, 26 January, 1907, f.64.
[209] R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life*, vol. 1, *The Apprentice Mage: 1865-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 360.
[210] Herbert Grierson, quoted in Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life*, vol. 1: 360.
[211] See, W.B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats,* vol. 4, *1905-1907*, ed. John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 308n.

1907 was thoroughly welcome; on the eve of the battle, assurance in the fairy faith was needed.

Freddie Rokem has suggested that to perform history often invites the spectator into 'a painful recognition of a routine which must be repeated over and over again'.[212] History, for Rokem 'can only be perceived as such when it becomes recapitulated, when we create some form of discourse [...] [that situates] the chaotic torrents of the past within an aesthetic frame.'[213] The performance of history is dependent upon the actor as a hyper-historian[214] in that he/she is able to articulate past events within the present and, from the perspective of cultural materialism, the arrestment of progressive historicism is made possible by an action that interrupts the progressive framework of history by presenting the discontents of historical time within the present. The burning of Christy's leg must be considered as a nodal action that brings the discontents of historical time into the historical present. For if the *Times* considered the Clonmel horror to be a 'shocking occurrence recalling the barbarities practised in the Middle Ages upon prisoners charged with witchcraft'[215] then Synge's implicit dramatisation of changeling belief in *The Playboy* necessitates a critique of Catholic progressive historicism because it critiques the very essence of contemporaneity. If historicism understands the past to be replete with historical events that cannot exist within the present – what Dipesh Chakrabarty considers to be 'the so-called simultaneity of the non-simultaneous'[216] – then the immolation of Christy in *The Playboy* suggests that changeling belief was not simply a relic from the past that punctuated the progressive historicism of the present but a relic of lived experience that testified to subterranean historical processes.

It only took two performances of *The Playboy* before Synge's scientific dramatisation of changeling belief was detected. In 1910, when Yeats sat down to recall the disturbances, he remembered how 'Synge came and stood beside me, and said, "A young doctor has just told me that he can hardly keep himself from jumping on to a seat, and pointing out in that howling mob those whom he is treating for venereal disease."'[217] This young medic was Daniel Sheehan, a friend of James Joyce, and it seems that the episode in which Christy was attacked and burnt had a peculiar resonance with the self-assured Kerryman who was, on this particular evening, far from reticent with his sentiments. Sheehan had been picking up on Synge's subtle appropriation of changeling folklore all evening, and when his bourgeois brothers in arms began rioting, Sheehan offered his own

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[212] Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2000), ix.
[213] Rokem, *Performing History*, ix.
[214] Rokem, *Performing History*, 13.
[215] "Ireland," 8.
[216] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Time of History and Times of Gods," in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 49.
[217] Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 312.

performance analysis: 'What about Mullinahone and the witch burning?'[218] The response from Catholic bourgeois Ireland: 'emphatic execrations'.[219] Sheehan's conjecture was painfully obvious; Bridget Cleary was burnt alive in Ballyvadlea, 'a remoted [sic] and isolated district a short distance...[from] Mullinahone' ,[220] which was just a stone's throw away from Clonmel.

Spectators of *The Playboy* were not attending a performance of a literary text, but rather, a performance that allowed the spectator to engage in disruptive, violent and to a certain extent, criminal acts. On the same night that Sheehan attended the play (Monday 28 January), an inebriated gentleman – operating under the alter-ego of "Napoleon" – travelled from Galway to Dublin so that he could meet 'Mr. Synge, who promptly made his appearance. The gentleman, having exchanged courtesies with the author'[221] then decided to offer 'a challenge to any man in the pit to fight him'.[222] Napoleon's behaviour is symptomatic of a plethora of violence that instigated arrests and court cases where defendants claimed their actions were completely justifiable. Similarly, when those accused of the Clonmel horror were brought to trial, the riotous behavior of the gallery spectators inside the courtroom anticipated the behaviour of those who would attend *The Playboy.* The *Irish Times* reported on the Clonmel horror trial that 'the proceedings attracted a very large crowd to the courthouse. The building was filled to its utmost capacity long before the hearing of the case was proceeded with and the prisoners were subjected to a good deal of unfavorable comment [...] the people indulging in fierce hissing and booing.'[223] Just like *The Playboy* rioters, those accused of the Clonmel horror maintained that their actions were reasonable. Crown Solicitor, Mr. Michael Gleeson advocated that Michael Cleary et al. had simply been acting in accordance with the fairy faith, and so a charge of manslaughter was ushered into proceedings instead of murder in the first degree. Similarly, when Anne Roche was brought to trial for murdering Michael Leahy, she was found not guilty by the jury, leaving the judge, Baron Pennefather, to conclude that members of the community were not 'safe in convicting the prisoner of murder, however strong their suspicions might be.'[224]

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[218] "The Abbey Theatre," *Freeman's Journal*, 29 January, 1907, 7. *Irish Independent* reports this slightly differently: 'What about Tipperary where the witch was burned' ("Police In," 5.) It is not categorically clear that Daniel Sheehan was responsible for this comment. But Sheehan, who was known to be present, does seem to be the most likely transgressor. In *The Silence of Barbara Synge*, W.J. McCormack conjectures that the comment was indeed 'the view of young Daniel Sheehan' and that the 'trainee doctor taunted the rioters with the cry, "What about Mullinahone and the witch burning?"' See, W.J. McCormack, *The Silence of Barbara Synge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 226-27. R.F. Foster corroborates McCormack's conjecture. See, Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life*, vol. 1: 360.

[219] "The Abbey Theatre," 7.

[220] "Dreadful Occurrence in Country Tipperary," *Irish Times*, 30 March, 1895, 5.

[221] "Abbey Theatre Scenes," 7.
For a full account of Napoleon's evening at *The Playboy*, see, *The Abbey Row: Not Edited by W.B. Yeats* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1907), 1-9.

[222] "Abbey Theatre Scenes," 7.

[223] "The Tipperary Burning Case," *Irish Times*, 2 April, 1895, 5.

[224] "Superstition," 12.

Such cultural credence given to changeling belief afforded Gleeson legal precedent to shift the blame onto the Catholic Church which, according to Gleeson, turned 'a blind eye to pagan rituals practised by the peasantry all the while unofficially allowing them to continue'.[225]

Writing from Rome, James Joyce, an author who took pride in detecting moribund aspects of Irish culture, wanted a piece of the action that his friend, Sheehan, had. Having fallen out with Synge in Paris over *Riders to the Sea*, the author in exile wrote to his brother, Stanislaus, maintaining that he felt 'like a man in a house who hears a row in the street and voices he knows shouting but can't get out to see what the hell is going on.'[226] As Yeats steeled himself for what Lady Gregory appositely termed 'the fight for our lives',[227] her Ladyship was left to defend the fort while she waited for the impresario to return from Aberdeen. Synge was nowhere to be found: 'I am afraid the "Playboy" has injured us a good deal', Gregory wrote to Wilfred Blunt, 'I am the real sufferer, for at the first attack Synge who is not fond of fighting his own battles kept in background & Yeats was away – & I had to take responsibility.'[228] The responsibility was sizeable. Nevertheless, Yeats arrived in Dublin from Aberdeen on Monday (28 January) to watch Sheehan offer his performance analysis. As George Roberts recalled, '[j]ust as the play was over Yeats arrived. He burst into the Green Room where the company were assembled, with the gleam of battle in his eyes. "This is the best thing that ever happened in my life," said he.'[229] But as the battle raged and the situation went from bad to worse, Yeats became increasingly withdrawn. Evasive action was needed because a consummate defence of Synge's dramatisation of changeling belief was always going to be a tall order for Yeats, and by now even his own colleagues were calling for Synge's head. George Moore protested against 'the burning of Christy's legs with the coal' because it was 'quite intolerable and wouldn't be acceptable to any audience.'[230] In response, an ailing Yeats attempted to defend the immolation of Christy 'on the ground that an artist need but make his characters self-consistent,' but privately he admitted that 'that too was observation.'[231]

Deciding to rally, Yeats proceeded to defend Synge's slur on changeling belief through flippant newspaper interviews that must have given him an acute case of *déjà vu*. When the Clonmel horror made headline news Yeats was called upon to defend changeling

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[225] Hoff and Yeates, *The Cooper's Wife is Missing*, 276.
[226] James Joyce, *The Selected Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 148. James Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, 11 February, 1907.
[227] Lady Gregory, quoted in ed. Ann Saddlemyer, *Theatre Business: The Correspondence of the First Abbey Theatre Directors: William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1982), 205. Lady Gregory to J.M. Synge, 13 January, 1907.
[228] NYPL MS: Berg Coll MSS Gregory. Lady Gregory to Wilfred Blunt. 20 April, 1907.
[229] George Roberts, "Memoirs of George Roberts," *Irish Times*, 14 September, 1955, 5.
[230] George Moore, quoted in Robin Skelton, *The Writings of J.M. Synge* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 118.
[231] Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 326.

folklore, which was harmless, as long as it was kept within his exotic *oeuvre*. The *Cork Examiner* spearheaded the attacks on Yeats by pointing out that although 'Mr. Yeats' was 'the most ardent folklorist amongst us,' he could not defend the Clonmel horror.[232] Yeats maintained that the 'imaginative impulse – the quintessence of life – is our great need from folklore',[233] but now the hangover from pre-Christian Ireland had turned his imaginative impulse into savage reality, which ultimately meant that the *Cork Examiner* held the impresario of the Abbey Theatre in checkmate. An anonymous Irishwoman who wrote in earnest to the *Irish Times* neatly summarised the predicament that the *Cork Examiner* had placed Yeats in:

> That superstition of various kinds is widespread, we all know; but hitherto we have believed that it took only gentle forms and have been tender to it, hoping, indeed, that the Catholic priests in Ireland would not be too zealous to root it out. Its manifestations we looked upon with something of the same tenderness with which we regard the exquisite legends that have sprung up everywhere about the footsteps of the saints, and would have said that the world from which the peasant superstitions had disappeared was a baser, uglier, more unlovable world. [...] [We] had no conception of the horror lurking in darkness in such minds as those of Bridget Cleary's torturers [...] To hold the changeling above the fire on a shovel, or to thrust a red stick down its throat, is the drastic method proposed in the old stories of changelings [...] The Clonmel horror for the moment makes our innocent superstitions guilty. Are we, then, to do away with our fairies, our banshees, our leprechauns? [...] Are we to lose all the pretty host because there are savages in Clonmel?[234]

Yeats felt compelled to prove the innocence of changeling belief and at first he discussed the case at length with Edward Clodd, but anthropological discourse only accentuated the Darwinian savagery that Yeats staunchly avoided.[235] In a panic, Yeats scrambled to the folk and discussed the case with his uncle's clairvoyant servant, Mary Battle, who was 'very angry with the Tipperary countryman who burned his wife,' because his actions were a result of surplus superstition.[236] Triumphantly, Yeats returned to his writing table and published his authoritative defence of changeling folklore: 'The Tipperary witch-burner only half knew his own belief.'[237] Or was it that Yeats only half knew his own belief? Privately, Yeats knew that his knowledge of the fairies exchanged 'scientific curiosity [for] wisdom, peace, and a communion with the people'.[238] Nevertheless, he would read Frazer

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[232] "The Tipperary Horror," *Cork Examiner*, 28 March, 1895, 5.
[233] Yeats, *Uncollected Prose,* vol. 1: 189.
[234] "Irish Witches, Spells and Charms," *Irish Times*, 13 April, 1895, 4.
[235] See, Edward Clodd, *Tom Tit Tot: An Essay on Savage Philosophy in Folk-Tale* (London: Duckworth, 1898), 83.
[236] W.B. Yeats, *Uncollected Prose,* vol. 2, ed. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson (London: Macmillan, 1975), 277.
[237] W.B. Yeats, "Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places," in Lady Gregory, *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1970), 360n.
[238] W.B. Yeats, *Explorations: Selected by Mrs. W.B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 401.

contra Frazer so that anthropological discourse became, for Yeats, syncretic rather than comparative. Yeats did this to try and become closer with his informants, all the while substantiating his own quest for that which was primeval and holistic, maintaining that it was simply human nature to long to be with '[w]hatever flames upon the night.'[239] But this wasn't what Frazer had concluded; it was Frazer's supposition that mankind had evolved from primeval magical practices, and he argued that people who believed in magic were akin to 'the lowest savages surviving in the remotest corners of the world'.[240] Frazer was quick to point out that a woman's being 'slowly roasted to death as a witch in Ireland' merely demonstrated the 'inefficacy of magic' and constituted a 'confession of human ignorance and weakness.'[241] For Frazer, whatever flamed upon the night in South Tipperary smacked of Darwinism. And although Darwinism was something that Synge played hide and seek with all his life, it was a discourse that he could easily find should he need to, and in *The Playboy*, Darwinism was brought to play on Yeats's stage of national-popular sovereignty. Alarm bells were ringing.

Surviving with the Unfit

In 1871, the year of Synge's birth, Charles Darwin published *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex,* a book which suggested that 'man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin'.[242] If *On the Origin of Species* had assaulted Victorian integrity, then *The Descent of Man* obliterated it; Darwin had proof positive that the genealogy of man was fundamentally simian. The tremors from Darwin's evolutionary science were seismic and although the widowed Mrs. Synge raised her son on a diet of Protestant evangelicalism that carefully avoided all Darwinian questions of evolution, the tremors produced hairline cracks that matured with Synge. The dramatist claims that he first read *On the Origins of Species* as a teenager:

> When I was about fourteen I obtained a book of Darwin's. It opened in my hands at a passage, where he asks how can we explain the similarity between a man's hand and a bird's or bat's wings except by evolution. I flung the book aside and rushed out into the open air – it was summer and we were in the country – the sky seemed to have lost its blue and the grass its green.[243]

[239] W.B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Russell K. Alspach (London: Macmillan, 1966), 931.
[240] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 54.
[241] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 55.
[242] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: Penguin, 2004), 689.
[243] *CW,* vol. 2: 10.

This, however, is incorrect. Synge, in fact, began reading *On the Origins of Species* in October of 1895 (at the age of twenty-four), i.e. 6 months after the Clonmel horror made headline news.[244] After reading Darwin's seminal work, Synge immediately 'writhed in an agony of doubt' over 'the important service' that Darwin had paid him.[245] It was not long before he launched himself into Darwin's treatise on the evolution of humankind, *The Descent of Man*, finishing it on 12 October.[246] Synge was fascinated by Darwin, even though he had come to his works in reverse; comparative anthropology and indeed, Frazer's *The Golden Bough* were inspired by Darwinian principles; Frazer's analysis of the Clonmel horror, which suggested that 'the polite world' was 'startled'[247] over Bridget's death is explicitly Darwinist in its tone. If Frazer's comparative anthropology had helped Synge to understand changeling belief by establishing the concepts of primitive religion, Synge wanted to understand what these concepts were predicated upon and within Social Darwinism the dramatist found his answer. Drifting around the National Library of Ireland Synge complemented his reading of Darwin by searching for articles that considered comparative sociology, finally settling for the work of Herbert Spencer,[248] the scholar that coined the phrase: "the survival of the fittest".

Darwin's suppositions on what would later be classified as Social Darwinism explained society as being a collection of heterogeneous social groups that established codes of behaviour in order to accommodate each other's existence. These codes of behaviour are conducive towards evolutionary progress because they regulate natural conflicts between social groups; the fittest of these social groups do not just survive this conflict but they adapt in accordance with the theory of natural selection and, in turn, this naturally raises the evolution of society. Darwin believed that societies evolved at the behest of a leading social group and those that were in the throes of evolution were left to languish. Darwin advocated that 'nearly the whole civilised world, were once in barbarous condition' but 'some savages have recently improved in some of their simpler arts'.[249] But some savages had failed to evolve at all. Like Synge, Yeats was fascinated by Social Darwinism and in the privacy of his own diary he would use Social Darwinism to demean new acquaintances like George Moore, whom Yeats met just after the Clonmel horror:

> I have been told that the crudity common to all the Moores came from the mother's family, Mayo squireens, probably half-peasants in education and occupation, for his father was a man of education and power and old

[244] TCD MS: 4416, f.129v. Synge's diary for 30 September 1895, simply reads 'Began the Origin of Species'.
[245] *CW*, vol. 2: 10.
[246] Synge's diary for 4 October, 1895 reads 'Began the Descent of Man' (TCD: MS 4416, f.131v). He would read it for over a week and on 12 October, 1895 his diary reads 'Finished Descent of Man' (TCD: MS: 4416, f.135v).
[247] Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 54.
[248] Synge's extensive notes on Spencer's work are found in TCD: MS 4379, f.57r.
[249] Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 171.

> descent. His mother's blood seems to have affected him and his brother as the peasant strain has affected Edward Martyn. There has been a union of incompatibles and consequent sterility [...] Both men are examples of the way Irish civilization is held back by the lack of education of Irish Catholic women.[250]

However, unlike Synge, Yeats could not bring himself to juxtapose Social Darwinism with those aspects of Irish culture, such as the fairies, that were perfectly suited to a Social Darwinist reading. It can be argued that Yeats steered clear of such scientific readings of the fairies because it likened his praxis to the fetishisation of savages – a discourse that had perennially orbited Irish culture under British rule. When *The Playboy* went into performance, the stock image of the Irish peasant in Britain was that of the ape, or what Charles Kingsley's memoirs termed as the human chimpanzee.[251] Thus, Yeats bitterly complained when he found that:

> [...] some folk-lorist [sic] is merely scientific, [because] he lacks the needful subtle imaginative sympathy to tell his stories well. There are innumerable little turns of expression and quaint phrases that in the mouth of a peasant give half the meaning, and often the whole charm. The man of science is too often a person who has exchanged his soul for a formula; and when he captures a folk-tale, nothing remains with him for all his trouble but a wretched lifeless thing with the down rubbed off and a pin thrust through its once all-living body. I object to the "honest folk-lorist," not because his versions are accurate, but because they are inaccurate, or rather incomplete.[252]

Synge, however, was a Modern primitivist and his dramatisation of changeling belief was certainly scientific in its formula. Nevertheless, Synge conceals this scientific formula with his soulful and idiosyncratic Anglo-Irish idiom and this poetic code dovetails with his scientific reading of folklore. In turn this not only gives his drama the 'certain brusqueness of attack'[253] of folk poetry, it also means that this attack is particularly poignant due to its provenance in comparative social science. Synge had no problem with the application of science to folklore, nor did he have a problem with an aesthetic application of Modern primitivism and neither did Sheehan. And just when Yeats thought he had saved changeling belief from complete degradation, the young medic had something else to say about Synge's dramaturgical content.

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[250] W.B. Yeats, *Memoirs* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 270-71.
[251] F.S.L. Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, 1890-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 12.
[252] Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats,* vol. 1: 229. W.B. Yeats to the Editor of the *Academy*, 2 October, 1890.
[253] TCD MS: 4382, f.51v.

The Freedom of the Theatre

When Yeats arrived back from Aberdeen, the critic of Catholic progressivism, W.P. Ryan, wrote to the Abbey's Secretary, W.A. Henderson, claiming that '[w]ith the coming of Yeats I knew that the trouble would be aggravated.'[254] Ryan was correct and although Yeats had become increasingly withdrawn he now attempted to save face by organising an imperious debate concerning "The Freedom of the Theatre" on the Monday night (4 February) after *The Playboy* finished its run. Conveniently citing illness, Synge chose not to attend; in any case he thought it was pointless trying to reason with 'low ruffians [who are] not men of intellect and honesty'.[255] But Yeats could not be dissuaded and, sensing his chance to hone his innate ability to pontificate, he dropped admission to half price and donned a bespoke dinner suit, all before taking to the Abbey stage with acute intellectual bravado. Yeats called upon those mutineers to put their money where their mouths were by inviting them to engage in 'the most free discussion [so] that we may get at last some kind of sound criticism in this country.'[256] Skulking in the shadows during all of this was Holloway and he noted in his diary that 'the Cecilia Street Medical Students formed part of the claque'[257] that attended the debate. Sheehan was back. After Yeats had finished his formal address, the chair of the debate, Patrick Kenny, a man who had little sentiment for the Catholic Church's romanticisation of Gaelic culture, brushed off Ellen Duncan's (the journalist who coined the phrase 'the drama of the drawingroom'[258]) request to speak because he 'was not going to be put off his purpose'.[259] Instead, Kenny invited Sheehan to take the stand whereupon the trainee doctor 'claimed his right to speak as a medical student'[260] and amidst an onslaught of catcalling he congratulated Synge's dramaturgical praxis because it depicted characters 'that ever since he studied any science he had paid strong attention to.'[261] And then Sheehan let slip the dogs of war by offering his *coup de grâce*: '[I have] never seen the doctrine of survival of the fittest treated with such living force as by Mr. Synge.'[262] Sheehan's sucker punch sent Yeats reeling; the little boat of science was back, and at her helm stood Darwin with Synge as a typically nonchalant first mate; in the privacy of his notebook he wrote that

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[254] W.A. Henderson, NLI MS: POS 7271, f.92v.
[255] *CL*, vol. 1: 289. J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood, 5 February, 1907.
[256] W.B. Yeats, quoted in W.A. Henderson, NLI MS: 1720. This speech was reprinted in *Arrow*. See, W.B. Yeats, "Mr. Yeats' Opening Speech At The Debate of February, 4th, At the Abbey Theatre," *Arrow*, 23 February, 1907, 6.
[257] Holloway, NLI MS: 1805, 4 February, 1907, f.85.
[258] Duncan, "The Playboy," 5.
[259] "The Freedom of the Play," *Irish Times*, 5 February, 1907, 8.
[260] James Kilroy, *The 'Playboy' Riots* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1971), 86.
[261] Kilroy, *The 'Playboy' Riots*, 86.
[262] Kilroy, *The 'Playboy' Riots*, 86.

'WBY's idea of saving W[orld] by Ireland [is] like decorating cabin when ship is sinking'.[263]

Just like the Clonmel horror, *The Playboy* disturbances were reported to the Irish populace as a metanarrative that concerned Irish cultural and social malaise. Social Darwinism was repeatedly invoked during the trial that followed in the wake of the Clonmel horror as changeling belief was utilised in order to draw analogies between African and Irish civilization.[264] E.F. Benson speculated on the Clonmel horror in that respectable periodical of the London literati, *The Nineteenth Century*, by drawing analogies between the Clonmel community and Hottentots, such as the Zulus, that believed in primitive superstition. In doing so, Benson reminded his readers that the Irish race had carried civilization 'back to a stratum of belief belonging altogether to a primitive and savage era.'[265] In *The Playboy* Synge follows Benson's trajectory of going back to the future with his Mayo community, which caused spectators to draw analogies between the Irish and African civilizations, as recalled by a shocked Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh: '"Enough!" howled one man in an excess of self-righteousness indignation, "the hideous caricature would be slanderous of a Kaffir kraal!"'[266] The *Irish Independent* attempted to critique *The Playboy* because the folk did not behave 'like omadhauns [and they] don't suddenly develop a passion for killing their fathers',[267] but as *The Playboy* advocates, suppositions such as these were spurious because both communities in Clonmel and Mayo did act like "Hottentots" and their passion for torturing members of the community developed at an alarming pace once Bridget and Christy were associated with the fairy changeling. What emerges from the public discourse across print media contradicts Jeremy Bentham's postulation that the daily newspaper made Victorian culture quintessentially modern because it erased any lingering attachment to backward and superstitious beliefs. In this equation Bentham valued print media because 'before this talisman, not only devils, but ghosts, vampires, witches, and all their kindred tribes, are driven out of the land, never to return again: the touch of holy water is not so intolerable to them as the bare smell of printers' ink.'[268] Print media may be conducive towards the imagined community of nationalism[269] but with respect to the Clonmel horror and *The Playboy*, the daily newspaper did not so much erase superstition as afford the residual culture from pre-Christian Ireland a symbolic enfranchisement.

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[263] TCD MS: 4396, f.62r.
[264] Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 115.
[265] E.F. Benson, *The Collected Ghost Stories of E.F. Benson*, ed. Richard Daly (London: Robinson, 1992), 619.
[266] Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years*, 81-82. A Kaffir kraal is a Zulu village.
[267] Jacques, "A Queer Hero In Mr. Synge's Play Produced at the Abbey Theatre," *Irish Independent*, 28 January, 1907, 4.
[268] Jeremy Bentham, *The Works of Jeremy Bentham: Published Under the Superintendence of His Executor, John Bowring*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1843), 400.
[269] See, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 37-46.

The Clonmel horror and *The Playboy* encouraged a counterpublic discourse as the Catholic middle classes closed ranks and attempted to sniff out those changelings within their own class, thus negating any imagined community of Irish nationalism. These changelings needed to be promptly identified because according to comparative social scientists, if a changeling survived to maturity it would be akin to those savages that did not have the requisite etiquette to belong in polite society. As Carole G. Silver has suggested, for the Catholic middle classes, fairy changelings were the 'products of every sort of underclass', and so they represented 'the horrible possibilities of the behaviour of such classes.'[270]. The changeling, then, was not just concomitant with racial concerns; it was also indexical of anxiety over middle-class rectitude and etiquette and it is not without significance that Synge mobilised these two anxieties in *The Playboy*. The fact that the middle classes acted like Hottentots could not have surprised Synge after he had read the Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer, who presented the dramatist with an alternative but equally alarming hypothesis. In *The Principles of Sociology* Spencer maintained that primitive peoples had degenerated from an advanced state of existence; evolution wasn't fixed and it could operate on a sliding scale. In his diary, the dramatist gave a précis of Spencer's theory of evolution:

> *Dec. 1.* I have been reading Herbert Spencer and my creed is now very simple. Humanity has evolved form the conditions of the world, and will return to the nothing it has come from. Each separate life is but a ripple on the waves, - a blade of grass on the roadside. For those who fail, there is no hope.[271]

After reading Spencer, Synge understood that those races that were inclined to devolve were likely to pass on their genetics to the next generation. For Synge, the Clonmel horror and *The Playboy* disturbances were symptomatic of the evolutionary decline of Catholic Ireland and, as Silver suggests, the changeling was 'a fantasy image that both displaced and conveyed the anxiety of [the] educated middle-class'[272] and so the changeling was an index for the 'loss of security, of power, and of hope for the future'[273] of a newly enfranchised class. What these classes needed was strong leaders (another prerequisite of Spencer's theory of social evolution) and for Synge there was little dispute over who was the fittest to survive.

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[270] Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples*, 87.
[271] *CW*, vol. 2: 29.
[272] Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples*, 8.
[273] Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples*, 8.

'A Deposit of Evil'[274]

In 1905 Synge toured the Congested Districts of Ireland (areas on the eastern and southern seaboard that did not have enough land for common pasturage) with J.B. Yeats for the *Manchester Guardian* and he made the conscious decision not to lift 'the rags from my mother country for to tickle the sentiments of Manchester.'[275] But two years later he had lifted every single rag and in that same year he decided to debunk the fairy faith in his poem, "The Passing of the Shee". The poem takes its impetus from George Russell's (who declined to comment on Synge's dramatisation of changeling belief at the Freedom of the Theatre debate)[276] pictorial representation of the fairies:

> Adieu, sweet Angus, Maeve and Fand,
> Ye plummed yet skinny Shee,
> That poets played with hand in hand
> To learn their ecstasy.
>
> We'll search in Red Dan Sally's ditch,
> And drink in Tubber fair,
> Or poach with Red Dan Philly's bitch
> The badger and the hare.[277]

Synge's reference to poets playing with the fairies 'hand in hand'[278] is index for Yeats's poem, "The Stolen Child," in which the speaker summons the efficacy of changeling belief: 'Come away, O human child! / To the waters and the wild / With a faery, hand in hand'[...].[279] Synge, however, prefers the simplified materialism of folk culture, involving fairs and the poaching of game, to the Romantic idealism that manifests itself in Yeats's version of the fairy faith. And so, if Synge believed the fairies to be culturally redundant then, at this juncture, it is pertinent to question Synge's ethics when staging changeling belief. In his first two productions (*The Shadow of the Glen* [1903] and *Riders to the Sea*) Synge was careful to dramatise the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland with sentiment and aptitude but now, in *The Playboy*, Synge was destroying what he had tried to enfranchise, for the sake of seeking revenge on the 'scurrility and ignorance and treachery'[280] of Catholic bourgeois critics such as Padraig Pearse, who could not but help invoking evolutionary theory in his critique of *The Playboy*: 'he is using the stage for the

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[274] "The Case of Witchcraft in Tipperary," *Irish Times*, 5 July, 1895, 5.
[275] *CL*, vol. 1: 111. J.M. Synge to Stephen MacKenna, 30 May, 1905.
[276] William M. Murphy, *Prodigal Father: The Life of John Butler Yeats, 1839-1922* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 316.
[277] *CW*, vol. 1: 38.
[278] *CW*, vol. 1: 38.
[279] W.B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 45.
[280] *CW*, vol. 2: 283n.

propagation of a monstrous gospel of animalism, or revolt against sane and sweet ideals, of bitter contempt for all that is fine and worthy, not merely in Christian morality, but in human nature itself'.[281] Synge advocated that medical students were inclined to have 'scurrilous thoughts'[282] but just for once he must have welcomed Sheehan's seditious comment, which resuscitated all of those uncomfortable memories concerning the Clonmel horror.

Walter Benjamin has argued that '[h]istory is not the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now'.[283] According to Benjamin, progressive historicism is empty because it is a model of historical time that is essentially bottomless, since historical event after historical event can be stacked into it; this articulation of historical time is unaffected by the horror of history, accounting for progressive historicism's homogeneity. The Clonmel horror's resonance with *The Playboy* created a disjunctive cultural constellation where the past and the present offered Synge's spectator an experience with the past instead of an experience of the past. The difference may seem subtle but it is imperative to an articulation of cultural materialism. The experience with the memory of the Clonmel horror allowed the past to sit uncomfortably within the present, whereas an experience of the memory of the Clonmel horror was conducive to treating the past as history and memory as myth; as Benjamin suggests, the historical/cultural materialist 'leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called "Once upon a time" in historicism's bordello.'[284] Silver points out that '[c]hangeling episodes usually occurred in rural places and among poor or working-class Roman Catholic'[285] communities and what made matters worse for Synge's Catholic bourgeois spectator was the fact that the Clearys were not members of the rural working class but rather, they were upwardly mobile mercantile Catholics that lived in a slate-roofed cottage, with 'three rooms, a kitchen and two bed-rooms [sic]',[286] and owned a Singer sewing machine. As Hubert Butler points out, nothing about the Clearys' life was an indication of 'mystery, remoteness [or] primeval superstition'[287]; no Darwinian apes from the pages of *Punch* could be found here. Essentially Sheehan was reminding the Catholic bourgeoisie of their sentimental attachment to the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland, which constantly threatened to discredit Catholic cultural hegemony. At every turn, the fairies made themselves known to the Catholic middle classes; Sir William Wilde observed that 'fairy doctors of repute [live] but a few miles from the metropolis [...] [on] the circular road

[281] P.H. Pearse, "The Passing of Anglo-Irish Drama," *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 9 February, 1907, 7.
[282] Synge, *Letters to Molly*, 61. J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood, 29 November, 1906.
[283] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn and ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), 252-53.
[284] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 254.
[285] Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples*, 67.
[286] "Tipperary Horror," 5.
[287] Butler, *Escape from the Anthill*, 63.

of Dublin'.[288] As the Clonmel horror and *The Playboy* demonstrated, when the fairies did make a guest appearance, they could be mobilised to substantiate the supposition that the Catholic middle classes were not as pious as they postulated. In both *The Playboy* and the Clonmel horror, changeling folklore, whether believed or disbelieved, was used to explain the cultural anxiety of the Catholic bourgeoisie, thus reinforcing that they still embodied a backward and pre-political consciousness which was, as the *Irish Times* pointed out, indexical of 'a deposit of evil.'[289] Synge's dramatisation of changeling belief can be seen as a codified rearguard defence of Anglo-Irish sovereignty across a familiar ideological battleground. The dramatist's conjecture was clear and Sheehan merely made it public: the Clonmel horror wasn't just a one-off occurrence, and it was still possible to find believers in changelings amongst the Catholic middle classes.

The resonance of changeling belief in *The Playboy*, which emerges in order to privilege the Anglo-Irish battle for socio-political hegemony, is in a curious dialogue with Synge's studies in Celtology. After studying with Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, Synge was aware that the fairies were the descendants of the *Tuatha Dé Danaan* (People of the Goddess Danu) that were forced into the underworld by the Sons of Mil, who were said to be genealogically linked to the incumbent Irish populace. And while Synge's notes from de Jubainville's lectures concluded that the 'Tutatha de Danann [are] the representations of principal light, life, knowledge',[290] Synge was content to consider the fairies as an innate Irish race that had been displaced because they could not survive with the fittest. For Synge, the parallels to the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy's displacement of Catholic Ireland would have been clear. By this symbolic logic the fairies were indexical of the Catholic middle classes, whose battle for state-orientated nationalism was severely discredited in the wake of the Clonmel horror and *The Playboy* disturbances; after all, it was these class formations that identified the fairy changeling. In *The Playboy* changeling belief is caught within the kaleidoscope of Synge's Ascendancy gaze and in the process a peculiar dialectic of class insecurity and Social Darwinism emerges from the fairy faith. As Yeats demonstrated in *On the Boiler*, Social Darwinism could be used to promote the science of eugenics, which, in turn, could be made to appease Anglo-Irish class insecurity; with respect to 'the uneducatable masses' Yeats believed that 'it will become the duty of the educated classes to seize and control' the modes of production so that the 'docile masses may submit'.[291] For Yeats, intelligence is consistent with class background and 'sooner or later we must limit the families of the unintelligent classes'.[292] If Social Darwinism promoted the creation of a

[288] William Wilde, *Irish Popular Superstitions* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1979), 28.
[289] "The Case of Witchcraft in Tipperary," 5.
[290] TCD MS: 4379, f.65r.
[291] W.B. Yeats, *On the Boiler* (Dublin: Cuala, 1939), 19.
[292] Yeats, *On the Boiler*, 20.

social elite that could displace inferior groups, then after reading Darwin and Spencer, Synge knew that societies were dependent on social elites in order to bring those struggling with evolution out of the benighted shadows. However, even though the elite would try its best to raise the standard of evolution, certain classes were simply unable to evolve and for Spencer this is why societies are heterogeneous. In his notebook, Synge recorded Spencer's evolutionary theory on the creation of heterogeneous societies: 'Formula of evolution = Evolution interpretation of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion, during which the matter ~~become~~ passes from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite coherent heterogeneity.'[293] The Clonmel horror and *The Playboy* must have proven to Synge that Catholic bourgeois Ireland was unable to evolve and, in one deft move, Synge had appropriated the Social Darwinian subtext of changeling folklore and was now applying it to the Catholic bourgeoisie that competed with the Anglo-Irish for socio-political hegemony.

Synge's mobilisation of the fairy faith in order to defend Anglo-Irish class security could seem to redress Catholic Ireland's attempt to indict Lady Alice Kyteler, a woman of Hiberno-Norman descent, for witchcraft in 1324. Richard Ledrede, the Franciscan bishop of Ossory, County Kilkenny, indicted Kyteler and that national scandal also involved an alarming amount of sex and violence; Kyteler was accused of acquiring her powers of sorcery through sexual intercourse via the incubus of Robert Artisson.[294] The accusation of witchcraft emanated from Kyteler's fourth husband, Sir John Le Poer who, when on his deathbed, believed that he was dying because of Kyteler's manipulation of poison and sorcery; after his death, Le Poer's children and Kyteler's previous three husbands testified that they too believed her to be a witch. If newspapers considered the Clonmel horror as a case of witchcraft then, just as in the Kyteler case, the accusation of witchcraft can be brought down to a lowest common denominator: sexual infidelity. Furthermore, just as in the Clonmel horror, wherever there is talk of witchcraft and sexual infidelity there is also the concomitance of le Braz's third defining feature of primitive Irish life: 'savage violence'.[295] As Kyteler's situation snowballed, she quickly became a wanted woman for being 'the leader of a group of heretics and witches who sacrificed to the Devil at nocturnal meetings and performed revolting magical rites to entrap and murder men or render them impotent'.[296] Kyteler managed to flee from Ledrede with her supposed *fait* accomplice, Basilia Petronilla, to England, where she disappears from the archive. However, the Church did manage to seize Basilia's mother, also Kyteler's maidservant, Petronilla de Meath, and

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[293] TCD MS: 4379, f.92v.
[294] Anne Neary, "The Origins and Character of the Kilkenny Witchcraft Case of 1324," in *The Proceedings Of The Royal Irish Academy*, vol. 83 (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1983), 337.
[295] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival,* 173.
[296] L.S. Davidson and J.O. Ward, *The Sorcery Trial of Alice Kyteler* (New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1993), 1.

they 'whipped her, extracted a confession and burnt her on 3 November 1324'.[297] Orbiting the wider discourse of the Kyteler case was the question of *habeas corpus*; the Irish Catholic Church understood witchcraft, magic and sorcery as heresy but English law necessitated that maleficence should be tried in a court of law rather than by acts of public torture.[298] And so, the Kyteler case, just like the Clonmel horror, set up a great divide between Anglo-Irish Ireland and Catholic Ireland.

Yeats may have fetishised the Kyteler case – '[t]hat insolent fiend Robert Artisson / To whom the love-lorn Lady Kyteler brought / Bronze peacock feathers, red combs of her cocks'[...][299] – but his fetishisation was one that necessitated fornicating with the incubus, not the 'savage violence'[300] and 'savage paganism'[301] that were corollaries of witchcraft. Synge's Social Darwinist reading of changeling belief and witchcraft in South Tipperary placed Yeats on very thin ice because in *The Playboy* Synge had privileged the savage sexuality, violence and paganism that was a corollary of changeling belief. However, Synge had, in fact, offered Yeats a golden opportunity. In Yeats's famous speech to Seanad Éireann (Senate of Ireland) on 11 June 1925, he rebutted the question posed by *An Cathaoirleach* (the chairman) who criticised Yeats's invocation of C.S. Parnell's infidelity with Katharine O'Shea as a means to criticise a proposed bill of divorce, and then stirringly moved onto a defence of the Ascendancy:

> DR. YEATS: [...] We had a good deal of trouble about Parnell when he married a woman who became thereby Mrs. Parnell.
>
> AN CATHAOIRLEACH: Do you not think we might leave the dead alone?
>
> DR YEATS: I am passing on. I would hate to leave the dead alone. [...] I am proud to consider myself a typical man of that minority. We against whom you have done this thing are no petty people. We are one of the great stocks of Europe. We are the people of Burke; we are the people of Grattan; we are the people of Swift, the people of Emmet, the people of Parnell. We have created most of the modern literature of this country. We have created the best of its political intelligence.[302]

In a similar fashion, in the wake of *The Playboy* disturbances Synge defended himself by advocating Ascendancy virtue: 'I believe in Ireland. I believe the nation that made a place in history by seventeen centuries of manhood, a nation that has begotten Grattan and Emmet and Parnell will not be brought to complete insanity in these last days by what is senile and

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[297] Davidson and Ward, *The Sorcery Trial of Alice Kyteler*, 9.
[298] Neary, "The Origins and Character of the Kilkenny Witchcraft Case of 1324," 336.
[299] Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems*, 433.
[300] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival,* 173.
[301] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival,* 173.
[302] W.B. Yeats, *The Senate Speeches of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Donald R. Pearce (London: Prendeville Publishing Limited, 2001), 87-88.

slobbering in the doctrine of the Gaelic League'.[303] And so, for Synge and Yeats, whether they knew it or not, Ascendancy shame and the embarrassment of the Kyteler case in 1324 had been implicitly reversed on Catholic Ireland by the Clonmel horror. *The Playboy* capitalised on this embarrassment, presenting Yeats with his golden opportunity as he proceeded to don full evening regalia and stride forth upon the Abbey stage, whereupon he began to lecture the Catholic bourgeoisie on the efficacy of Synge's consciousness and, by corollary, the efficacy of the Anglo-Irish consciousness; to Yeats it seemed to matter not that Synge was setting the fairy faith within evolutionary theory. What is significant about Synge's Social Darwinist reading of Catholic Ireland's morbid fascination with changeling belief is that it mirrors the critical and cultural discourse of his time. Far away from the boards of the Abbey, Horace Plunkett argued that the 'defect in the industrial character of Roman Catholics'[304] was due to the fact that Irish Catholicism was far from liturgically orthodox because it was punctuated by vernacular custom and tradition: Popular Catholicism. Therefore, according to Plunkett, the Catholic bourgeoisie should follow the example set by the Anglo-Irish because it was what 'we Protestants conceive to be a simpler Christianity',[305] which is why 'Protestants have given and continue to give, a fine example of thrift and industry to the rest of the nation.'[306] In his riposte to Plunkett, Rev. M. O'Riordan attempted to defend the Catholic populace's lingering sentiment to the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland and, in doing so, he was forced to defend the Clonmel horror:

> those superstitions which [Plunkett] tells us play such moral havoc in backward districts, would likewise cease to be superstitions; because those poor folk to whom he alludes are no doubt quite sincere as to the righteousness of their beliefs or customs. He does not specify what those "survivals of superstition" are, and he therefore precludes me from discussing them on their merits. Does he allude to the notorious Tipperary witch case? Prescinding from the question whether the chief actor in that tragedy was a lunatic, or not – and religious maniacs are to be found everywhere, that his was a singular case appears from the fact, carefully concealed by our traducers, that he was hooted by his neighbours whose moral instincts were shocked by his action. We are supposed to be always on the defence, making apologies for our beliefs and customs; even held responsible for the conduct of fanatics or fools. But the home of the "simpler Christianity" across the Chanel has been the home of superstition and fanaticism from the days of the Lancashire witches and Johanna Southcote down to the faith-healers, the spirit-rappers [and] the crystal gazers.[307]

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[303] *CW,* vol. 2: 399.
[304] Horace Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century* (London: John Murray, 1904), 101-102.
[305] Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century* (London: John Murray, 1904), 103.
[306] Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century* (London: John Murray, 1904), 120.
[307] M. O'Riordan, *Catholicity and Progress in Ireland* (London: Keegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1905), 248.

If O'Riordan correctly argued that traducers such as Plunkett failed to consider that Michael Cleary was 'hooted by his neighbours whose moral instincts were shocked by his action',[308] then the community in *The Playboy* failed to inform the authorities of their 'savage violence'[309] because 'savage sexuality'[310] and 'savage paganism'[311] were naturalised in material conditions. There is, then, a 'great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed',[312] and the homeopathic magical ritual that changeling exorcism necessitated in both the Clonmel horror and *The Playboy* appears, in the final analysis, as a rationalising tenet that was mobilised by Catholic Ireland. According to Patricia Lysaght, 'the changeling belief could have arisen to account for the sudden or unexpected return to normality',[313] which is why Father Ryan watched Michael Cleary 'tearing his hair and behaving like a madman'[314] outside the parish church in Drangan as he proceeded to ask for confession and, similarly, after Christy's exit Pegeen Mike laments how she 'lost the only playboy of the western world'.[315] But, in truth, changeling belief as a rationalising tenet was also a perfect narrative structure for Synge, who could use the critique of comparative social science in order to defend his own class insecurity. And just as for Michael Cleary and Pegeen Mike, the sudden return to normality after changeling belief had been mobilised in *The Playboy* was far from comfortable; Synge's pyrrhic victory effectively ended the Ascendancy's battle for hegemony as the fervour for Catholic bourgeois nationalism increased palpably.

'Give Church and State the Lie'[316]

While it is perhaps a little farfetched to postulate that the disturbances were exclusively caused by *The Playboy*'s resonance with the Clonmel horror, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that Sheehan's comments catalysed the disturbances. For whichever way the disturbances are considered, Sheehan's likening of the events in *The Playboy* to the Clonmel horror unleashed the shame and humiliation of the vast majority of Catholic, bourgeois Ireland. Synge gave the Catholic middle classes the religious discontents of Catholic Ireland, which was, by his analysis, a subculture that was neatly brushed underneath the carpet by Catholic hegemony. However, although Synge realised that he could use the evolutionary stigma that surrounded changeling belief in order to seek

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[308] O'Riordan, *Catholicity and Progress in Ireland*, 248. For details of how Michael Cleary was betrayed by the community see, Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*, 18-19.
[309] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.
[310] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.
[311] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 173.
[312] *CW*, vol. 4: 169.
[313] Patricia Lysaght, "Fairylore from the Midlands of Ireland," in *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, ed. Peter Narváez (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 35.
[314] "The Tipperary Burning Case," 5.
[315] *CW*, vol. 4: 173.
[316] J.M. Synge, in Henderson, NLI MS: 1720.

revenge on his Catholic critics, he does this at the expense of betraying a subterranean culture that he once tried to enfranchise. As Synge learnt about the fairies on Aran he was warned against 'Protestants who don't believe in any of these things and [they] do be making fun of us'.[317] Synge had succeeded in doing just that.

If ideology establishes itself in relation to text by representing and/or transmuting material conditions then *The Playboy* exploited the disjunctive space between the fairy faith as fantasy object and lived experience in Catholic Ireland. The pre-Christian sensibilities attached to changeling belief may have attempted to transmute the modes of production, but ultimately it only succeeded in reinforcing it as Catholic bourgeois nationalists advocated that the Ascendancy was far removed from the politics of the people. Unlike in *Riders to the Sea*, the modern Irish political subject that used the cultural vestiges of pre-Christian Ireland to rationalise material conditions emerged from *The Playboy* as backward and pre-political. Revenge on Catholic bourgeois Ireland came at a cost. The supposition that Synge had planned his revenge on Catholic Ireland in order to promote the struggle for Anglo-Irish hegemony is substantiated by his self-reflexive missive under J.B. Yeats's portrait of the dramatist in rehearsals for *The Playboy*: 'If Church and State reply / Give Church and State the lie.'[318] When the Dublin *Evening Mail* led the cannonade of complaints by pointing out that if Synge was 'stupid enough to suggest that the Irish people are cannibals or gorillas, [then the reviewer's] hand will not fumble for the sword-hilt',[319] Synge, true to his memorandum, told the *Evening Mail* that his play was just 'a comedy, an extravaganza, made to amuse'.[320] But Patrick Kenny, that critic who invited Sheehan to the soapbox, wasn't as easily fooled. Kenny, who was in the 'industry' of 'telling the truth' and making 'many things quite stirringly articulate'[321] praised Synge for his Darwinian account of Irish culture, wherein 'the survival of the unfittest is the established law of life.'[322] It was, Kenny added, as if 'human specimens most calculated to bring the race lower and lower' populated *The Playboy*. And just like the communities in South Tipperary and Mayo, on realising a changeling may have been in their midst, the rioting Catholic bourgeoisie had a similar reaction: 'We fear to face the thing [...] We scream.'[323] The dramatist concurred. 'I am glad', Synge said, that Kenny realised there are 'several sides' to *The Playboy* and there 'may still be others if anyone cares to look for them.'[324]

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[317] *CW,* vol. 2: 180.
[318] Synge, in Henderson, NLI MS: 1720.
[319] H.S.D. "A Dramatic Freak," *Dublin Evening Mail*, 28 January, 1907, 2.
[320] Synge, quoted in A.F., "I Don't Care a Rap," 2.
[321] Patrick Kenny, *The Sorrows of Ireland* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1907), 14.
[322] Pat, "That Dreadful Play," *Irish Times*, 30 January, 1907, 9.
[323] Pat, "That Dreadful Play," 9.
[324] *CL*, vol. 1: 286. J.M. Synge to the Editor of the *Irish Times*, 30 January, 1907.

'FILTHY JOB – TO WASTE AND DIE'[1]

I asked if I got sick and died, would you
With my black funeral go walking to.

- J.M. Synge[2]

The final week (17-24 March 1909) of Synge's battle with Hodgkin's disease was an abeyant affair. Vital activity deserted the thirty-seven year old at every turn and yet W.B. Yeats was still quietly watching over his star attraction, the author of *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907). Or was he? Synge was dying young and although Yeats was absent from the Elpis nursing home in Dublin, he managed to infiltrate the medical ranks through a friend that he disliked: Maurice Joy.[3] Bed-ridden just down the corridor, Joy, a Kerryman of letters, was merely the supporting act to Synge's genius, but if he could relay precise information to Yeats he could possibly win the poet's sentiments. Yeats had to be kept in the loop because he had to try and do something, that much he had been told by the Abbey patron, John Quinn, who had replied 'like a raging lunatic'[4] to the news concerning Synge's terminal illness.

However, the whole affair of Synge's final days turned out to be a complete haze to Yeats. Maurice Joy was never there; he had been present when Synge had made an earlier visit to hospital but when the end was nigh there was no Joy to be found.[5] During that final week, Yeats was in Dublin but he was unable to visit the nursing home because he was preoccupied with the state of Ireland, concluding that '[t]he soul of Ireland has become a vapour and her body a stone'.[6] The dramatist that once brooked no rivals was afforded little postulation by Yeats. Even the heraldic symbols upon the Yeats family's seventeenth-century coat of arms were given more attention than Synge.[7] John Butler Yeats had 'sent word at once to Quinn – that most intense man will be greatly relieved'.[8] But he wasn't. Quinn 'seemed to think that no one cared whether Synge lived or died' and so 'the

[1] TCD MS: 4410, f.35r.
[2] *CW*, vol. 1: 64.
[3] Maurice Joy, a Kerryman with an English accent, orbited the periphery of the Revival. Yeats certainly thought that Joy's illness was not as pressing as Synge's: 'To be operated on at the same time as Synge struck one as sheer insolence'. See, W.B. Yeats, *Memoirs* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 202-203.
[4] J.B. Yeats, *Letters To His Son: W.B. Yeats and Others*, 1869-1922, ed. Joseph Hone (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), 109. J.B. Yeats to W.B. Yeats, 1 July, 1908.
[5] W.J. McCormack, *Fool of the Family: A Life of J.M. Synge* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000), 379.
[6] Yeats, *Memoirs*, 178.
[7] Yeats, *Memoirs*, 196.
[8] Yeats, *Letters To His Son*, 106. J.B. Yeats to W.B. Yeats, 1 July, 1908.

hopelessness of activity in this and other cases [had turned his] blood into vitriolic fury.'[9] It was not until 23 March when Molly Allgood reported that the nursing home had decided against giving the patient his evening meal, that Yeats was stirred into action. 'Whether to close the Abbey or to keep it open while he still lives?'[10] was Yeats's only pressing concern and, returning to his diary, he nonchalantly bid Synge *adieu*: 'I feel Synge's coming death less now than when he first became ill. I am used to the thought of it and I do not find I pity him.'[11]

Synge's dying wish was to be moved from room 31 to room 29 in the Elpis nursing home, a room that bathed in the sun each morning.[12] Upon entering the room Synge was said to have remarked: 'This is a nice room, and I already feel better in it. Now I shall be able to see the Dublin mountains.'[13] If he could not die in the company of his tramps and tinkers then he would die looking at their natural habitat. Joseph Holloway's indirect presence was felt right to the end. Like Yeats he also had a source in the nursing home but his was considerably more reliable; the patient in the room next to Synge's was Kitty Clinch who was friends with Holloway's niece. In his diary, Holloway recorded the information that was relayed to him: '[Synge] read the Bible each day, but refused to see a clergyman' but then '[h]e asked about one o'clock on Wednesday morning [24 March, 1909] "Where is the clergyman you promised to send for?"'[14] Molly tirelessly searched Dublin for a Catholic priest that would agree to say Mass for a dramatist that had spent his entire career raging against the Catholic Church.[15] The Catholic Church would not come to Synge's aid and when a clerical visitor of an indiscriminate denomination did arrive at Synge's bedside the topic of conversation was primarily focussed on Nature.[16] The decision to discuss the Natural order – the symbolic repository of many pre-Christian sensibilities – is an index for the dramatist's contempt for organised religion and it is this contempt that predicated Synge's decision to dramatise pre-Christian cultural residue in his plays. The critique of Catholic cultural imperialism in his plays curiously echoes the contemporaneous cultural critique of Catholic progressivism that permeated critical discourse. Patrick Kenny, the chair of the Freedom of the Theatre debate that took place in the wake of the *Playboy of the Western World* disturbances, was particularly critical of the teleology of Catholic progressivism and he argued that if an independent Ireland was to be realised then it needed

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[9] Yeats, *Letters To His Son*, 109. J.B. Yeats to W.B. Yeats, 1 July, 1908.
[10] Yeats, *Memoirs*, 199.
[11] Yeats, *Memoirs*, 199.
[12] TCD SSMS: 6197, f.4814.
[13] J.M. Synge, quoted in Maurice Bourgeois, *John Millington Synge and The Irish Theatre* (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1913), 235. Joseph Holloway accounts for Synge's comment slightly differently: 'This is a nice little room and I feel better already in it' (Joseph Holloway, NLI MS: 1807, 26 March, 1909, f.381).
[14] Holloway, NLI MS: 1807, 26 March, 1909, f.381.
[15] TCD SSMS: 6197, f.4816.
[16] McCormack, *Fool of the Family*, 381.

to shake off the shackles of 'Parochial terrorism' because Ireland suffered 'not from "the Roman Catholic Religion," but rather from the want of it'.[17] It is little wonder, then, that Synge's conversation with the minister of religion focussed on the Natural order.

The politics of Catholic progressive historicism that were concomitant with the Revival articulated a logic that merely replicated the incommensurability of tradition and modernity, a permeating factor of colonial rule. Synge's dramatisation of the cultural traces of pre-Christian Ireland 'brush[es] history against the grain'[18] in Walter Benjamin's useful phrase and Marxist theory allowed the dramatist to postulate an alternative political praxis that critiqued Catholic progressive historicism. With Marx in mind, the dramatist was able to analyse the ideology of Catholic Ireland when it was still in the throes of enfranchisement, when those essential components had not yet been harmonised and/or masked. What became clear to Synge was that the Catholic bourgeois subject would fetishise the peasantry as Irish quintessence but fail to accept their material conditions into a hegemonic dialogue that articulated modernity. Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian cultural vestiges proposed an alternative temporality of modernity where the residual sensibilities emerged as a counter-hegemonic cultural discourse that would puncture and punctuate Catholic modernity. Louis Althusser has argued that if 'the theatre's sole object' is simply to give a commentary on an 'eternal self-recognition and non-recognition – then the spectator would already know the tune, it is his own'.[19] For Althusser the efficacy of theatre practice is its ability to 'destroy this intangible image, to set in motion the immobile' so that 'the play is really the production of a new spectator, an actor who starts where the performance ends, who only starts so as to complete it, but in life'.[20] Althusser's suppositions on theatre practice measure appositely against Synge's plays because, as Yeats argued, Synge was 'the more hated because he gave his country what it needed, an unmoved mind where there is a perpetual Last Day, a trumpeting, and coming up to judgement.'[21]

Synge's Modernist dramaturgy of pre-Christian sensibility that was predicated upon discourses of comparative social science and metaphysics afforded the dramatist the opportunity to dramatise what Frank McGuinness understands to be a seamless interchange between 'pagan indifference and Christian scruple and orthodoxy'.[22] McGuinness's reference to pagan indifference reflects Synge's knowledge of Arthur Schopenhauer's postulate on *wille*. The ability to use pre-Christian sensibility in order to transcend to a

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[17] Patrick Kenny, *Economics for Irishmen* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1907), 164, 156.
[18] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), 248.
[19] Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1977), 151.
[20] Althusser, *For Marx*, 151.
[21] W.B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 310.
[22] Frank McGuinness, "Synge and the King of Norway," in *Interpreting Synge: Essays from the Synge Summer School: 1991-2000*, ed. Nicholas Grene (Dublin: Lilliput, 2000), 60.

higher consciousness where *wille* can be alleviated is most apparent in Synge's first two plays, *The Shadow of the Glen* (1903) and *Riders to the Sea* (1904). In these plays the efficacy of pre-Christian sensibility that the dramatist identified in music and Nature allowed his characters to transcend bourgeois suffering and pain, which is perhaps why Nicholas Grene has argued that Synge's plays constantly reflect and refract 'Christianity against paganism [and] the struggle of the individual to express himself or herself within a collective community'.[23]

This dissertation suggests that in Synge's early plays Schopenhauer tempers comparative social science's critique of primitive religiosity. However, as the dramatist approached his mature drama Schopenhauer's defence of magical ritual is eschewed as Synge foregrounds the critique of comparative social science, a critique that suggested pre-Christian sensibilities were an index for those members of the Irish populace that had failed to evolve; this is particularly apparent in *The Playboy of the Western World* (Chapter Three). However, David Lloyd has suggested that the erasure of pre-Christian residual culture necessitates the erasure of a 'deeper history of social and cultural formations that were profoundly recalcitrant to modernity and which had to be destroyed to allow for the emergence of the modern state form on which both the colonial regime and its nationalist antagonist depend[ed]'.[24] Synge's mobilisation of comparative social science that highlighted the discursive understanding of pre-Christian cultural residue as an index for heathendom in *The Playboy of the Western World* must still be regarded as Synge's method of evaluating wanton Catholic cultural imperialism, and it is significant that the founders of the Abbey supported Synge wholeheartedly:

> 12 Ormond Road
> Rathmines
> 14.1.05.
>
> Dear Mr. Holloway,
>
> Thanks for your letter. I cannot help thinking that you are needlessly alarmed over "The Well of the Saints".
>
> [...] I met a young priest who praised "In The Shadow of the Glen"; so does Father O'Donovan and so did my other brother who is a very pious man who knows the Catholic religion and its philosophy. [...] If the Irish public were reverent they would not turn one's blood cold with their use of words that really religious people – the orientals for instance – scarcely dare breathe. You may say it is the lower classes who do so; well they are principally Catholics; and Synge's play deals with their like. [...] I have

[23] Nicholas Grene, "Synge in Performance," in *The Cambridge Companion to J.M. Synge*, ed. P.J. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 156.
[24] David Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press and Field Day, 2008), 64.

always fought against the "Island of Saints" view of this country [...] Synge is not a "kindly" dramatist but I think he may yet be a great one that will make this country talked of again and we mustn't try to clip his wings even if he splash us now and then. Read "King Lear" again.

Again thanking you for your kind note.

Yours sincerely,

F. J Fay.[25]

In his notebook Synge concluded that '[t]he liberty of a people consists in being governed by laws which they have made themselves under whatsoever form it be of Government'.[26] If Irish socio-politics were to be changed 'root and branch'[27] then the Catholic Church and by corollary the bourgeois class that adhered to its strict codes of Roman orthodoxy needed to entertain the hypothesis that pre-Christian residual culture was not backward, nor pre-political, but a defining aspect of material conditions. Some advocates of Catholic progressivism, such as Rev. M. O'Riordan, were of the same persuasion as Synge: 'I declare this opinion, that the most illiterate Catholic old crone I have ever met, taken with some superstitions accidental to her faith, is higher in the scale of rational civilisation than some of those who abuse reason and try to sublimate the result to the act by calling it rationalism'.[28] It is not that Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian cultural residue can be substantiated by D.P. Moran's critique of the Ascendancy subject who maintained that 'Catholics are superstitious and he believes in spooks himself; he thinks they are priest-ridden and he would like to go back to Paganism'.[29] While Synge's attitude towards pre-Christian sensibilities are indexical of an esoteric clique of Ascendancy dilettantes that fetishised the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland, Synge did not want Irish culture to return to paganism but he did want pre-Christian cultural sensibilities – not Popular Catholicism – to be incorporated into cultural hegemony. The dramatisation of pre-Christian vestiges in Synge's plays arrested the progressive flow of Catholic history precisely because it was the historiographical vindication of eddies and counterflows.

Lloyd reminds us that in Ireland 'the agency of a subaltern peasantry' was such that it was able to respond to 'the inroads of colonial modernity by a process of adaptation and re-formation that remained nonetheless inassimilable to and unrepresented by the modern state'.[30] This is why Synge dramatised characters such as Maurya, The Tramp and Pegeen Mike in opposition to Dan Burke, Michael Dara and Shawn Keogh; these latter characters

[25] NLI MS: 4455. F.J. Fay to Joseph Holloway, 14 January, 1905.
[26] TCD MS: 4349, f.34r.
[27] TCD SSMS: 6193, f.1663.
[28] M. O'Riordan, *Catholicity and Progress in Ireland* (London: Keegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1905), 255.
[29] D.P. Moran, "Protestants and The Irish Nation," *Leader*, 27 July, 1901, 342.
[30] Lloyd, *Irish Times*, 65.

were in diametric opposition to the simplified materialism of folk culture because they are preoccupied with the 'scurrility and ignorance and treachery'[31] that Synge believed to be concomitant with Catholic bourgeois materialism. Synge had to critique Catholic progressive historicism in order to ensure that the history of Irish cultural discourse would not become heterogeneous; as Friedrich Nietzsche points out, historiography such as Synge's 'is only fruitful for the future if it follows a powerful life-giving influence, for example, a new system of culture'.[32]

Catholic progressive historicism in Synge's Ireland had reduced pre-Christian cultural residue to the discontents of historical time but, in the very same instance, it depended upon the Gaelic League's accreditation of pre-Christian folklore and myth in order to articulate the triumph of state-orientated nationalism. Hypocrisy such as this was never going to wash with Synge because the Catholic Church merely transmuted and transposed subaltern pasts into commodity objects that furnished nationalism as cultural quintessence. But it cannot always be assumed that Synge staged subalternity for its own sake; certainly in *The Well of the Saints* (1905), *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) and *The Tinker's Wedding* (1909) Synge staged subaltern pasts for the wrong reasons, that is to say, he used subalternity to attack Catholic Ireland rather than staging subalternity in order to bring the subaltern into hegemonic dialogue. If we recall that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak advocates that the proviso for speaking for the subaltern is that 'the historian then breaks his theory in a scrupulously delineated political interest'[33] rather than attempting 'the restoration of the subaltern's subject-position in history [...] as the inalienable and final truth of things',[34] then while Synge attempted to foreground those subaltern pasts that had been defeated in the name of Catholic modernity, his engagement with the subaltern is irretrievably subject to his own desires. Like Catholic bourgeois Ireland, subalternity, for Synge, is a fetishistic commodity that can be mobilised in different discursive contexts. Nevertheless, to suggest that Synge only fetishised the subaltern in order to purloin the surface of a pre-Christian culture that would belie his class insecurity is mistaken. This dissertation has tried to suggest that Synge only resorted to his Ascendancy background in order to retaliate against Catholic Ireland.

Synge may have had the 'wildest admiration for the Irish Peasants, and for Irish men of known or unknown genius',[35] but the realisation that penury was conducive to a

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[31] *CW*, vol. 2: 283n.
[32] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, trans. Adrian Collins (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), 12.
[33] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *Subaltern Studies*, vol. 4, *Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), 345.
[34] Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," 345.
[35] *CW*, vol. 2: 283n.

'starving but wonderfully attractive and charming'[36] peasantry smacks of Synge's inability to empathise with the peasantry. However, Synge's suppositions on this class should not be taken out of context because Synge only celebrates the peasant's simplified material conditions in order to highlight the corruption of the Catholic bourgeoisie: 'in one place the people are starving and wonderfully attractive and charming, and in another place where things are going well, one has a rampant, double-chinned vulgarity I haven't seen the like of'.[37] It is equally important to remember that Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian residual culture was also recalcitrant to the fetishisation of pre-Christian sensibility by his fellow Ascendancy esotericists such as Yeats and Gregory. 'Synge', writes Garrigan Mattar, 'unlike Yeats and Lady Gregory, had few problems in accepting the basic tenets of nineteenth-century comparative science'.[38] The juxtaposition of pre-Christian cultural residue with his knowledge of comparative social science demanded that Synge's Modernist aesthetic was fundamentally recalcitrant towards the Romanticisation of pre-Christian cultural residue by both Catholic Ireland and a peculiar aspect of the Ascendancy; this is why Synge must be considered as 'the playfellow of Judas' because, as he admits, the act of betrayal demands that there is '[s]orrow's sauce for every kiss'.[39]

'Dublin Bourgeois and Ascendancy'[40]

As night fell on 23 March a storm was brewing over Dublin. In Coole Park, County Galway, Lady Gregory was unable to sleep because she was 'certain that some evil was coming.'[41] At half past five, with the storm still raging,[42] Synge turned to his nurse and muttered his last words: 'It is no use fighting death any longer'.[43] In his diary Yeats would later recall that 'when he died [the storm] had well begun'[44] and his younger sister, Lolly, felt that something metaphysical was taking its course. At breakfast she told her brother that: 'I think it will be alright with Synge, for last night I saw a galley struggling with a storm and then it shot into calm and bright sunlight and I heard the keel grate on the shore.'[45] Turning once again to his diary, Yeats was so taken with his sister's analogy that he mused over its pre-Christian sentiment: 'One remembers the voyages to *Tir-nan-oge*

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[36] *CW*, vol. 2: 283n.
[37] *CW*, vol. 2: 283n.
[38] Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, 131.
[39] *CW*, vol. 1: 51.
[40] TCD CMS: 4424-4426, f.328. Henri Lebeau to J.M. Synge, 3 May, 1907.
[41] W.B. Yeats, *The Death of Synge and other Passages from an Old Diary* (Dublin: Cuala, 1971), 11.
[42] Thomas McDonagh recalled that the weather in Dublin on that morning was 'stormy' and 'wuthering'. See, T.M. "J.M. Synge: Irish Dramatist, Writer, Poet," *T.P.'s Weekly*, 9 April, 1909, 469.
[43] Yeats, *The Death of Synge*, 11.
[44] Yeats, *The Death of Synge*, 12.
[45] Yeats, *The Death of Synge*, 12.

[sic]'.[46] Located on an island beyond the western periphery of any map, the voyage that Yeats invokes is the journey made by mythological mortals such as Bran or Oisín to the pre-Christian Otherworld, *Tír na nÓg* (Land of the Young). As Chapter One suggested, *Tír na nÓg* is not an afterlife analogous to the Christian concept of heaven but an Otherworld of earthly paradise that is home to the genealogical ancestors of the fairies, the *Tuatha Dé Danaan* (People of the Goddess Danu). To take one's leave from *Tír na nÓg* was to embrace a slow decline into a cowardly death. This certainly could not happen to Synge, Yeats's Ascendancy hero of artistic integrity, which is why in Yeats's mind Synge hadn't really died but had made the arduous voyage to the pre-Christian otherworld.

Yeats wasn't the only one who believed that Synge had arrived in *Tír na nÓg*. Two and a half hours after Synge's passing, Yeats escorted the Abbey Theatre mourning party to the Elpis nursing home at 19-21 Lower Mount Street. After conversing with Molly he claimed that she too entertained Lolly Yeats's pre-Christian vision: 'she saw [Synge] in a boat. She was on the shore, and he waved his hand to her and the boat went away. She longed to go to him but could not.'[47] In an article for the *Daily Express*, Synge argued that 'surely a last glimpse of the Celtic "Happy Other World"' could be found in 'the Celt, [who] in growing Christian, clung to his older traditions, turning them in many ways to suit the new creed that had arisen'.[48] To liken Synge's death to a voyage to the pre-Christian Otherworld is to acknowledge that Synge's plays dramatised the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland. However, it seems that Yeats's analogy was mobilised for a different reason altogether. In Yeats's esoteric scenario, the dramatist quite literally lives in another world, but as with most pre-Christian phenomena, Synge could appear in this world of sensory data in a supernatural guise when the mortal subject least expects it. During Yeats's 1914 North American lecture tour, the poet made a point of attending one of Etta Wreidt's séances in Detroit. Wreidt was responsible for introducing Yeats to his daemon (a tutelary, guiding force), Leo Africanus,[49] and although Synge's passing had occurred five years before, Wreidt and Africanus were able to reunite the two colleagues. When the séance had ended Yeats immediately returned to his accommodation and opened his diary:

> Just returned – 8.45 – from séance with Mrs. Wreidt. Heard faint voice in full but when lights put out got gradually clearer. First voice when in light was 'Lady Gregory'[.] It was a message for her. When I asked from who the voice said 'Shadow of the glen'. ~~What is Synge I ask values, he said 'you!'~~ It was or professed to be Synge. It was very anxious to speak to Lady Gregory. The speaker was greatly indeted to her. I asked where did you first see her. Voice said on 'Isle of Aran'[.] I said who were you engaged to

[46] Yeats, *The Death of Synge*, 12.
[47] Yeats, *The Death of Synge*, 12.
[48] J.M. Synge, "Anatole Le Braz," *Daily Express*, 28 January, 1899, 3.
[49] For Yeats's relationship with Leo Africanus see, NLI MS: 30,499.

> – & slowly ~~state our new~~ & with difficulty got 'All good' spelling it & then said 'Sara'. I said you were not engaged to 'Sara' & the voice said 'I should think not' & laughed loudly. It said it could not get the right name through & so said Sara instead it went on to speak, Lady Gregory & I 'putting the MSS together' after his death & of Lady G getting, his Aran book 'recopied'! I said '~~say~~ say something Lady G will recognize as coming from you & it said 'too men on barrels & one smoking' & laughed. It went on to say if Lady G were younger no one known to speaker would surpass her on the stage. He said 'she has more guides than you. Leo does not want to make a spiritist of you but an orator. Said he & Leo would help me. Said he was happy but when he saw me longed to live. He had hated to die.[50]

If Yeats maintained that he 'would hate to leave the dead alone'[51] then Michael McAteer has suggested that 'when you are dead, Yeats can start talking to you'.[52] In the middle of a Detroit February Yeats began talking to Synge. According to Yeats's account of the séance, Synge desires to live again even though he is happy ghosting the ether. However, this is Yeats's fabrication; Synge repeatedly told Stephen MacKenna that 'he longed to live for ever on the earth but could not be convinced of a life in any other state'.[53] In 1898 Synge wrote in his notebook that the 'otherworld [is] escape through the mysteries and from cycle of rebirth'[54] and, if three days before Synge's death Yeats was celebrating 'that directness and simplicity of mind which is today Protestant and Ascendancy',[55] then Synge's death presented Yeats with an opportunity to give Synge a rebirth that would foreground Ascendancy virtue. And so, turning to his diary once again, Yeats began to characterise Synge as 'very truthful and ever matter-of-fact, being in every way very simple' but, nevertheless, he 'had that egotism of the man of genius'.[56]

The juxtaposition of Synge's death with a voyage to the pre-Christian Otherworld is symptomatic of Yeats's desire to mythologize Synge into something that he wasn't. By sending Synge to *Tír na nÓg*, Yeats essentially returns the Ascendancy to folk culture, which allowed Yeats to harmonise Synge with the politics of the people. Synge's harmony with the politics of the people was always complicated because of his Ascendancy background. While on Aran, Synge may have desperately desired to 'go back to Paris in a few days to sell [his books] and [his] bed, and that then [he] was coming back to grow strong and simple as they were among the islands',[57] but he could never quite make this critical step and in the final analysis, he knew that he would always remain 'an interloper

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[50] W.B. Yeats, NLI MS: 30,358. This account from Yeats's séance with Wreidt is contained in a brown leather notebook that Maud Gonne gave to Yeats for Christmas in 1912. There is no folio number.
[51] W.B. Yeats, *The Senate Speeches of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Donald R. Pearce (London: Prendeville, 2001), 87.
[52] Michael McAteer, "Cultural Stagnation and Creative Vitality: Yeats, Synge, Shaw," (unpublished lecture, The Synge Summer School, Rathdrum, County Wicklow, 30 June, 2012).
[53] Stephen MacKenna, NLI MS: 13,276, f.12.
[54] TCD MS: 4378, f.50r.
[55] Yeats, *Memoirs*, 195.
[56] Yeats, *Memoirs*, 202, 205.
[57] *CW*, vol. 2: 142.

only, a refugee in a garden between four seas'.[58] Time and again throughout *The Aran Islands*, Synge's class background begins to simmer; he almost had a quarrel with an Aran schoolboy 'because he wanted [Synge] to take his photograph in his Sunday clothes from Galway, instead of his native homespun's [...] [that] connect[ed] him with the primitive life of the island.'[59] Furthermore, in October 1899 on 'the eve of the Parnell celebration in Dublin'[60] as Synge boarded a 'third-class carriage' in Galway with 'a few people from the islands'[61] the dramatist attempted to share the material conditions of the islanders but the situation was awkward and complicated. As Synge approached the train station he bumped into his Aran guide, Michael Costello, who was too 'ashamed to speak to [Synge] in the middle of the people'[62] because as far as Michael was concerned, Synge was a 'duine uasal (a noble person)';[63] matters are made worse by the realisation that Synge complained of his 'difficulty in finding any one to carry my baggage to the railway'.[64]

However, the valorisation of the Ascendancy did not concern Synge. To return to his apprentice play, *When the Moon has Set*, the dramatist points out that 'it is a good thing that this aristocracy is dying out. They were neither human nor divine.'[65] It is not that Synge was defending the Ascendancy through his dramatisation of pre-Christian cultural residue; he was defending himself against the harsh criticisms from Catholic bourgeois Ireland and in doing so, he was forced to fall back on his class background. In May 1907 Synge received a letter from Henri Lebeau (a friend of Anatole le Braz) and in the letter Lebeau wrote: 'I don't find it possible to tell you here what I think of your *Playboy*. But allow me to assure you with an absolute sincerity that it is certainly, in my opinion, and that by far, the best thing which you have ever written'.[66] Concluding his letter, Lebeau reminded the dramatist to keep up with his 'unbiassed [sic] view of what English mistake made [sic] of the Connaught people' because it was particularly recalcitrant to the 'Dublin bourgeois and ascendancy'.[67] To presuppose that Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian cultural residue was a means to secure the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy with an innate aspect of Irish culture is surely Yeats's mythology of Synge's life, which is why Synge had to return to *Tír na nÓg*.

Synge invoked his Ascendancy background in *The Well of the Saints* and *The Playboy of the Western World* not simply because he knew that the dramatisation of pre-Christian cultural residue would cut close to the Catholic bone, but also because he

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[58] *CW*, vol. 2: 258.
[59] *CW*, vol. 2: 134.
[60] *CW*, vol. 2: 122.
[61] *CW*, vol. 2: 122.
[62] *CW*, vol. 2: 122.
[63] *CW*, vol. 2: 128.
[64] *CW*, vol. 2: 121.
[65] TCD MS: 4389 f.13.
[66] TCD CMS: 4424-4426, f.328.
[67] TCD CMS: 4424- 4426, f.328.

respected what figures like Parnell had done for Home Rule. In the years after Synge's death Yeats understood that Catholic bourgeois Ireland catalysed Synge's death, as it did Parnell's. However, if Yeats likened Catholic Ireland to a savage pack of hounds that were predisposed to maul the noble Anglo-Irish Ascendancy stag,[68] then Synge gave as good has he got. From this perspective, the invocation of his Ascendancy background was merely another way to critique Catholic cultural imperialism and, in years to come, even his harshest Catholic critics would begin to recognise that Synge's engagement with the discrepancy between religious and political ideology was a critique that the nation needed; 'Ireland, in our day as in the past has excommunicated some of those who have served her best and has canonised some of those who have served her worst',[69] Padraig Pearse wrote just four years after the dramatist's death, and '[w]hen a man like Synge, a man in whose sad heart glowed a true love of Ireland, one of the two or three men who have in our time made Ireland considerable in the eyes of the world, uses strange symbols which we do not understand, we cry out that he has blasphemed and we proceed to crucify him.'[70]

Synge was truly isolated from both Catholic and Anglo-Irish factions and ultimately his decision to defend himself by invoking a sense of Anglo-Irish propriety was the ultimate act of betrayal because it ensured that everything that the dramatist stood for could be reduced to class insecurity. Perhaps this is why, as the dramatist anticipated his own death, he reflected upon those places where he had encountered the cultural residue from pre-Christian Ireland, knowing full well that the magical realism of pre-Christian sensibility was dying with him:

> I read about the Blaskets and Dunquin,
> The Wicklow towns and fair days I've been in.
> I read of Galway, Mayo, Aranmore,
> And men with kelp along a wintery shore.
> Then I remembered that "I" was I,
> And I'd a filthy job – to waste and die.[71]

But it didn't die. Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian cultural residue is a fulcrum upon which Irish drama is balanced and some of Ireland's leading contemporary playwrights, such as Brian Friel and Marina Carr, continually return to Synge's dramatisation of pre-Christian sensibility to inform their own praxis.[72] Maybe Yeats was right after all; Synge continues to live in *Tír na nÓg*. And if he does, he only returns when we least expect it.

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[68] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955), 316.
[69] P.H.P. "From a Hermitage," *Irish Freedom*, June, 1913, 2.
[70] P.H.P. "From a Hermitage," 2.
[71] TCD MS: 4410, f.35r. The poem is dated 23 November, 1908.
[72] Eileen Battersby, "A Double Take of Savage Realism," *Irish Times,* 7 February, 2009, 45.

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