

Influence of W. B. Yeats on John Millington Synge's Dramatic Style with Reference to Synge's Comedies

Dr. Sushil Kumar Mishra

Abstract

John Millington Synge was not a dramatic critic. After taking degree at Trinity college Dublin he wandered some years on the continent chiefly in Paris and learnt lessons in realism. It was in Paris that W.B. Yeats met him in 1899. Yeats persuaded him to return to Ireland. Though Synge was born at Rathfarnham in the county of Dublin, Yeats spoke to him about the Aran Islands and Synge returned to Ireland—not to Dublin, nor to his village or birth place---but Aran Islands which were close to the main land of Ireland. Here Synge was inspired by the beauty of the surroundings as well as the humour and tragedy and poetry of the life of simple fisher folk. He was also charmed by the variety of the dialect of Celtic language spoken there. His first play The Shadow of the Glen was produced by the Abbey theatre, Dublin at the behest of W. B. Yeats. He came to Dublin in 1904 - a year after the production of that play and soon afterwards he joined Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats as a director of the Abbey Theatre.

Key Words: W. B. Yeats, J.M. Synge, style, comedy

INTRODUCTION

Synge belonged to the first phase of the Irish national theatre movement started about the turn of the century by Yeats, Lady Gregory and others. We have specially to mention W.B. Yeats who called Synge back from France. Synge's discussion with Yeats set the more tangible instrument of primitive Irish culture besides a harvest of new ideas, fruitful of debate, questioning and assimilation. But Yeats' influence upon Synge's style was rather sparse. It rather remains close to the style of the playwrights who initiated a revival of the poetic drama in England. From the time of the Irish civil war until the First World War the writing and criticism of Irish drama were largely in the

hands of a group of friends bound by many personal and literary ties presenting a united front to the materialism of the age. They were the founders of the Irish Literary Theatre. At first they were only four in numbers—Yeats, Lady Gregory, George Moore and Edward Martin---all influenced by the foundation of the Independent theatre in London, founded in 1891 by J.T. Grain, in order to encourage new development in modern drama. In 1902 the Irish literary theatre became able to maintain a permanent all Irish company and changed its name to the Irish National Theatre which moved in 1904 to the Abbey Theatre, by which name it has since been known. Many of the plays produced at the Abbey Theatre were only of local and ephemeral interest. But J.M.

Synge's use of the speech and imagination of Irish country people along with Yeats' powerful symbolic use of themes from old Irish legend gave new kind of viable permanence and vitality to the theatre.

The founders - Yeats, Lady Gregory, George Moore and Edward Martin - wanted to make a significant contribution to the Irish Literary Revival with anti-English and Celtic nationalism in their minds. They were influenced by Grein's independent theatre in London, the anti-English and pro-Celtic bias is not pronounced except in the plays of Sean O'Casey and that also because Sean O'Casey has taken only the Irish civil war as the background of the plays not primitivism or mythology in the case of the plays of Synge and Yeats. Grein had founded the independent theatre in order to encourage modern experiments in drama. This seal for experimentation occupied the first phase of the Irish Literary theatre changed to the Irish National Theatre than to the Abbey theatre and finally to the theatre of Dublin. W. B. Yeats' *Countess Cathleen* started the theatre but Yeats' *The Land of Heart's Desire* and *The Shadowy Waters* made Yeats popular. W.B. Yeats being the senior most dramatist of the theatre and also an established poet remained the leader. The strain of Yeats' leadership is seen in almost all the plays of Synge staged at Dublin.

In the play *The Shadow of the Glen* a woman marries the old farmer for the sake of money and declares her old husband dead after taking all money from him.

THE TINKER'S WEDDING, a two act folk comedy by Synge is a satire on the

Roman clergy and marriage sacrament. It gives us a new expression not only to jollity and fun but also to incongruities and mannerism of the Roman Catholic clergyman.

The Well of the Saints, a three act drama is also illusion of life and the disillusionment with life. The illusion and the disillusion form the idea of *The Well of the Saints*.

The Play Boy of the Western World develops around Christy Mahon, who has struck his father and left his villagers thinking that his father is dead. It is a funny comedy. It provides a satirical picture of the Irish youth. It is realistic, fantastic and bitterly satirical comedy.

CONCLUSION

John Millington Synge also belonged to Irish Literary Theatre. The Irish Literary theatre was founded in 1899 by W. B. Yeats and Synge joined it just a year after and embellished the theatre till last with his final play ***Deirdre of the Sorrows*** which remains unfinished. His non-dramatic work included ***The Aran Island, Poems and Translations, In Wicklow, West Kerry and Connemara***. His decisive event in Synge's life was his going to the Aran Island at the suggestion of W. B. Yeats. His *Experiences in Aran Island* and later in Ireland gave him the theme and style of his drama. He saw and felt deeply the life of the peasants wringing a hard-living from sea and soil. He saw both the tragedy and comedy of the soil. The dialogue from *The Tinker's Wedding* will not be out of place in showing both the aspects—the comedy on the surface and the tragedy of the plight of poor couple who have not even money to buy a ring.

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