

The Playboy of the Western World' As a Tragi-Comedy

Jemima Daniel

Lecturer in English, Bharath Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai – 600073, India

ABSTRACT: Ever since the playboy was staged, hot controversy has raged among critics as to the class of plays to which it belongs. It has been called a 'Pleasant Play' i.e. A play which deals with the life and suffering, joys and sorrows, of the peasants inhabiting the western part of Ireland. There is, no doubt, that it has 'peasant quality', it deals with the simple life of the rural dwellers, of a particular region. But it is not a mere regional play. No doubt Synge has depicted faithfully the rural life of a particular region, but by concentrating on the elemental human passions, he has imparted universality to the regional and the particular. A merely "peasant play" has thus been imparted the glory and greatness of universal art.

I.INTRODUCTION

The playboy has also been called a satire, because in it Synge has exposed and ridiculed the many weakness and vices of the Irish peasantry. Their criminal propensities, their religion, their immorality, their fantasy-building, their yearning for thrills and sensation, have all received a satiric ironic treatment at the hands of Synge. There is also satire in the reversal of the usual pursuit of women by men, a theme which was later on taken up by G.B. Shaw. However, it would be wrong to conclude from this that Synge is a dramatist with a purpose, that his chief aim in writing primarily for the entertainment of his readers and spectators, and whatever satire there is, is incidental and unobtrusive. Nor does he distort and falsify the truth, as is frequent with satirists.

Synge himself called the play an extravaganza, but one in which there is much that is serious. It is a comedy of the Dionysiac variety, one in which the instincts find an uninhibited expression. It abounds in exaggerated, farcical situations which provoke loud boisterous laughter and which appeal to the tastes and intelligence of the lower sections of the audience. The spectacle of a young man trying to run away from the house because he is being forced to stay there for the night all alone with his betrothed, the sudden appearance of a dead man just at the moment when his son is boasting that he killed his 'da' with a single blow of his loy; the verbal duel of two women in love, etc. Are only a few examples of such farcical situations chosen at random.

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But the play is not all extravaganza. There is also a serious side to it. It may also be interpreted symbolically and psychologically. It may be said to depict the growth and evolution of a Youngman's personality under the impact of love, sympathy and admiration. While the domineering and tyrannical treatment of his father makes Christy 'the looney of Mahon', the appreciation of the people of Mayo turns him into "the Champion playboy of the western world". The three murders may also be interpreted symbolically as attempts on the part of Christy to free himself from the tyranny and domination of his father, and to achieve self-fulfillment. He does achieve such self-fulfillment and goes out of Mayo with his manhood fully awakened. He goes out with his father as , 'a master with a heathen slave," and his father is also delighted at the transformation and proud of his son, "the champion playboy of the western world." *Christy has murdered symbolically both his domineering and tyrannical father, and his own earlier cowardly and effeminate self.*

But while the play is a comedy as far as Old Mahon and his son are concerned, it is a tragedy as far as Pegeen is concerned. In other words, it may also be called a tragi-comedy. Aristotle defined tragi-comedy as a play with a double ending, happy for some of the characters and unhappy for some others. Its end is Henn calls her the, "heroine victim", for, "she has found the man, made him won him in the teth of opposition from her own, sex", and also ultimately lost him. She is really in love with Christy, and when he goes away with his father she exclaims pathetically. "oh, my grief, I have lost him surely, I have lost the lovely playboy of the western world". We feel that she shall be happy no more, for a woman loves only once, and Pegeen has loved and lost her man.

In short, '*the Playboy*' is a complex work of art and cannot easily be categorised. Each must interpret it according to his own light, and a slight change of focus is likely to alter and modify that interpretation. Synge himself called the play an extravaganza, nut ne in which there is much that is serious.it is a comedy of the Dionysiac variety, one in which the instincts find an uninhibited expression. It abounds in exaggerated, farcical situations which provoke loud boisterous laughter and which appeal to the tastes and intelligence of the lower sections of the audience. The spectacle of a young man trying to run away from the house because he is being forced to stay there for the night all alone with his betrothed, the sudden appearance of a dead man just a t the moment when his son is boasting that he killed his 'da' with a single blow o f his loy; the verbal duel of two women in love, etc. Are only a few examples of such farcical situations chosen at random.

III.CONCLUSION

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