

Ibsen, Yeats, Synge and the Development of Irish Cultural and Political Identity

Didachos Mbeng Afuh (Ph.D)

The Department of English Modern Letters, the University of Ngaoundere, Cameroon

Abstract: Ireland's over seven hundred years under British imperialism saw its national identity suffer immeasurably as the Irish themselves did. This is because imperialism was an educational movement where colonizers set out to "consciously modernize, develop, instruct, and civilize the colonized" (Said, 94). As many commentators of Irish history of colonization have reported, Irish native features like the ancient Gaelic culture, Ireland's mother tongue, Irish traditions, thoughts and ideas, to say nothing of its independent identity were Anglicized. This article focuses on the cultural and political struggle for a reawakening of the Irish consciousness, and defends the view that the adoption of Ibsen's works in Ireland was largely responsible for future political and literary developments in Ireland. I argue that Ibsen's writings succeeded in establishing a new type of national identity in Ireland.

Ibsen's early plays like *The Pretenders*, without doubt, drove the poetic dramatist, W.B. Yeats to focus on dignifying Ireland's Celtic past and Irish peasant life. By symbolically representing the Gaelic culture with its legends and heroes in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, Yeats intended to make the Irish conscious of their historical and mythological heritage. He used traditional Celtic symbols and shaped them in his own way. With this, he succeeded in transferring them into contemporary Ireland with a slightly different additional meaning. In addition, Ibsen's master piece, *An Enemy of the People*, caused Synge to write plays that violated the existing picture of Irish nationality, thus bringing to limelight his personal conception of a new Irish political identity.

Key Words: identity, Irish culture, nationalist drama, nationalism, Irish, Ibsen, Yeats, Synge.

I. INTRODUCTION

In dealing with Yeats' and Synge's relationship with Ibsen, we address their indebtedness to Ibsen in relation to culture and leader/masses crises. Ibsen's early drama, *The Pretenders*, and his revolutionary play, *An Enemy of the People* conditioned Yeats' and Synge's private interpretation of their society. Their voiced anxieties, associated with Ibsen's influence, reveal their attitude to dramatic realism. I. R. Malome in *Ibsen and the Irish Revival* asserts that "during the period 1903 and 1912 Ibsen's dramas were not only explored by several Irish writers, they were played out in the Irish political arena" (5). Yeats and Synge, just like T. C. Murray, Edward Martyn and Brian O'Cassey saw in Ibsen's plays a reflection of their own socio-cultural and political concerns in relation to nationalist fervour.

Commenting on the fact that Ibsen's drama did not reach true excellence, and as such could not have influenced an Irish nationalist theatre, Gregory Jain asserts that "Ibsen's drama is

a formless mass of mediocrity; it is dull, repetitive and lacks literary quality and thematic significance" (qtd in Larson, 47) and could not have served as a guide to the new Irish literary group. As Toril Moi has pointed out, Ibsen is all too often considered to be an outmoded realist, a classic of the pre-modernist age and of no interest to modern academics. She acknowledges Ibsen's pre-modernist writings which Yeats drew from and his "unmatched series of superbly sustained metatheatrical reflections" (3), but detects a certain critical blindness to the modernist tendencies of Ibsen's drama, namely its reflection on the status of language and self in the post-idealistic world. Pintér Márta has also analysed how the revivalists' glorification of Irish past was drawn from Ibsen's early plays. Like Toril Moi and the revivalists themselves, he fails to see how the political question of Ireland could not have been properly confronted by solely glorifying a past.

By focusing on diverse aspects of both his pre-realistic and realistic drama, we explore the role that Ibsen played in shaping the ideas and the form Yeats and Synge's drama later took, and by so doing, unfolding his role in the development of Irish cultural and political identity. Besides, literary works are usually considered as battlefields on which writers fight to overcome the influence of their masters. In this article, I argue that such battles are not waged in isolation but amid the multiple incidents and influences of everyday life. Yeats and Synge, whose works were branded Irish Ibsenite propaganda, could not have engaged in a purely literary relationship with Ibsen. Their society conditioned their private interpretation of Ibsen, and in the process, they re-established an Irish national identity within Ireland and abroad.

In the above light, while Yeats saw history as an evolutionary process and as that which continually develops into the present, Synge thought that the understanding of what historical facts mean, how they fit within the complex web of competing ideologies, socio-political and cultural agendas is a matter of interpretation, not fact. Their plays are seen as biased historical accounts and as narratives or stories that should be interpreted as any other cultural discourse. According to Michel Foucault, "the particular discourse formation of an era determines what is considered as knowledge and truth, as well as what is considered abnormal, legal and criminal" (qtd in Tyson, 103).

During the colonial phase of Irish history, "there emerged a dramatic sense of struggle with inherited forms ranging from radical movements to theoretical groups" (Roche, 106) whose

objective were to obtain independence through the use of force. These militia movements, as Eugenio Biagini further explains, failed because their leaders placed militarism against cultural decolonization (151). Realizing how ineffective the use of force as a way to liberation was (the Irish context), Irish cultural nationalists like Douglas Hyde, W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge, George Russell, and Isabella Augusta sought to create an alternative means of expression for a nation struggling to recapture an identity through plays that “spread a tradition of life that makes neither great wealth nor great poverty, that makes the art a national expression of life” (Sauerhoff, 74). Yeats and his colleagues hoped they could fight and regain their identity by recreating their glorious past. In Yeats own words, the theatre was to be made a “place of intellectual excitement... [where] beauty and truth are always justified of themselves, and that their creation is a greater service to our country (qtd in Roche, 43). Yeats called this new-found mask the “anti-self” and he deployed it beautifully for the rest of his days, in confrontation with the prejudices of supercilious Englishmen.

Yeats therefore initiated “a movement towards a nearer appreciation of the country people and their language, as they [the revivalists] set out to mythologize the peasant figure in the face of a fight as great as that which was at hand” (qtd in Sauerhoff, 59). I.R. Malone asserts that Ibsen’s plays attracted a great number of Irish people so strongly that they hailed him as the greatest living dramatist” (3). Along this line of argument, Yeats consequently declared that “Ibsen [was] a romantic nationalist of worldwide fame” (qtd in Malone, 5), and consequently a role model for Irish playwrights. By hailing Ibsen as such, Yeats lauded Ibsen’s early plays like *Catalina* (1850), *The League of Youth* (1850) *Norma* (1869), *Love Comedy* (1862), *Brand* (1866), and *Emperor and Galilean* (1873), in which he made no revolutionary innovations in dramatic techniques but employed experimental efforts to dignify Norwegian folklore and history. Yeats defended this point in relation to the future of Irish drama by constantly writing in the Dublin Daily Express. In one of such instance, he called on all Irish playwrights “to be like Ibsen whose *Peer Gynt* is not only a national literature, but is the chief glory of the national literature of its country” (qtd in Malone, 9). By so doing, Yeats was calling on Irish playwrights to adopt a nationalistic literature that seeks to showcase the country to the outside world, and as such fully engage in dismantling the negative picture which the British colonialists presented as an image of Ireland.

Though Ibsen’s radical plays (*A Doll’s House*, *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of the People* and *Hedda Gabler*) were never performed in Ireland during Synge’s time, rumours from their London productions circulated in Ireland. According to Malone “Ibsen’s dangerous social addictions had begun to circulate in Dublin long before the public had the chance of watching any of his plays” (20). His assertion that English papers were on sale in Dublin around this time is reason enough to believe that they published London gossips

including reactions to Ibsen’s plays. Synge and the other members of the Irish Revival were therefore in contact with Ibsen’s ideas directly or indirectly. George Bernard Shaw lived in London and was one of those greatly involved in the debates surrounding Ibsen’s productions. As an Irish, he must have served as one of the sources through which discussions about Ibsen’s radical works listed above got to Ireland.

New historicism will be used to investigate the critical battle that inevitably occurred over Ibsen, Yeats and Synge upon the production of their plays, and which generated a host of topics like nationalism, female suffrage and emancipation, liberalism and socialism. As shall be seen below, Yeats and Synge got to learn more about Ibsen and about his challenging ideas during the discussions that circulated and was to interpret them according to their personal beliefs and the socio-political realities that surrounded Ireland. I therefore find new historicism useful for this study, especially as it rethinks the issues of inter and para textualities in the study of various forms of textual material and historiography. Also related to this work is new historicists’ view that “literary texts consist of a diversity of dissonant voices and these voices express not only the orthodox but also the subordinate and subversive forces of the era in which the text was produced” (Tyson, 92). In this light, Ibsen’s Yeats’ and Synge’s plays are read as instruments for propaganda of cultural values, be they supportive or subversive of existing hegemony.

II. IBSEN’S *THE PRETENDERS* AND THE REAWAKENING OF THE IRISH CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Before 1814 (the year Norway had its independence from Denmark) there had been almost no Norwegian literature, but with the advent of a Norwegian “... theater for Norwegian actors and Norwegian pronunciation, the people craved reassurance for they belonged to an ancient kingdom; and wanted to be reminded of their long history and their great traditions” (Larson, 5). Ibsen understood what was needed and in *The Pretenders* he presented not just a national story, but a story with archetypal significance, full of geographical symbols, mysticism, and national characteristics. These will combine to create this national literature, and Norway had vast amounts of material from which he could draw.

In *The Pretenders*, in the leadership scuffle between King Haakon and Earl Skule, Ibsen suggests that ultimately, Denmark lacks the strength of character to be able to continue to rule Norway, and that while Denmark may have done much as the interim, it was time for Norway to continue. The strength of character he bestows on King Haakon archetypically represents the strength Norwegian nationalists figures possess. Skule does all he can to undermine the peace and progress that Haakon has made, and to plunge the country into a civil war to no avail because of Haakon’s opposition. Haakon proves his legitimate claim to the throne with a trial by fire and with the different successes registered. In a frequently quoted speech, he proclaims that “it is time to

summon the Assembly. Until [that day his] hands were shackled. None [he] thinks will blame [him] for wishing to have them freed” (225). Haakon allows Skule to continue to hold the King’s Seal, and takes as his queen Skule’s daughter, Margrete. With these two moves, Haakon himself obfuscates the clear lines he appears to have been trying to draw, ensuring that Skule can still function as King for all practical purposes, and ensuring that future generations will forever remain somewhat incestuously tied (Margrete is Haakon’s first cousin) to both Skule and Haakon. At last somewhat secure in his position as King Haakon tells Skule of a glorious vision for the future of the country:

Norway was a kingdom, it shall become a nation. The men of Trondelag fought the men from Viken. The men of Agde fought the men of Hordaland, and the men of Haalogaland the men of Sogn; now all must be united and know themselves and realize that they are one! That is the task which God has laid upon my shoulders; that is the high calling which faces Norway’s king. (283-284)

The men of Trondelag, Agde and Haalogaland who fought bravely represents Norway’s nationalists whose exploits should serve as a source of strength and inspiration to the Norwegians in the fight for complete liberation from the Danes. Skule fails to recognize this great Norwegian strength portrayed in King Haakon. Consumed by ambition, love for land and a strong desire to succeed, Haakon positions himself at the head of the Kingdom thereby thwarting Skule’s plans presented as not strong enough to uphold the ideal.

Margrete, Haakon’s wife, and Lady Ragnhild, Skule’s wife, are equally convinced in their roles as supportive wives. Margrete does not question Haakon’s pronouncement of her father’s death sentence, not because she does not love her father, but because she puts national interest over personal gain. Lady Ragnhild, to the end, is convinced that Skule is the rightful ruler, swearing that “his turn will come again” (332). Some critics have branded her an enemy to the spirit of reawakening. Tom Eide thinks she is “... a representative of those who swear against change and who do nothing but transgress” (67). It is important to mention here that *The Pretenders* should not be read as a play that satirizes Danish role in Norway. In this way, Lady Ragnhild’s spirit of dedication and conviction will be better appreciated. Skule only realizes how “perfect” she is at the end, when he sees her love for him even when he himself knows that he has failed. He declares: “Ragnhild, my wife, against whom I have transgressed so deeply, you surround me with warmth and love in my hour of direst need. You tremble and fear for a man’s life who has never cast a ray of light across your path” (334). Through Haakon, Lady Ragnhild and Margrete, Ibsen presents to the world the model character of dedication of spirit, conviction and strength to be adopted by those who suffer in the hands of a foreign power.

Norway’s landscape is also given a considerable space in the play *The Pretenders*, and this is of great effect to our understanding of Ibsen’s role in the development of Irish nationalism. We first come in contact with nature and the Scandinavian landscape when Skule acknowledges defeat, observing how nature responds to Haakon’s rule. Under King Haakon, “...the trees bear twice the fruit and the birds lay twice as many eggs ... the Vermeland country and its fields are rich with corn. It is as if blood and ashes manure the land where Haakon leads his men” (246). The locale landscape is projected to the level of a human and presented as a character, as it responds to circumstances according to her pleasure or displeasure.

Later, when the Bishop, promises Skule to “lead [him] up to a high mountain and show [him] all the glories of the world” (328), we get a glimpse of the myth behind Norwegian geography. The heights of the mountains are thought to give one a sense of near omniscience power and glory, the like of which can never be found in the lowlands. That is why Skule must be led there for inspiration and blessings. Here, Ibsen presents the natural and local landscape of Norway as a force and a mystery capable of relieving, consoling and empowering the battered.

Geography for Ibsen is hugely mythic, as are horses and birds. Philip Larson suggests that “in a country precariously balanced on the top of Europe, cut across by fjord and ravine and gorge, monstrously furrowed into mountain and valley, the tradition of living was for long centuries one of multiple isolation: national, cultural, individual (11). Avra Sidiropoulou observes that “his universe consists of three parts, the heights, the lowlands, and the sea, with each part acting as a power and on each of which man moves precariously, never certain that a misstep will not lead him to destruction” (181). It is not therefore surprising that Ibsen decided to use this mythic landscape to appeal to his compatriot’s sense of nationalism.

Ibsen in *The Pretenders* did not only answer to a national call, but gave his compatriots the opportunity to re-examine the basics of human drives and instincts which he found in Scandinavian heroes of the past and the beautiful and rich land scape in order to confirm their absolute validity and necessity for human growth and development in a country that was still starting up. His role as an artist was to actively take part in building the new nation by capturing this “golden age” where men and women were spiritually and physically decisive as they lived in total harmony with the organic world. It is this model that Yeats adopted and gave it an Irish touch in his contribution to Irish nationalism.

Ireland in the days of Yeats, due to England’s dominant position as the colonizer, was generally perceived as weak and uncivilized. On the other hand, England was regarded as the embodiment of authority and stood in striking contrast to the negative picture of Ireland. Two issues emphasized this condition even more: one being Ireland’s perception as “...the

bestial, feminine other, or the opposite of the English norm of civilized masculinity” (Pintér, 65), and the negative stereotype of the Irish embodied in the figure of the Stage Irishman. The popular drama used the Stage Irishman to portray Irish men and women as buffoons and as ridiculous comic figures, presenting them as lazy, crafty and drunken. Eugenio Biagini points out that “... there were two categories of the Stage Irishman: the buffoon and the Irish braggart. The latter was likely to be a soldier or ex-soldier, who showed off by claiming to have seen the whole world while actually never having left his own country” (94). The exaggerated and unrealistically simple view of Ireland was such that even the Irish audience could laugh at their own ridiculous depiction. It was this “Paddy with his Pig” image that Yeats set out to dismantle in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* by drawing from Ibsen’s spiritually strong and decisive characters.

Although Yeats may have violently disagreed with some of the trends toward Ibsenite realism within the Irish Literary Theatre, he did indeed achieve what Edward Martyn and George Moore (two fellow Irish dramatists) had dreamed: “to do for Ireland what Ibsen had done for Norway” (Sidiropoulou, 112). To achieve this, he saw in Ibsen’s nationalist characters what was needed in Ireland in their fight for liberation from British imperialism and as such established a new type of national identity.

The play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* is about an old woman, Cathleen, an Irish character and a mythical symbol of Irish nationalism. Her general portrait is that of an old woman who has lost her home and is now looking for young men to help her reclaim it. This home consists of “four green fields” which traditionally stand for the four Irish provinces – Leinster, Munster, Connacht, and Ulster. As such, this makes her the female personification of Ireland under British control.

The play opens with a description of the scene: “Interior of a cottage close to Killala, in 1798.” Yeats carefully chooses the setting: 1798 marks the great Rebellion of the United Irishmen against British rule in the Kingdom of Ireland which left over 10,000 deaths and many wounded (Kitishat, 67). Since in new historicism non-literary texts are not subordinated as contexts for the interpretation of the literary text, Barry suggests that they should rather be called “co-texts” which are “expressions of the same historical moments” (qtd in Tyson, 167). Yeats, like new historicists blurs the boundaries between the literary text and its context, and also views history as a broader spatial and temporal continuum which itself constitutes an expanded concept of text.

By this, Yeats gives his play not just an authenticity and a sense of realism, but equally calls on the people’s sense of responsibility towards reconquering their stolen land. This call should not be seen as a call to war, rather as a call that awakens the consciousness of the people. No doubt the old woman asks for help to recover her green fields. For this great assignment to be realized, the Irish must develop a self-sacrificing attitude which goes beyond personal gain.

When Cathleen first enters, the family in the cottage are preparing for a wedding (personal and temporal gain) unconscious of the great assignment, and when Michael decides to follow her for a more noble task, the whole family is scandalized and run after him for a change of mind. Michael’s parents, Bridget and Peter, have their own prospects in mind concerning Michael’s marriage as they look forward to benefitting much from the union of their son with Delia. Peter declares that he wishes he had the luck to get a hundred pounds, or twenty pounds with the wife he married. Through Michael, Yeats adopts Ibsen’s model and prescribes boldness, vision and character in the Irish.

Some critics have read Michael’s act of running off with the old woman as “rash eagerness [especially as] he rushes to his death in a blind search for some ghostly and ungraspable vision of renown and honor” (Kitishat, 85). This argument is supported by the fact that the play ends on an ambiguous and quasi-tragic note. However tragic the end is, Michael’s move is an act of glorious courage. The fight might be risky, for many will likely lose their lives in the process, but very rewarding, for in return one gets martyrdom and immortality. Cathleen Ni Houlihan reminds the reader of the benefits of standing up for one’s country:

They shall be remembered for ever,
They shall be alive for ever,
They shall be speaking for ever,
The people shall hear them for ever. (219)

Perhaps in this context, Yeats idealizes the son (Michael) and the mother figure (Cathleen) as he draws an inseparable link needed to drag the Irish into loyalty and obedience. Such views, are socio-political messages where viewers/readers are invited to take a particular stance. They may be invited to embrace concepts such as freedom, or revolution. Michael finally decides to abandon his marriage, refusing the physical joy and follows Cathleen’s voice. At this moment a supernatural event takes place: the old lady is transformed into a majestic-looking young girl. In other words, Michael must choose between his physical pleasures, represented in his new marriage, or the national cause of the independence of the country. This struggle stresses the character’s quest for having an identity by rejecting the stereotype that the English colonizer presented of the Irish people.

The Irish natural and rich landscape, though simply hinted on in *Cathleen*, is of great effect, especially when reading Yeats as a nationalist. This home the old woman wants to capture is so rich that she summarizes it in three words: “four green fields” which traditionally stand for the four Irish provinces. The green fields (if we draw from Yeats’ presentation of Irish landscape in his poetry) drives home the idea of fertility, beautifully shaded natural site, meadow, spring or brook and charm. Yeats idealized the native Irish natural and cultural landscape in order to achieve his objective for the cultural nationalist movement. This idealization not only showed to the world a peculiar native culture different from that of

Britain, but also excavated and enhanced Irish national culture which was in danger of being perished by British cultural assimilation.

III. AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE AND IRISH POLITICAL REVOLUTION

It is Ibsen's realistic period (1877 to 1890) that earned him a place as a theatre giant. During this period, he introduced controversial subjects and everyday heroes in an everyday language. Dedria Bryfonski calls this face of innovation "... the middle or second phase [where] Ibsen dealt with many of the political, social and ethical problems that existed in the complacent Victorian world" (qtd in Moretti, 123), showing to Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, John Millington Synge and others that theatre could not only entertain but could also be used to create a new national awareness.

To the Irish anti-revivalists, this romantic mythification of Ireland was systematically repressive so that it was impossible to associate realists like Ibsen with it. Kavanagh and his colleagues refused to accept Yeats' declaration that they were inspired by the person who singlehandedly created a national drama for Norway. To him, and to others Ibsen was too good to be associated to the revivalists. Besides, Ibsen wrote from the European perspective while the revivalists had the unique Irish society as their sole guide. This anti-revivalist's assessment seems unjust because Ibsen, like the revivalists wrote with the aim of fostering national consciousness. Besides, Ireland was (is still) part of the European experience. One of such experiences was the negative role of the majority in Ireland's fight for home rule, an issue that Ibsen brilliantly handles in *An Enemy of the People*.

An Enemy of the People presents Dr. Stockmann, a researcher and a civil servant whose research leads to the discovery that the city bath is contaminated with poisonous bacteria, and the bacteria infested water could be fatal to the visitors or tourists who gather there. To clear this mess, he proposes that the baths be shut down for some time. At the beginning, his discovery is praised and he gets assurance of support from the different responsible persons, particularly, newspapers' editors, chairman of householders association and the civil community. This support makes him courageous and also happy, not because of security, social power and economic benefit, but because of the sense of his community's feelings of brotherhood. But, when it becomes very clear to the city authority that the improvement of the baths will cost high amount, they turn the people against the doctor and in a meeting organized by the city mayor in the city council hall, he is voted an enemy of the people.

Ibsen in this play presents just how a foolish majority can drive a community to destruction. Peter Stockman, the town's mayor, and the people refuse to accept health reforms that will save them from an eventual destruction. They would prefer to die than to be saved by one who goes against an existing order. The community's slavish and egoistic addiction to standard is the result of manipulation from a democratic

leader. Peter Stockman holds fast to this order because it is profitable to him; for his council will not have to spend a lot of money in cleaning the water source. He manipulates institutions like the press, associations and even the commoners to vote against the truth. In the end, the doctor decides to open a school and develop great minds. The task for democracy, Ibsen seems to say in the words of Rosmer in his play titled *Rosmersholm*, is to make everyman in the land, a noble man.

Synge's community was equally easily misguided and in *The Playboy of the Western World* he decides to contextualize Ibsen's message and satirize the role of the majority in decision-making. In the play, Synge presents a community (a majority) who "vote for" the idealistic past while rejecting the realistic and productive future. By choosing Christy over Shawn, the Mayo community settles for the supernatural folktale, the idealistic wealth and the imaginative potentials of the Irish against a modern, realistic and business-oriented one. Synge might have set his play in "an idealized west-of-Ireland location, whose distance from the Anglicized east had preserved Irish authenticity" (Mathews, 42), but his play was present-orientated.

The Christy who is introduced in Act I belongs to the world of the tramps and not heroes. He is first described by Shawn as "a slight young man ... very tired and dirty" (61). Shawn further says that he is "speaking in a small voice" and is like one who "followed after a woman in a lonesome night" (77). The direct opposite of Christy is Shawn. When introducing his characters, Synge describes Philly and Jimmy as "small farmers" and Shawn as "a farmer", and when he makes his first entrance, the stage direction presents him as "a fat and fair young man" (60). By presenting Shawn as such, Synge positions him at the head of the Mayo community. There is therefore a great difference between Christy and Shawn in relation to physical description and psychological characteristics. In this context, Shawn's wealth and position represent progress. In Act I, as part of the marriage bargain between himself and Pegeen, Shawn promises Michael "a drift of heifer and a blue bull from Sheem" (63) in addition to the items in the list Pegeen is making. Shawn's willingness to spend more shows how economically sound he is.

Added to his position and wealth is his established righteousness. Michael, Pegeen's father, celebrates his choice of Shawn as a son-in-law by declaring that "I've got a decent man, Pegeen, you will have no call to be spying after if you have a score of young girls" (65). He sees Shawn's righteousness as an added advantage as it ensures that he will be faithful to Pegeen, no doubt he prefers his bed to a drunken wake. By presenting a character who refuses to attend a wake for wine but prefers to go "through the short cut to [his] bed" (68), Synge evokes what came to be known in Ireland after the great famine as "devotional revolution" [an upright life style]. Luke Gibson writes that "post famine Irish society embraced the devotional revolution which accorded for profligacy and preference for the creation and consolidation of

wealth” (qtd in Roche, 307). Through Shawn, Synge shows how necessary it was for the Irish to abandon certain wasteful practices and integrate themselves in the capitalist world.

Shawn’s economic strength and his moral righteousness depict him as one capable of moving the Mayo community forward. The community is therefore expected to rally behind him as their model and as their leader. But this is not the case as they rather choose falsehood to truth and prosperity. Christy’s introduction and his false revelation that he killed and buried his father immediately affects the support Shawn has already won for himself. Shawn’s attempt to intervene in any conversation is met with contempt and disgust. Pegeen is “snapping at him” as she speaks to him in a “honeyed tongue”. By the end of Act I Shawn’s public view has deteriorated to the point that Pegeen declares “I wouldn’t wed him [Shawn] even if a bishop came walking forth to join us” (106).

Christy is triumphantly transformed thanks to the power of his tale and is now considered their protector and the hope of the community. Though Christy is introduced to the reader as a tramp, he quickly gains fame among the people of Mayo and is treated like their king. He becomes the most respectable and the most celebrated among the people of Mayo. Pegeen compares him to King Solomon in the Bible while Michael thinks he is the strongest and most courageous he ever saw, and the community feels safe under his leadership. As the ruler, he is now expected to ensure the security of the people and provide them with useful tips on how to face an oppressive father and brutal colonial agents.

Thanks to Christy’s eloquence and highly convincing tongue the people see him as the “champion of liberty”. While in Michael’s house, everyone wants to know why he looks tired and worn-out. He does not rush in answering the questions they ask him but takes his time to select his words, using them aptly. For example, Michael asks if he is running away because he killed his father. Christy answers slowly, saying: “With the help of God I did, surely, and that the Holy Immaculate Mother will intercede for his soul” (39). To show his “braveness”, he declares: “I never used weapons. I’ve got no license, and I am a law-fearing man” (40). Then, with the aim of gaining more support, Christy adds: “and I walking forward, facing hog, dogs and devils on the highway of the road”. Christy’s beautifully narrated tale makes Jimmy to declare that “Now by the grace of God, herself will be save this night, with a man killed his father holding danger from the door, and let you come on Michael James, or they’ll have the best stuff drunk at the wake”(44).

Christy’s fame and source of power depends on his ability to persuasively display himself thereby manipulating his way to the top. The community’s inability to judge properly makes them to hang on a lie for safety and salvation. At the end, they are disappointed as their “hero” walks away with the person he claimed to have killed and buried. Synge, just like Ibsen set out to show that the majority is most of the time wrong. The

point here is that public opinion should not be driven by passion but by reason as it is the people’s need for security that pushes them to easily accept Christy’s story and Peter Stockman’s analysis without verification.

Synge learned of the mental awakening that *An Enemy of the People* provoked all over Europe, and seeing his country’s situation reflected in it, thought he could present a play with similar effects that will stir the spirit of the people. This dream of his seemed to have come to pass if we take into consideration the reactions that accompanied the first productions of *The Playboy of the Western World*. Synge probably realized that Ibsen was not only ridiculing the political situation and method of achieving freedom but was also exposing the social and hypocritical lives of the Irish people. As one who witnessed Charles Stewart Parnell’s downfall, Synge was less tempted to see the comical part of *An Enemy of the People*. To him, Ibsen had implicitly written on the Irish politician who had made extra-ordinary advances and sacrifices in the fight for Irish Home Rule but was rejected by those he wanted to save. In Kiberd’s words, “Parnell was abandoned by his close political associates” (32). Through Parnell and through Ibsen’s Dr. Stockman, Synge had come to learn and believe that the confounded majority do not always argue for the truth; a theme he would pick up years later when he wrote *The Playboy of the Western World*. Through Christy, Synge shows how a whole community can be carried away by simple rhetoric. Christy is perfect in creating impression and succeeds in convincing the majority. Like Ibsen, Synge shows that party discipline turns justice upside down, making people to think alike.

IV. CONCLUSION

Many of the plays written and performed in Dublin in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were controversial, creating a dissent between religious, social, and political groups in Ireland. Among the most volatile of these controversial pieces were Yeats’ *Catheleen ni Houlihan* and Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World*. Ibsen’s early interest in Scandinavian history, culture and folklore conditioned Yeats’ private interpretation of Irish nationalism. Ibsen, just like Yeats came to understand that that folklore alone does not represent national culture, but our understanding of our natural environment and landscape can remind us of our potentials. Synge understood the dangers of the foolish majority to a community that was fighting home rule, and in *The Playboy of the Western World* he decides to contextualize Ibsen’s message in *An Enemy of the People*.

With Ibsen as their godfather the playwrights respectively enhanced a diverse dialogue regarding cultural and political struggle for a reawakening of the Irish consciousness. As illustrated above, Ibsen’s *The Pretenders* enabled Yeats to strengthen and praise idealized nationalistic and conservative norms while *An Enemy of the People* provided Synge with a free experimentation space on Ireland’s political arena. Their plays spurred on the necessary conversations and conflicts

surrounding Irish nationalism and fight for home rule. Therefore, as the sections above reveal, Yeats and Synge aimed at kindling Irish patriotism into a blaze of hatred for everything despicable of Irish attitude and the modern world and to achieve this, they drew from the early and later works of Ibsen. Their contact with Ibsen's works enabled them to deploy a dream figure to mobilize inspirational text for nationalists, creating the spirit of the 1916 rebellion.

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