34. "That's a grand story:" Reading J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* as a postnational allegory

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APA: Çimen, R. & Ünlü Çimen, E. (2022). "That's a grand story:" Reading J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* as a postnational allegory. *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (28), 508-521. DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.1132593.

Abstract

The concept of "national allegory" formulated in Fredric Jameson's work on the third-world literatures has been the subject of much critical debate, especially in the context of postcolonial studies. The dispute surrounding the term is closely tied to Jameson's controversial suggestions such as the view that "all" third-world literary texts inevitably fall into the category of "national allegory". The "nation" in this sense provides the main conceptual framework out of which literary texts imbued with "allegorical resonances" develop by specifically addressing the nation state. Jameson's formulation acquires further significance when it is reciprocally held with his concept of the "political unconscious", which refers to the implicit political aspect behind creative works. Jameson suggests that artistic works are the products of unconsciously felt political and cultural conditions laid out by latent historical and economic realities. J.M Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* lends itself to a Jamesonian reading in that the Irish efforts to achieve independence from British rule are transmuted into the dramatic world of the play in the form of an Oedipal tension between a father and a son. However, the play does not put forward a simplistic allegory of the nation since the text itself avoids reproducing a picture of a clear-cut nationhood. This essay argues that Synge's play addresses a "postnational" condition transcending the militant nationalist ideologies and produces a "postnational allegory" in which the suggestive background points at a new rationale for defining the nation with a call for imagining a nomadic "beyond".

Keywords: postnational allegory, Jameson, Synge, The Playboy of the Western World, nomadic

"Bu büyük bir hikâye:" J. M. Synge'in *The Playboy of the Western World* oyununu ulusötesi alegorisi olarak okumak

Öz

Fredric Jameson tarafından ortaya atılan "ulusal alegori" kavramı özellikle postkolonyal çalışmalarda önemli düzeyde eleştirel tartışmaya konu olmuştur. Bu kavramla ilgili tartışmalar çoğunlukla Jameson'ın "tüm" üçüncü dünya edebi metinlerinin kaçınılmaz biçimde "ulusal alegori" sınıfına dâhil olduğu şeklindeki görüşü üzerine odaklanır. Bu bağlamda "ulus," alegorik yankılarla bezenmiş metinlerin bilhassa ulus devlete göndermede bulunarak geliştiği temel kavramsal çerçeveyi ortaya koyar. Jameson'ın yaklaşımı sanat eserlerinin ardındaki dolaylı siyasal boyutu belirten "siyasal bilinçdışı" kavramıyla birlikte düşünüldüğünde daha da anlam kazanır. Burada Jameson sanat

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eserlerinin bilinçdışı düzeyde hissedilen tarihi ve ekonomik gerçeklerin ürettiği koşulların birer ürünü olduğunu öne sürer. J. M. Synge'in *The Playboy of the Western World* oyunu bu bakımdan Jameson izleğinde bir okuma yapma olanağı sunar; zira İrlandalıların İngiliz hâkimiyetinden bağımsızlık kazanma çabaları oyunun dramatik dünyasına baba-oğul arasındaki Odipal bir gerginlik biçiminde aktarılır. Bununla birlikte, oyun net sınırları olan bir milliyet anlayışını yeniden üretmekten kaçındığı için basite indirgenmiş bir ulusal alegoriyi içermez. Bu çalışma, Synge'in radikal milliyetçi ideolojilerin ötesine geçen bir "ulusötesi" duruma seslendiğini ve arka plandaki dolaylı anlatının göçebe bir "öteyi" tahayyül etme çağrısıyla yeni bir ulus yaklaşımını benimseyen "ulusötesi bir alegori" ortaya koyduğunu iddia eder.

Anahtar kelimeler: ulusötesi alegorisi, Jameson, Synge, Playboy of the Western World, göçebelik

Introduction

Despite the permanent presence of allegory in literature for a long time, it has been customary to disregard this literary mode due to an array of modern prejudices. As Jeremy Tambling (2010) notes, "Reading for allegory was regarded as getting in the way of an immediate response to a text, missing out on its vital, literal sense" (1). This attitude clearly stems from the literati's long-lived obsession with 'realism' which claims to 'represent' the world in writing in its entire 'accuracy'. Accordingly, allegory does not fit in the realistic framework since it presumably produces an 'artificial' set of literary functions in which the semantic meaning is coded with direct connections to abstract ideas through formulaic strategies such as personification. Therefore, it can be inferred that the typical relations between abstract ideas and the ways they are concretized are the main site of discontent for the realistically oriented studies of literature.

However, realism itself has been under attack for some time. Once a mighty concept that was thought to be capable of projecting the world in its 'natural' form, realism is no longer considered a viable option for writing about reality since the very 'objective' dimension of literary writing has been posited as a fundamentally value-ridden element. Jean-François Lyotard criticizes realism due to its claims about finding certainties and universalities in the depiction of reality. For Lyotard (1984), realism is an 'ideological' model that seeks "to preserve certain consciousness from doubt" (74). His critique here focuses on the strategic choices realism makes when claiming to represent reality so that its fictional world construes itself as the inevitable and universal framework for meaning. Similarly, Roland Barthes interrogates realism's claim to portray human existence in its most truthful form. According to Barthes (1967), realist fiction depicts a world that is "purged of the uncertainty of existence" (27). The realist reassurance that there is a natural continuity between the type of human existence in literary fiction and the real world is what drives Barthes to maintain a critical distance from the realist model in fiction. Both Lyotard and Barthes highlight the ideological aspect of the realist models that claim to objectively work on what constitutes reality.

The anti-realist stance has proven particularly effective since realist mode of writing is evidently a less credible form today compared to its traditional position in literary criticism. Allegory in this context has acquired a renewed position since accusations of artificiality turn out to be groundless in the sense that realism itself has been posited as an artificial model of production. In other words, since artificiality no longer denotes an inferior place, allegory has come to reclaim a revised position in contemporary approaches to literature (Tambling, 2). Paul de Man undertook one such assessment of allegory and offered a poststructuralist study of the figural language. In *Allegories of Reading* (1979), de Man

famously notes that "any narrative is primarily the allegory of its own reading" (79) and highlights the absence of a referent in allegory that would produce a fixed frame of reference for the act of reading it. Following this line of thinking, since there is no longer a stable ground upon which reading of a narrative can be placed with referential certainties, language becomes a slippery platform where the gap between what is expressed and what is understood produces nothing other than productive misreadings. According to McQuillan (2001), Paul de Man's affirmative take on allegory suggests the idea that "Meaning relies on misreading" (35). This means that referential ambiguity is essential during any processes of reading since 'interpretation' becomes possible only when there is an ambiguous relation between the reference and the referent. As language, in the aftermath of the poststructuralist project, can no longer offer a stable ground for meaning production, allegory is inevitably an essential trope in all kinds of reading processes.

In the light of abovementioned views - Barthes and Lyotard's critique of realism and de Man's advocacy of allegory – it can be argued that the contemporary theoretical framework built around the allegorical mode has come to reassert the importance and ever-presence of allegory in literary studies. Fredric Jameson's interest in allegory takes on a major significance in this context. Rather than merely marking a return to an unheeded literary device, Jameson's work on allegory in a way suggests the urgency of a renewed understanding of how textual layers can produce multiple interpretations of the political and historical reflections in a given text. It is with such contention that this essay focuses on the suggestive background of *The Playboy of the Western World* (hereafter *Playboy*) as a dramatic piece ripe with potentials to shed further light on the emerging realities it was faced with. In what follows we carry out a textual analysis by exploring the junction between Jameson's approach to allegory and how the play underscores the national(ist) conflicts in the Irish society taking place in the early years of the twentieth century. A representationalist reading of the play would suggest finding direct correspondences between its textual semantics and real-life referents for the purpose of highlighting its "allegorical resonances". However, such a limited account would certainly imply a closure in the possibilities for different modes of interpretation, which would do a grave injustice to a dramatic work whose strength lies in its capacity for "a confusion of categories" (Grene, 1999: 86). Therefore, instead of maintaining a representationalist approach where the analytical labour of the critic is reduced to a diminutive task of finding descriptive match-ups, we seek to carry out our analysis by focusing on how the play offers to imagine a decentred form of Irishness "beyond" habitual norms of national existence. Through its attempts for a revaluation of communal identity, the play as a "national allegory" becomes what other scholars in different contexts call "postnational allegory" (Raja, 2007; Moore-Gilbert, 2017; Fan, 2017). The main characters' ultimate turn to a kind of "nomadic" existence, an often neglected aspect of the play, is when taken allegorically an expression of an urge to move towards a postnational terrain where the territorially coded stable identities - those that are tinged with national vectors - get into contact with the idea of mobility, connection, and an unrestrained flux of imagination.

A number of critics have charted the intersection (and the tension) between the *Playboy* and Irish nationalism (Greene, 1947; Kojima, 1998; Cusak, 2002; Pilkington, 2007; Tenorio, 2010; Boynton, 2012; Devlin, 2013; Burke, 2016). In fact, as Christopher Collins notes, "the politics of Irish nationalism" has been a common "image" that "surrounded critical discourse" (2011: 272). However, our analysis differs from the existing scholarship in the sense that we give a Jamesonian hearing to the gradual constitution of a postnational, nomadic, ontology in the text. With the exception of Hwang (2017) whose analysis proceeds along the crossover between *Playboy*'s representation of a lonely community and Jameson's conceptualization of "political unconscious", the play has not yet been studied specifically in the context of Jamesonian views. As we will discuss throughout the essay, history, an indispensable

component in Jamesonian allegory, is crucial to the understanding of the play. However, *Playboy* does not dissolve within the teleological flow of the official narratives proposed by the nationalist sensibilities of the time it was produced in; on the contrary, it foregrounds "discontinuities", generates disengagements, and points at mutable communal reflections "beyond" hegemonic structures, thereby addressing the onto-political implications the prefix "post-" carries. In this context, *Playboy* reflects on (Irish) history against the grain and opens up a dynamic space for a discussion of nationhood as a fluid space of meaning. As Mary C. King explains, for Synge, "Art becomes both a means of access to the past, and a medium for transforming that past to meet the challenge of the present and the future" (1985: 11).

Jameson: symptoms, allegory, ideology

Jameson begins *The Political Unconscious* (1981) with the famous dictum, "Always historicise!". This is an announcement of the general framework that expresses the "moral" of his project as well. As part of his ongoing effort to rethink the dynamics of literary criticism, the book has been a major contribution to "the reconstitution of literary criticism as a radically historical discipline" (Gelber, 1982: 1229). However, besides positing literary studies as a complex mesh of historical processes, the book builds on the concept of the unconscious found in Freudian psychoanalysis with the purpose of explaining the connection between the "surface" and the "depth" of any narrative. For Jameson, "we never really confront a text immediately, in all its freshness as a thing-in-itself" (1981: 9) but rather we confront texts through "the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by [...] inherited interpretive traditions" (1981: 9). For this reason, interpretation is "construed as an essentially allegorical act, which consists in rewriting a given text in terms of a particular interpretative master code" (1981: 10). Historicity of texts proves particularly significant here since it is through uncovering historically constructed "depth" of texts that we can get "an adequate account of the essential mystery of the cultural past" (1981: 3). In a way, it is "in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history, that the doctrine of a political unconscious finds its function and its necessity" (1981: 19).

The dyadic structure of texts as consisting of a surface and a depth suggests the use of a Freudian model in interpretation where an essential take on the "unconscious" orients the reading procedures. Adam Roberts (2000) claims that from a Jamesonian perspective texts should be treated "as if they were psychiatric patients; that the *surface* meanings of texts are not necessarily reliable indicators to the important stuff, to what is really going on *underneath the surface*" (76, original emphases). As the meaningful material can be accessed only when hidden textual layers are paid attention to, surveying through "symptoms" of a text is an imperative for any attentive act of interpretation. In other words, it is through a careful examination of the "symptoms" developing out of the unconscious reality of a text that a comprehensive reading is made possible.

While the presence of an "unconscious" is constant in the Jamesonian line of thinking, the question as to what constitutes the "reality" of that unconsciousness illustrates another important aspect of his approach. For Jameson, the unconscious reality in any text is "history". In line with his continuous commitment to a model of criticism which is fundamentally based on a historical consciousness, Jameson calls for a "recognition of the primacy of History" (1981: 14) in understanding the political unconscious of any text. History is, for Jameson, "not a text", but at the same time "it is inaccessible to us except in textual form" (1981: 35). Textuality in this sense is a key "mediational category" (Mohanty, 1997: 101) located between history as a persistent reality buried underneath the textual semantics and the critical project of any heedful critic. Symptoms of the unconscious reality are then the fragmented

expressions of the presence of history that gave way to the emergence of the text itself at the very first moment.

The access to the unconscious reality requires a subtler approach in that, like the surfacing of psychiatric symptoms, the emergent expressions of the buried context might seem "fractured" at times. This would mean that in order to produce meaning out of a mesh of expressions, the critic needs to rethink what really articulates the political dimensions of a text. Here Jameson points at the need in any procedures of interpretation for considering not only the content of a literary text but also the literary form and its generic qualities. For Jameson, "genre is essentially a socio-symbolic message, or in other terms, [...] form is immanently and intrinsically an ideology in its own right" (1981: 141), so interpreting the generic style through which a content is structured is crucial in understanding the ideology of the text. "The ideology of the form", as Jameson further clarifies, "persists into the later, more complex structure as a generic message" (1981: 141). This implies that the strategic use of one generic form instead of another is not simply an aesthetic choice but is rather closely tied with the ideological axioms and messages that the text is immersed in. It is with such commitments that Jameson defines genres as "essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact" (1981: 106). The "allegorical resonances" of any text in this respect can be recovered through literary criticism on condition that specific historical conditions are understood by putting an emphasis on the ideological particularities of both the content and the form.

Jameson's another significant text is "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" (1986) in which the previous arguments about the ideology of the textual form and content are discussed in terms of postcolonial and national contexts. The essay is, while faced with a fierce barrage of criticism[3], one of Jameson's landmark texts as he offers the (in)famous description of "third-world" texts as "national allegories":

> All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: They are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel. (69, original emphasis)

Jameson through this definition lays out a certain theoretical framework for understanding the texts coming from non-western contexts. He adds that:

> Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic- necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*. (69, original emphasis)

Jameson's argument stems from his observation that among the third-world intelligentsia there is "an obsessive return of the national situation" (65), so even a narrative that is seemingly about the "private" experiences nested with "libidinal" dynamics has a national dimension. This is because, in line with his previous arguments on the "political unconscious", "psychology, or more specifically, libidinal

[3] The most important critique of the concept of "national allegory" comes from Aijaz Ahmad. In a response paper titled "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory"' (1987), Ahmad opened a vigorous debate about Jameson's conceptualization of "national allegories" on several grounds. He rejects the claim that third-world texts are wholly involved with national allegories as well as questioning the idea of "third-world literature" as an epistemic unity. Ahmad notes that Jameson's text is "centrally grounded in a binary opposition between a first and a third world" (5), so it is primarily a product of an exclusive ideology in its affirmation of Three World Theories which "divides the world between those who makes history and those who are mere objects of it" (7). In such terms, "Difference between the first world and the third is absolutised as an Otherness" (10).

investment, is to be read in primarily political and social terms" (72) in third-world culture. Also, for Jameson, the intellectual in the third-world is "always in one way or another a political intellectual" (74). Such enmeshments with politics are, therefore, what makes "allegorical resonances" possible in the first place. However, while "allegory" is "somehow congenial" today, it is not because allegory maintains "the homogenous representation of the symbol" that is inherent in traditional conceptions but because it is today "profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream" (73). Following this plane of thought, it could be argued that any treatment of national allegories should take into consideration the dispersed and polysemic resonances they evoke. The intersection between history, ideology, and the allegorical form requires a more nuanced understanding when it comes to make sense of the range of textual expressions that obliquely project a national condition.

Allegory appears repeatedly in Jameson's attempts to understand the microscopic shifts taking place in the material reality behind narratives. In a recent book, *Allegory and Ideology* (2020), Jameson again sets out to see how ideology is still a major force in the constitution of an unconscious that produces specific conditions for building narratives. Allegory is, for Jameson, "always with us, in politics, in narratology, in daily life, and in 'common sense'" (2020: 207). However, such a ubiquitous presence does not mean that allegory achieves an absolute harmony between the models of representation and the objects they claim to represent. On the contrary, the allegorical mode is "profoundly discontinuous" (170), and since postmodernity marks "a shift from personification to process-oriented allegory", we need "a parallel critical and theoretical reorientation" (xx). Meanings in such a polysemic frame are shuffled on top of each other, so the critic needs to remember that representationalism is no longer a workable option as the present moment goes through an acute "crisis of representation" (181). With modernity we have witnessed a number of differences and the "emergence of all kinds of new specializations; new mental faculties; new zones of reality; and new projects, ambitions, productive activities, subjectivities, and varieties of human flora and fauna," which means that if there is a conclusion to be drawn from what allegory is today, it is that allegory is "one way of sorting through these multiplicities and finding analogies between the differentiation, identities among the differences: the 'levels' relate fully as much as they separate" (345).

The place of allegory in literary studies has been under scrutiny for some time. Building on Northrop Frye's observations, Angus Fletcher (1964) says, "All literature [...] is from the point of view of commentary more or less allegorical" (8). The inseparability of textual semantics from allegorical reverberations is an essential trope of Jamesonian thinking, too. What makes his line of thinking different from other critical projects is that he highlights the significance of the crossover between seemingly disparate historical elements and textual worlds. His is a critical venture that aims to find historical and ideological couplings in unexpected places. A departure from representationalist attitudes in giving meaning to interpretative processes is his critical *tour de force*. Therefore, Jamesonian undertakings in allegory need to address the inherent multiplicity of meanings along the interpretative path. It is with this contention that we hold diversity and dynamism as the guiding concepts for our reading of J. M. Synge's *Playboy*. Rather than trying to find perfectly fitting alignments between textual worlds and real-life complements, this study focuses more on how the allegorical pairings can open up a dynamic space for a new understanding of entrenched concepts like nation and community.

Playboy: from nation to nomadic fellowship

Following Jameson, a brief look at history is essential for our analysis. The period in which *Playboy* was staged marks some of the most significant aspects of Irish history. The late nineteenth-century interest in Irish culture, commonly known as the Irish (or Gaelic) Revival, ignited a heated debate among the Irish intelligentsia about the trajectory of the national efforts devoted to the independence from the British rule. The nationalist movement, mainly led by cultural nationalist and political organizations like the Gaelic League and Sinn Féin, argued for a return to a "truly Irish" vernacular identity which was for them under the hegemonic influence of the English language and culture. For such organizations, there was a definitive form of Irishness which could be recovered through cultural and political investments in the "essentially" Irish ideals. An interest in the idealization of the native space was part of the general nationalist strategy in building up a national discourse for an "original" and "uncontaminated" Irish land. Synge's writing of the *Playboy* acquires a further significance when such contemporary trends are taken into consideration. While Synge was fluent in Irish and "supported Irish nationalism" (Collins, 2020: 4), he was deeply suspicious of the nationalist movement and its methods. As Christopher Collins (2020) notes,

> For Synge, one of the big lies of Irish nationalism was its romanticization of the west of Ireland. Irish nationalists romanticized the west of Ireland as being the perfect example of Irish national identity: frugal Catholics living in little thatched cottages. What nationalists overlooked was the reality of the Congested Districts: huge expanses of the west of Ireland in socio-economic ruin, overpopulated with starving peasants. (4)

The evident discrepancy between the empirical reality that the Irish population was living through and the national narrative constructed by the nationalist movement clearly frustrated Synge's take on the discourse surrounding the independence movement. The "political unconscious" of the period is, then, filled with discursive materials about nationhood and national space. It is within this context that *Playboy* can be interpreted as a major 'de-mythologizing' force against the reductionist mythologies of the Irish nationalist movement. The west of Ireland was, for the nationalists, an idyllic, almost mythical, space of the authentic Irish identity; for Synge, it was a "fantasy" to be "deconstruct[ed]" (Kojima, 1998: 53).

While the play poses a number of serious questions about the discourse of national identity, it has a relatively simple plotline: Christy Mahon arrives at a public house in County Mayo claiming to have killed his father; his story of patricide becomes a major attraction for the locals and turns him into a kind of hero; Pegeen, the daughter of the tavern's owner, falls in love with Christy who has become a respectable figure among the locals due to his newly-earned charisma; Old Mahon arrives at the town later on to reveal that Christy's narrative of patricide is a scam; Christy then attacks his father to preserve his reputation, getting no positive feedback from the locals; in the end, Christy and Old Mahon decide to leave the town to travel across Ireland to tell their stories.

The play did not receive a rousing reception initially since the nationalist middle-class audience was somehow aware of the larger implications of the plot and characters on the stage. What the nationalists expected was to "watch a poetic and sanitised version of reality" (Collins, 2020: 5), which meant a strict adherence to the nationalist propaganda and its aesthetic expectations from artworks. The onstage world where a dysfunctional Irish community finds a heroic story in the scamming act of patricide was not evidently on a par with the nationalist rhetoric that was supposed to be a unifying tool in the struggle for gaining independence. From a Jamesonian perspective, the play evidently enacted a series of "discontinuities". Somehow the fictional world of the play claimed, as Edward Hirsch (1983) states, a

"more than fictive status" (92). This suggests that the audience was driven by the allegorical resonances the play was, intentionally or unconsciously, evoking. Therefore, it is possible to say that, combined with other reasons such as Synge's questioning of established social norms and his refusal to comply with the nationalist depiction of his society, such allegorical implications contributed to the triggering of fierce reactions against the production at the Abbey Theatre, which later came to be known as the Playboy Riots. In the words of Anthony Roche, "The volatility of the onstage Mayo audience appeared to have spread to the off stage audience" (2015: 73).

Clearly, the audience could not find a realistic play onstage, which was not very common for the time being. Instead, Synge put on a play which was a blend of various formal and generic features such as realism, satire, comedy, melodrama, social critique, tragedy, and farce (Murray, 1997: 80; Levitt, 2007: 19; Collins, 2016a: 32). Therefore, what we see in the play is "a rejection of convention" and the "violation" of "generic conventions" (Bigley, 1977: 158). As stated previously, Jamesonian understanding of allegory pays a specific attention to form as it complements the content, and Synge's avoidance of blatant realism can be interpreted in these terms. In his famous preface to *Playboy*, Synge argues that "On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy" (1981: 174), implying that realism lacks the imaginative initiative that would bring "joy" to the theatrical experience. Realism, in a sense, was an aesthetic mode that was employed in the nationalistic depictions of reality. Following this plane of thought, it could be argued that, by refusing to give in to the dominant realist conventions of his age, Synge also questioned the hegemonic forms of depicting reality and instead offered an eclectic look on how reality itself can be quite unrealistic. Given this heterogeneous network of generic qualities, the play forms a textual example to what Hager Ben Driss calls a "nomadic genre" (2018). Accordingly, taking its cue from the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, "the nomadic model" frees a literary text "from fixed generic identities" (2018: 60). In this context, *Playboy* is nomadic in the sense that a fluid set of intergeneric movements does not allow one form to take over the whole and instead produces an active play between multiple genres and modes of representation as well as a complex array of thematic qualities. As Nicholas Grene (1999) claims, such a play-like tone produces Ireland as a "natural site of carnival" (106) where all the social roles are reversed, and it might be this aspect of the play that received hostile reactions.

The polemic over whether the play was assaulting the national cause continued for some time, so the debate over its aesthetic and cultural value was unable to rest on an objective ground. However, what was clear from the onset is that, for at least the Irish nationalists, allegory mattered in dramatic depictions of the society, and it is such elements of the play that have attracted the attention of critics. For George Cusak (2002), for example, the villagers in the play produce an allegory of Irish nationalism (573), an assessment which also hints at the possible cause of the Riots. Gregory Castle (1997) similarly states that the Irish nationalists resented the negative portrayal of the Irish peasantry as they instead wanted to see "plays that dramatized political sentiments and that represented myth and legend as revolutionary and patriotic allegory" (266). The peasant communities in the west of Ireland represented the moral and political ideals for Irish independence, but the dramatic make-up of the stage world, while definitely constructing an allegorical dimension, did not allow room for a pro-Revival depiction of such ideals. David Krause comments:

> Synge found the Irish peasants in varying states of comic paralysis and contradictory tensions, straining under the complex moods of frustration and wild fantasy, vicarious exuberance and farcical despair, and therefore his dark comedies were a necessary desecration of those sentimental pieties of the idyllic and pure peasant life. (1971: 121-122)

As a means for Synge's "desecration" of nationalist idealizations, allegory as a blend of multiple forms was part of the theatrical experience, and it did not condone the habitual codes that would supposedly bring about a fundamental change in the political structure. In a sense, allegorical layering of the play seems to have disturbed the nationalist layering of the Irish social system.

The postnational redefinition of nationhood emerges out of a process of failure in the attempts to give meaning to the communal existence in the play's setting. In other words, the postnational condition arises out of the fruitless investments in the construction of a nationhood built around an infantile and yet highly derogatory form of heroism. Regarding such communal energy, Elizabeth Grubgeld (1988) notes that "the play rejects any positive portrayal of group consciousness" (203). Postnational allegory develops in the background insofar as the dramatic representation of Ireland and the Irish community does not supplement the Revival rhetoric. It is, as Jameson pointed out, the "discontinuities" that produced the allegory in the background. One of the major allegorical resonances in the play is evidently the tension between Old Mahon and his son Christy. As we learn from Christy's own account of his life with his father, Old Mahon forces Christy to do things against his own will, like marrying an old widow. The tension between the father and the son, in a rather Oedipal manner, opens a wedge between them and ultimately drives Christy to resort to violence. For Christy, killing his father is "something big", something that does not look like the "stories on any little paper of a Munster town" (Synge, 1981: 182). As Eugene Benson (1982) indicates, "the parricide represents a necessary rejection of all symbols of kinship and authority - family, priest, society" (126). The violent tension between the father and the son, especially in a patriarchal community, is not simply a matter familial unease but the projection of a power struggle between the authority and the subject, so it is "something big" in the sense that the rage of the subject finds an expression in a violent form. However, when such affairs are considered in the context of colonialism to which Ireland was long exposed, the allegory reveals a deeply political mesh of relations. As C. L. Innes (2009) observes,

> in many anti-colonialist works, the plot revolves around an Oedipal conflict between father and son, or between father figures and a younger generation, in which the values of the father are seen as harsh, materialistic and sterile, and are in turn linked to the values of the colonising power. (122)

Proceeding along this line of thinking, it can be said that the hostility between the father and the son allegorically projects the conflict between England and Ireland. Innes further notes that Synge was an "anti-colonial writer" since "his drama and essays address the situation of a colonised Ireland seeking to free itself from physical and cultural domination by England" (118). When taken allegorically, then, patricide reflects an ultra-nationalist desire to overthrow the colonising power, by means of violence when necessary. This suggests the central conflict between characters might possibly be an allegory of a conflict over the expression of anti-colonial desire and whether it is heroic or not.

The juncture between the communal energy and anti-colonial resistance in the play is not a constructive one, though. On the one hand, the villagers aspire to achieve a kind of authentic existence; on the other hand, they lack the ability, initiative, and the means to do it. Pegeen, for example, quite farcically says that "[she] never killed [her] father [because] [she'd] be afeard to do that" (Synge, 1981: 187). Their collective desire to challenge authority is, therefore, directed towards Christy who could achieve something they cannot. Christy is, for villagers, "a daring fellow" (Synge, 1981: 183), "a lad with the sense of Solomon" (184), "a fine lad with the grate savagery to destroy [his father] (201), someone who "would wear the spirits from the saints of peace" (186) and has "a grand story" (197) to tell. The fact that he is greeted with gasps of admiration underlines the absence of a totemic figure who would be an emblem of collective power, so "the villagers in the play create a hero who can embody their own repressed desires"

(Cusak, 2002: 573). It is for this reason that the villagers offer a place to Christy and promise not to turn him over. Malcolm Kelsall (1994) states, Christy "belongs to the people because a crime of tragic passion is outside the jurisdiction of a mechanical and foreign legalism" (xvii).

Christy's presence, despite the youthful energy he brings along, does not lead to a recuperation in the material conditions of the community. Mayo, as a sedentary location, reproduces the habitual manners of existence which constitute the community members as part of a communal identity rather than allowing space for subjective expression. In line with the sterile atmosphere of the communal space, the villagers' take on their socio-political existence is very similar to the one in the Revival rhetoric which promotes an idealized version of reality as part of a political agenda. *Playboy*'s treatment of the shared discourse is, however, far from being idealistic. Synge interrogates the heroic discourse of the Irish nationalists by giving a farcical hearing to it. Synge's farcical tones become manifest in a scene where the community members propose a toast for their heroes: "Drink health to the wonders of the western world, the pirates, preachers, poteen-makers, with the jobbing jockies; parching peelers, and the juries fill their stomachs selling judgements of the English law" (Synge, 1981: 197). "The wonders of the western world" seem to be far from a collection of national ideals, which means that the village is a place where the symbolic codes of social existence produce a reversed and demeaning form of heroism. In other words, the villagers reinstate a form of authority that they claim to defy in the first place (Cusak, 582). While they claim to hate colonial authority, they produce a similar one by glorifying bogus "wonders" and manufacturing a heroic self for Christy. It is through such farcical elements that Synge attacks his contemporaries who succumb to the hollow rhetoric of Irish nationalism. As Robert Brazeau (2009) suggests, "Synge uses Christy and the community's response to him to critique sharply the stock beliefs of Romantic and heroic Irish nationalism" (154).

While Christy's new social position as a respectable man is based on a series of lies about his past and his abilities, he still goes through a transformative process which brings about a fundamental change in his view of himself. In the words of Nicholas Grene (1985), "We witness the metamorphosis of a figure of farce into a dynamic character" (139). For Christy, the reappearance of his father as an authoritarian figure in his life means a retreat from his desire, "a desolation between [his] own self and the fine women of Ireland" (Synge, 1981:207). In his newfound land, Mayo, he is able to build himself a new identity beyond his father's reach by initiating "a dynamic construct of an outsider" (Lachman, 2018: 79), and this process is also fostered by the other members of his new community, especially women. Whereas he was a "dribbling idiot" in the past, he turns out to be "the wonder of the western world" (215) in the end, due to the contributions of his new community confounded by his parricidal stories. This aspect of the play, therefore, poses another question about identity: if the self is the sum of the stories you tell about yourself and other people tell about you, is there an essential and objective basis for it? Synge's play challenges the straight answers to such questions. What is apparent is that, as Ronan McDonald puts forth, "[Christy's] victory over his father is also a victory over origin as the source of a straitening, inherited identity. Now identity becomes a future possibility rather than a predetermined burden" (2002: 75). In line with the overall suggestions in the work, it could be argued that Synge posits the self as an allegory in itself: an allegory of the collective investments in a narrative construction of subjectivities. Contrary to what the antagonistic rhetoric of Irish nationalism suggests, the constitution of the self, especially in Christy's case, is an allegorical procedure of storytelling where communal relations and subjective desire play more decisive roles than purely national motivations. In this context, postnational allegory in the play grows hand in hand with a post-identity politics.

The play's ending where Christy and Old Mahon make an elated exit is nested with suggestions for a different mode of inter-subjective existence. As previously stated, the tension between Christy and his father is very much akin to the political tension between Ireland and England, and Christy's failed integration into the Mayo community which is desperate to find a heroic figure raises questions about the ways the self is constituted. When such semantic layers are taken allegorically, it could be safely argued that Christy and Old Mahon's departure from the community is ripe with political and ontological suggestions. Upon his father's arrival, Christy attacks him to regain his 'heroic' position. However, once the mythology surrounding his life is dissipated, he fails to win the others' admiration. Pegeen, for example, says that "there's great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed" (Synge, 1981: 227), implying that the narrative allure of Christy's nurtured heroism is no longer seductive. The father and the son, then, somehow developing a sense of intimacy, decide to leave the village to roam around Ireland and tell the "stories of the villainy of Mayo, and the fools is here" (229). Christy says that he will attend his father "like a gallant captain with his heathen slave" since he is "master of all fights from now" (229). In a way, the duo stops being a stable constituent of the local community and open themselves to a new mode of existence. This is where their exit acquires an onto-political dimension. Declan Kiberd (1995) argues that "When Christy leads his father out towards the end of that act, 'like a gallant captain with his heathen slave', the pair constitute the image of a revolutionary community, while the villagers lapse into revivalism" (175). That is, the decision to become nomadic storytellers is a marker of a revolutionary thinking in that they show enough courage to leave the habitual space of signification and seek reconciliation in the dynamic flow of a vagrant lifestyle. Moving beyond the confines of the stratified space, the pair risk roaming outside the communal codes, and thus, deterritorialize the very mode of existence the Irish nationalism offers to them. Christopher Collins charts the theatrical presence of Irish nomads as expressive of a "residual culture" of pre-modern Ireland that offers "an alternative understanding of what it meant to be modern at the beginning of the twentieth century" (2016b: 1). However, while we agree on the significance of the nomad as a political force, we argue for a more ontologically inclined reading of the nomadic existence. As Deleuze and Guattari argue in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), the nomadic is "everywhere apparent but remains difficult to conceptualize" (354). By choosing to exist outside definitive structures, laws, and customs, the father and the son, though there is still tension between them, seek an alternative way for self-expression, which they ultimately find in nomadic storytelling. Does Synge offer a solution in the colonial tension when the final moment is taken allegorically? Can the ontological dynamics of nomadic storytelling be a new way of co-existence between the authority and the subject, the colonizer and the colonized? Does the practice of nomadic storytelling offer the duo with a chance to build what Manuel DeLanda calls "flat ontology" (2002; 47), that is, a way of co-existence beyond habitual structures of domination? Given the complexity of the questions the play addresses, it is hard to come to any simple conclusions, but as this essay has argued, Synge is calling for a postnational and post-identity understanding of the troubled relationship between various subject positions. If nation is, as Benedict Anderson (1983) famously notes, an "imagined community", then Synge's play suggests that there are many ways to imagine it as a dynamic space of encounter. While he avoids catchall prescriptions, he addresses the importance of aesthetic endeavour in finding suitable expressions for centennial problems as well as subjective existence.

Conclusion

Irish theatre underwent a major transformation at the beginning of the previous century. Playwrights faced challenges in finding a language that would, on the one hand, build on the national condition they were working under, and on the other hand, reflect the artistic desire and capacity to go beyond the habitual forms of thinking. The indispensability of the latter motivation brought about a theatrical

sensibility which could ultimately work against the grain; that is, theatre showed a potential to dislocate the entrenched models of knowing even if it meant that theatre itself would be deconstructed. As Robert O'Driscoll comments, prominent Irish writers in this period "turned from the fashionable and narrowly nationalistic" toward "creating a unique style, the opposite of what their nation demanded or expected" (1971: 9). J. M. Synge's *Playboy* portrays a dramatic world in which both the established theatrical norms and the dominant ideologies of personhood are evacuated. As Christopher Murray (1997) asserts, "the celebration of freedom is the key to Synge's drama" (71); as such, *Playboy* plays with standardized notions of the self and artistic creation and offers instead an allegorical lens through which everyday reality can be reassessed. In doing so, *Playboy* conceives reality as a play between various levels of allegory which resurfaces at moments when language stops being a representationalist medium. As this essay has tried to show so far, a Jamesonian look at how the allegorical resonances imbricate can well inform the readings about the juncture between history and ideology. It is the ideological coupling of language and allegory that invests in the construction of everyday illusions; it is also through the same coupling that those illusions can be deconstructed. One of the greatest achievements of the play lies in its dismantling the essentialisms behind the hegemony of specific modes of existence and negotiating the self and the literary form on a nomadic plane of thought. By opening up a theatrical space for such discussions, the play addresses a postnational allegory as an imaginative interpretation of national and individual reality.

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