

Subversion of Heroic Myth: The parricide in J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the subversion of the heroic myth in John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* by applying the 'heroic scheme' of Lord Raglan, who identified a set of common characteristics that appear in the lives of mythological heroes across various cultures, and the model of the 'monomyth' by Joseph Campbell, who traced the universal stages of the hero's journey across diverse myths and folklore. Synge, the Irish playwright, poet, and writer best known for his contribution to the Irish Literary Revival, wrote the play in 1907, which was premiered at Dublin's Abbey Theatre in the same year. *Playboy* precipitated controversy and riots due to its perceived mockery of Irish rural society; however, it later came to be recognized as a masterpiece of modern drama. Christy, the parricide protagonist, lacks conventional heroic attributes, and Synge's portrayal demonstrates that Christy does not belong within the traditional heroic framework. This subversion is evident from the play's outset until its conclusion, through factors such as the protagonist's social class, the divergence between the divine and the worldly, and deviations in mythotypical skills and qualifications. Methodologically, the analysis first applies Lord Raglan's heroic scheme to assess Christy's alignment with traditional heroic traits, followed by an examination through Campbell's model to evaluate Christy's non-heroic position. The goal of this complementary approach is to offer an exploration of structural, thematic, and contextual elements revealing layers of heroic subversion that a single-method approach might overlook.

Keywords: J. M. Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*, Lord Raglan, Joseph Campbell, hero's journey

Kahramanlık Miti'nin yıkımı: J. M. Synge'in *The Playboy of the Western World* adlı oyununda baba katili

Öz

Bu çalışma, John Millington Synge'in *The Playboy of the Western World* (Batı Dünyasının Çapkını) adlı eserinde kahramanlık mitinin nasıl yıkıma uğratıldığını Lord Raglan'ın farklı kültürlerdeki mitolojik kahramanların yaşamlarında ortaya çıkan ortak özellikleri tanımladığı 'kahramanlık şeması'nı ve Joseph Campbell'ın çeşitli mitler ve halk hikayelerinde kahramanın yolculuğunun evrensel aşamalarını izlediği 'monomit' modelini uygulayarak incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. İrlandalı oyun yazarı, şair ve yazar olan ve İrlanda Edebiyat Rönesansı'na yaptığı katkılarla tanınan John Millington Synge, bu oyunu 1907 yılında yazmış ve oyunun aynı yıl Dublin'deki Abbey Tiyatrosu'nda prömiyeri yapılmıştır. *The Playboy of the Western World*, İrlanda kırsal toplumuyla alay ettiği algısı nedeniyle tartışmalara ve ayaklanmalara yol açmış; ancak daha sonra modern dramının başyapıtlarından biri olarak kabul edilmiştir. Baba katili başkahraman Christy, geleneksel kahramanlık niteliklerinden yoksundur ve Synge'in betimlemesi, Christy'nin geleneksel kahramanlık çerçevesine uymadığını göstermektedir. Bu yıkım, oyunun başından sonuna kadar başkişinin sosyal sınıfı, ilahi olan ile dünyevi olan arasındaki ayrım ve mitotipik beceri ve niteliklerdeki sapmalar gibi unsurlar aracılığıyla gözlemlenmektedir. Çalışma, metodolojik olarak önce Lord Raglan'ın kahramanlık şemasını uygulayarak Christy'nin geleneksel kahramanlık özellikleriyle uyumunu değerlendirmekte, ardından Campbell'ın modelini kullanarak Christy'nin kahramanlık konumunu analiz etmektedir. Bu tamamlayıcı yaklaşımın amacı, tek bir yöntemle gözden kaçabilecek yıkıma dair katmanları gözler önüne sererek yapısal, tematik ve bağlamsal unsurların bir analizini sunmaktır.

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Anahtar kelimeler: J. M. Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*, Lord Raglan, Joseph Campbell, kahramanın yolculuğu

Introduction

John Millington Synge, born in 1871 and died in 1909 in Dublin, is renowned for his play *The Playboy of the Western World*, first performed in 1907. Synge sketches Irish peasantry and culture in the play in order to highlight societal ills rather than celebrating them. He portrays characters with misconceptions and false beliefs and reflects the flaws of his society. Instead of a conventional hero who confronts and fixes these issues, Synge's protagonist, Christy Mahon, is flawed and contributes to societal damages through his actions and beliefs. By choosing such an ordinary person as his protagonist, Synge starts a debate in his time to critique his society effectively. Synge was a sheer observer of his time and composed his works on real picture of life. He wrote *Playboy* relying on his observations of a number of visits to West Kerry and Mayo, counties in Ireland, between 1903 and 1904 (Benson, 1982, p. 112). In one of his visits, he learns about a real story of a murderer who kills his father with a spade. According to that, the man flees to a small town where he is welcomed and guarded over by the natives from the police until finally he runs away from here to America (Gerstenberger, 1964, p. 85-86). Christy Mahon, the protagonist of *Playboy*, escapes from his hometown to a village in Mayo after he kills his father with a loy (an Irish spade). This escape from the police does not end like the real story as Christy is to go back to his village with his father at the end. The play gives humorous record of Christy's quest from a sarcastic angle.

Synge's *Playboy* caused an intense controversy upon its 1907 premiere, provoking audience disturbances and protests that came to be known as the Playboy Riots. This tumultuous reception stemmed from the play's satirical treatment of Irish society, particularly its religious and nationalistic sensibilities. The play's parodic exploration of religious themes and application of mock-Christian events and allegorical representations deeply offended the predominantly Catholic audience (Bourgeois, 1968, pp. 199-201). Furthermore, Christy Mahon's provocative depiction of Irish women in their underwear, considered scandalous at the time, was perceived as both an affront to moral decency and a slander against national pride; "the touchy Puritanism of the Irish was offended by anything outspoken on the subject of women" (Strong, 1941, p. 35). This image, coupled with the play's critical portrayal of Irish rural life, fuelled accusations that Synge was denigrating Ireland's image and undermining nationalistic sentiments. The image of an Irish girl in her shifts was a "discredit on Ireland" (p. 35).

Taking its subject matter from a real story, the play owes much of these discussions to its realistic description. Characters are chosen from the real Irish agricultural labourer of low social status and their language is employed in the play. As Synge expresses in his preface, one can observe imagination, a rich and living language, and reality and joy in the play (1995, p. 96):

I have used one or two words only that I have not heard among the country people of Ireland, or spoken in my own nursery before I could read the newspapers. A certain number of the phrases I employ I have heard also from herds and fishermen along the coast from Kerry to Mayo, or from beggar-women and ballad-singers nearer Dublin; and I am glad to acknowledge how much I owe to the folk imagination of these fine people [...] This matter, I think, is of importance, for in countries where the imagination of the people, and the language they use, is rich and living, it is possible for a writer to be rich and copious in his words, and at the same time to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form [...] On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy. (1995, p. 96)

Christy who believes that he has killed his father has fallen into a fatal error that he has done something heroic. Moreover, the people in Mayo reinforce this illusion by believing

his story considering it as something ideal, and honour him as a brave warrior or king. Not only his bombastic language elevates him to a higher status, but also the attitude of the people in the village determines Christy's so-called dignified character. Later in the play, he is disparaged to be a parricide. This leads a paradoxical perception of his murderous act that makes Christy a hero and a murderer at the same time. This paradox reveals itself in the language of the play that elaborates heroic and religious accounts in a comic manner. The joy of the play is penetrated in that language. Alan Price, a scholar who wrote on Synge, remarks that "Synge made a selection from the idiom of the peasants and created language authentic and credible and more exact, compact and beautiful than the actual utterance of anyone" (1961, p. 77). It was this actuality that held a mirror to the audience and disturbed them.

One of the key themes in the play is Christy's journey of self-discovery, which, in a parodic sense, bears similarities to Oedipus's tragic realization. However, unlike Oedipus's tragic fate, Christy's journey not only unfolds in a darkly comedic manner but also provides a subverted version of heroic patterns that portray him as an antihero rather than a hero. This study employs a dual methodological approach to examine the subversion of traditional heroic archetypes in Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. It first applies Lord Raglan's heroic scheme to assess Christy Mahon's conformity to established heroic traits. This framework, which outlines recurring patterns in hero narratives, identifies deviations and subversions. Subsequently, the analysis utilizes Joseph Campbell's monomyth model, which delineates the stages of the hero's journey, to further evaluate Christy's position within the non-heroic framework. This complementary approach is thought to provide a comprehensive investigation of the play's structural, thematic, and contextual elements, and contribute to unveil domains of heroic subversion that a single-method analysis might neglect.

1. Challenging traditional archetypes: Lord Raglan's heroic traits

In opposition to the heroic tradition, structuring of the hero is recurrently interrupted in *Playboy* and the protagonist proves himself to be an antihero rather than a hero in many aspects. In his book *The Hero*, Raglan puts forward that "the fact that the life of a hero of tradition can be divided up into a series of well-marked features and incidents [...] strongly suggests a ritual pattern" (1951, p. 186). He gathers these features in three groups of rituals: rituals at birth, at initiation and at death (p. 185). He schematises the whole life of a mythological hero and offers heroic traits:

- 1) The hero's mother is a royal virgin;
- 2) His father is a king, and
- 3) Often a near relative of his mother, but
- 4) The circumstances of his conception are unusual, and
- 5) He is also reputed to be the son of a god.
- 6) At birth an attempt is made, usually by his father or maternal grandfather, to kill him, but
- 7) He is spirited away, and
- 8) Reared by foster-parents in a far country.
- 9) We are told nothing of his childhood, but
- 10). On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom.
- 11) After a victory over the king and/or a giant, dragon, or wild beast,
- 12) He marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor, and
- 13) Becomes king.
- 14) For a time he reigns uneventfully, and
- 15) Prescribes laws, but
- 16) Later he loses favour with the gods and/or his subjects, and
- 17) Is driven from the throne and city, after which
- 18) He meets with a mysterious death,
- 19) Often at the top of a hill.
- 20) His children, if any, do not succeed him.
- 21) His body is not buried, but nevertheless

22) He has one or more holy sepulchres. (Raglan, 1956, pp. 174-175)

To begin with the pattern's first traits, we do not know anything about Christy's birth but we are informed that Christy Mahon is coming from a village to the coast of Mayo where he finally arrives after "walking wild eleven days and waking fearful in the night" (Synge, 1995, p. 108). He is the son of a strong farmer and is himself a farmer. According to Raglan's pattern, a hero descends from a noble family: the mother of the hero is a royal virgin, and his father is a king. When we look at the play, we have many biographic details from the dialogues. In agreement with the traits, we do not know anything about Christy's childhood and his mother, who might have died shortly after Christy was born as we know that Old Mahon wants to wed Christy to Widow Casey who suckled Christy for six weeks (p. 118), which also echoes Oedipus' marrying his mother. On the other side, Old Mahon does not belong to a noble family of any sort but is a farmer like Christy. Thus, he fails to fulfil Raglan's heroic feature by having an ordinary pedigree. The circumstance of Christy's heroic conception is still unusual as killing his own biological father as the source of his heroism is both self- ascribed and interestingly socially accepted, even collaboratively endorsed despite the legal and theological prohibitions against parricide. Rather than having supernatural, mysterious, or extraordinary events as the base of an exceptional personality with uncommon talents that set him apart from ordinary people, Christy's heroic status originates from a straightforward act of killing, which is also forming the foundation of subversion.

In Raglan's pattern, a common motif is that an attempt is made on the hero's life at birth – often by his own father (1956, p. 174). In *Playboy*, Christy is similarly threatened by Old Mahon, who wishes to marry him to Widow Casey, not out of a desire to protect his established power, but for financial gain (1995, p. 118). When Christy rejects the proposal, Old Mahon threatens him, saying, "I'll have the devil making garters of your limbs tonight" while lifting a scythe, an agricultural tool, and adding, "God have mercy on your soul" (p. 118). In response, Christy raises the loy and "split[s] to the knob of his gullet" (p. 119). The antihero recounts this story as if in a daze, surrounded by young Mayo girls who are quite impressed by his actions. Christy will continue to narrate this story in a way that captivates and enchants the villagers, especially the young women. His account of violence, shared with a sense of pride and embellishment, raises him to an almost legendary status within the community, despite the questionable morality of his action. This persistent retelling not only secures his image as a daring and rebellious figure but also enhances the irony and social satire in Synge's depiction of heroism and its acceptance in the Irish community.

Raglan notes that, upon reaching adulthood, the hero either returns to or sets out for the place where he is destined to become king (1956, pp. 174-175). In the first act of the play, the theme of ascending to royalty is presented with a parodic twist. Pegeen, deeply impressed by Christy's audacious act of killing his father, perceives him as heroic, though in a deliberate contrast to the fated path of Oedipus. When Pegeen and Christy are left alone for the first time, they engage in a conversation that reveals Christy's past and Pegeen's curiosity about him. Pegeen expresses amazement that Christy, after having killed his father, had not been feared before. Christy confesses that prior to the incident, he was an unnoticed, ordinary man, with no one paying him any attention, including girls, except animals. Pegeen, somewhat disappointed, contrasts her romanticized image of Christy as a grand figure with his reality of labour and solitude. Christy humorously recounts his modest life, where his only excitement came from poaching rabbits and even catching a fish with a dung-fork, which nearly got him jailed. Pegeen will question the appeal of such solitary activities (Synge, 1995, p. 109):

PEGEEN [*with disappointment*] And I thinking you should have been living the like of a king of Norway or the Eastern world. [*She comes and sits beside him after placing bread and mug of milk on the table*]

CHRISTY [*laughing piteously*] The like of a king, is it! And I after toiling, moiling, digging, dodging from the dawn till dusk with never a sight of joy or sport saving only when I'd be abroad in the dark night poaching rabbits on hills, for I was a divil to poach, God forgive me [*very naively*], and I near got six months for going with a dung-fork and stabbing a fish.

PEGEEN And it's that you'd call sport is it, to be abroad in the darkness with yourself alone? (p. 109-110)

This exchange between Pegeen and Christy illuminates Christy's previous anonymity and his yearning for recognition. Peegen, as if she has believed a romance and would like to live in that, tries to situate Christy in a chivalric world. On the other hand, Christy is hardly cooperating with her. People didn't truly know him or his capabilities in Ireland as he was likely overlooked or underestimated. Peegen, somewhat teasingly, suggests that perhaps it was the girls who were paying attention to him and implies that he might be exaggerating his lack of notice. However, Christy insists that even the girls didn't take much notice of him. We see a contrast between Peegen's idealized perception of him and the harsh reality of his life. Peegen initially expresses disappointment because she expected Christy to have lived a life of grandeur, 'like a king of Norway or the Eastern world'. Christy playfully dismisses this idea and feels sorry for the grim truth of his life – a relentless cycle of hard work with little happiness, save for the occasional thrill of poaching at night, which is similar to Medieval hunting practice of the aristocracy. However, the idea of illegal hunting (poaching) is contrasting even to this aristocratic sport.

For Raglan, the hero is destined to defeat the king or a dragon/wild beast, marry a princess, and eventually become king (1956, p. 175). In *Playboy*, parody shows itself through Christy's similar but inverted hero's journey. When Christy is questioned about why he left his village, and when it is assumed he is fleeing from bailiffs, agents, and landlords, he dismissively responds that he is escaping from "divil a one" (1995, p. 104). Christy's repeated disavowal of these typical figures of oppression implies that his father's treatment of him was even more severe, framing his father as a more personal and direct antagonist than conventional 'devilish' figures of authority. Instead of defeating a king, dragon, or wild beast as per Raglan's archetype, Christy symbolically "kills" Old Mahon, leaves his village and arrives in Mayo to become a "king" or leader in this new land. Christy's self-attribution as a hero and the villagers' admiring perception of him align as he demonstrates his leadership and prowess, especially during and after the mule race. He is celebrated by the villagers, who cheer him on as "the champion playboy of the western world" (p. 132) and shower him with praises like "Good jumper! Grand lepper! Darlint boy! [...] the racer!" (p. 135). Even Old Mahon, without recognizing him, ironically praises Christy as a "Good rider!" (p. 133). Through these achievements and the villagers' honours, Christy establishes his authority and earns a heroic status within the community. His transformation from a fleeing son to a celebrated figure creates an ironic turn on the classic heroic narrative, which underlines Synge's satirical approach to heroism and social expectations. This is also reinforced through the theme of marriage. It is Old Mahon who usually interferes with the hero's choice of princess. He aims to wed Christy to Widow Casey, who symbolically parallels Raglan's "princess" as the hero's future spouse, a role later embodied by Pegeen. Although Pegeen and Christy takes her father's consent to get married in the scene that Christy threatens Shawn with the loy, Mahon rushes in and reverses everything. Christy's downfall from a man of honour and courage to a murderer and a mad man, namely from hero to antihero begins from this stage at the end of which he cannot marry. There is also another point to stress. In Restoration theatre, strict fathers function as a blocking device that prevent their children from marrying the partner they chose (Payne, 2001, p. 143). The father usually prefers the partner of his own choice, which is the main triggering conflict between Christy and his father. Furthermore, Mahon's appearance in Mayo commences the blocking for the marriage

between Christy and Pegeen. However, in the Restoration plays, it is usually the female who has to consent to his father's wish – just like Pegeen – and it is the female's father that prevents the wedding. Mahon's appearance and the natural consequent process of obstacle for the marriage imply a change of the role between male and female. With this incident, Christy looks more desperate and helpless like the female partner in the Restoration theatre, and loses his hero status swiftly.

In line with Raglan's heroic traits, a hero is traditionally reputed to be the son of a god (1956, p. 174). First, as suggested by the hero's name, there is a strong reference to Jesus Christ. With the words "If I wasn't a good Christian" (Synge, 1995, p. 137), Christy defines himself as a devoted Christian. In the courting scene, where Pegeen and the protagonist exchange flirtatious words, they refer to God's miracles, symbolizing their union (p. 137). Pegeen's name also connotes 'pigeons' an allusion to the purity and innocence of doves in Christian symbolism. Second, Christy assumes a role akin to that of Jesus Christ as a redeemer and saviour for the people of Mayo: he is perceived as a guardian of the public house, keeping away the "harvest boys" and idle "tinkers" (p. 102), and as a saviour for Pegeen, who had been expected to marry Shawn. Yet, this portrayal is parodic as Christy is celebrated as a hero primarily for 'killing' his father. In Christian mythology, God sends His son to die as a sacrifice for humanity's salvation, whereas here, Christy kills the father figure and even threatens to kill many people of Mayo, making it a parody of even Jesus Christ with no real sacrifice as an inversion of the biblical roles of father and son (Smith, 1999, p. xix). Thus, Christy fulfils a subversive 'founding' religious role rather than a heroic one. Third, numerous biblical references throughout the play both construct and deconstruct Christy's divine role. After Pegeen prepares Christy's bed, she says, "may God give you a good rest till I call you in the morning when the cocks will crow" (Synge, 1995, p. 113), which can be interpreted as an allusion to Jesus' betrayal as the next day the villagers will turn against Christy. The scene where the villagers lift him up after winning the mule race also echoes the resurrection of Christ, who was raised to life after being crucified. In the play, Mahon cries, "they are raising him up" (p. 134), signalling Christy's celebration of a new, heroic life after proving himself. However, this rise to grace is short-lived as Mahon's reappearance quickly brings about Christy's downfall. When Mahon introduces himself, Christy denies their relationship, calling him "a raving maniac that would scare the world" (p. 141). Mahon, in turn, calls Christy a "poor good-for-nothing" and adds, "isn't it by the like of you the sins of the whole world are committed?" (p. 141), ironically alluding to Christ's role as a redeemer who purifies humanity. Here, Christy is exposed as a liar rather than a bearer of truth like Jesus. Finally, rather than becoming a protector of all, Christy attempts to kill his father a second time with the loy (p. 143), leading the villagers who once revered him to condemn him to death.

In the context of Raglan's heroic traits, Christy's identification with the son of God is undercut throughout the play by farcical elements and parody. The villagers, as well as Christy himself and Mahon, frequently use religious expressions, exclamations, and doxologies like "Glory be to God" (Synge, 1995, pp. 105–146) and "may God and Mary and St. Patrick bless you" (p. 113; p. 140), and often refer to religious figures, particularly saints. These expressions are mostly used in vain, reflecting an exaggerated and ironic use of Christian terminology that emphasizes the contrast between the dignity of religious references and the triviality of the occasions (Skelton, 1971, p. 119). For example, Pegeen's father, Michael, tries to leave Shawn with Pegeen as he heads to a wake, but Shawn, fearful that Father Reilly will disapprove, grows anxious, exclaiming, "Oh, Father Reilly and the saints of God, where will I hide myself to-day? Oh, St. Joseph and St. Patrick and St. Brigid, and St. James, have mercy on me now!" (Synge, 1995, p. 102). In another scene, Pegeen burns Christy's leg during an attempt to restrain him: "PEGEEN (*coming over*) God help him so.

(*Burns his leg.*) CHRISTY (*kicking and screaming*) O, glory be to God! (*He kicks loose from the table, and they all drag him towards the door.*)” (p. 145). This grotesque scene blends religious parody, comedy, and brutality, emphasizing the inconsistency between religious exclamations and violent actions. Another scene shows the irony between word and action. When Jimmy speculates about Christy’s reasons for coming to Mayo, he suggests, “Maybe he followed after a young woman on a lonesome night” (p. 104). Shocked, Christy responds, “Oh, the saints forbid, mister; I was all times a decent lad” (p. 104). Yet Christy is in fact pursuing Pegeen and enjoys the admiration he receives from both Pegeen and Widow Quin. He even ties his supposed heroism to an unheroic and unchristian gain, boasting on his own in a soliloquy: “two fine women fighting for the likes of me – till I’m thinking this night wasn’t I a foolish fellow not to kill my father in the years gone by” (p. 114). Similarly, he invokes God when speaking of his murderous deed: “With the help of God I did surely, and that the Holy Immaculate Mother may intercede for his soul” (p. 105). According to Skelton, this reflects “the spiritual decadence of the west, a decadence which has gone so far that, for all the religious verbiage, the only acceptable Redeemer turns out to be a young man who has killed his Da [dad] in a scuffle, not Christ Messiah but Christy Mahon” (1971, p. 119). Christy’s so-called bold deeds and words convey neither true heroism nor religious weight, uncovering the satirical portrayal of both religious and heroic ideals in the play.

Christy functions as an antihero not only in the mythological sense but also within a religious context as he repeatedly defies Christian doctrine despite the implications of his name. Ten Commandments that are the divine and human laws of Christianity as well as fundamental social codes of conduct (Barclay, 2001, p. 4) are persistently violated by Christy. He kills or attempts to kill his father twice, directly contravening the commandment “You shall not murder” (Packer, 2007, p. 9), and disparages him with terms like “devil” (Synge, 1995, p. 106) and “dirty man” (p. 8), violating “Honour your father and your mother” (Packer, 2007, p. 9). Christy also excessively invokes the divine name in vain, with expressions such as “In the name of the Almighty God” (Synge, 1995, p. 141) and “God bless you” (pp. 102, 107), which contradicts the commandment “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain” (Packer, 2007, p. 9), a habit shared by many characters in the play. Additionally, he persuades Widow Quin to be a false witness (Synge, 1995, p. 129), contrary to “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Packer, 2007, p. 9), and he obsessively desires to win Pegeen’s affection and live with her, defying “You shall not covet your neighbour’s house” (Packer, 2007, p. 9). Old Mahon, his father, further accuses Christy of laziness, saying he spends half the day lying idle in the sun (Synge, 1995, p. 126), contrasting with “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Packer, 2007, p. 9), which implies a six-day work ethic. Unlike the heroic figure of Jesus Christ, Christy is a parody of a Christian believer, undermining both the sanctity of God through his language and the actions expected of a Christian hero. Ironically, Christy considers himself a “decent lad” (Synge, 1995, p. 102) despite these transgressions and, even more ironically, others view him in the same light. Through this portrayal, Synge illustrates a hypocritical society that overlooks its own moral inconsistencies, humorously narrating human nature by subverting traditional heroic traits and pattern.

As Raglan’s archetypal scheme suggests, the hero reigns uneventfully for a time but eventually loses favour with the gods or his people and is expelled from the throne and community (Raglan, 1956, p. 175). In the climactic scene, the villagers attempt to hang Christy, believing this time he has truly killed his father. Pegeen, who was initially captivated by Christy’s deeds and romantic words, also turns against him upon facing the stark reality of his supposed crime (Synge, 1995, pp. 144-145). This scene hints at the alignment with Raglan’s pattern, where the hero’s fall from grace mirrors the archetype’s tragic decline. However, Christy, though rejected by the people in the land of his kingdom, emerges

transformed – from a submissive figure into a dominant one. Old Mahon’s unexpected return disrupts the villagers’ plans and leads to Christy’s escape and a surprising reversal of power relation between father and son. As they leave together at the end of Act Three, Christy asserts his newfound authority by declaring that his once–tyrannical father will now “cook his meal and wash his spuds” because he has become “master of all fights from now” (p. 146). Throughout his heroic journey, Christy has evolved, becoming a confident and assertive figure vastly different from the timid, stuttering young man he was in his hometown. Emboldened, he no longer fears women and has even gained a romantic interest, whom he hopes to marry. He has attempted to kill his father twice and, by the end, openly challenges him a third time. Old Mahon, who previously sought to duel with Christy, ultimately submits, symbolizing a figurative death of the father-figure and a symbolic transfer of power to Christy. Christy takes his father’s former position as an authority, a shift foreshadowed earlier in the play. When Pegeen admires Christy as having the appearance of a noble young man, he asks, “is it me?” (p. 108), realizing his transformation from a dirty, stuttering lout into a poetic figure. Similarly, in the final act, Old Mahon, now astonished by Christy’s command, echoes this sentiment with his own, “is it me?” (p. 146). Here, Old Mahon acknowledges his weaker status, and “realizes that from this out he is to be the subordinate partner” (Price, 1961, p. 175). Christy, empowered by the events, leaves the village as a self-proclaimed master of all fights while Pegeen mourns the loss of her imagined hero and the possibility of an escape from her mundane life. The final scene effectively illuminates the play’s exploration of subverted form of heroism, the tension between illusion and reality, and the transformative power of storytelling.

2. Deconstruction of heroic patterns: Joseph Campbell’s Monomyth

Synge’s *Playboy* subverts traditional heroic myths by presenting an antihero whose journey contrasts with Joseph Campbell’s monomyth theory outlined in his influential book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell describes the universal stages of the hero’s journey – *separation*, *initiation*, and *return* – collectively known as the monomyth. While Christy’s journey exhibits some elements of this monomyth, many features of the heroic pattern oppose it, or are altogether absent. This divergence stems from the subversive nature of the hero type Synge draws. Although Christy undergoes a similar process, the outcome of his journey differs significantly in the context that the knowledge and universal message typically acquired by the hero in mythological narratives, which usually lead to positive renewals in the protagonist and society, contrast with the negative outcomes throughout the play.

According to the monomyth, the first stage of a mythological journey is *separation*, a departure from the familiar surroundings into an unknown realm filled with both danger and opportunity, prompted by a call to adventure that signals a shift in purpose and identity (Campbell, 2001, p. 53). The hero might embark willingly, like Theseus confronting the Minotaur, or be pushed by external forces, as with Odysseus contending with Poseidon’s wrath. Whether the adventure begins by chance, through curiosity, or by fate, it draws the hero into extraordinary realms where he will explore a life beyond his ordinary life (Campbell, 2001, p. 53). Christy’s call to adventure occurs before the events of the play. Old Mahon pressures him to marry a notorious forty-five-year-old widow who is described as fat, limping, and blind, and who also nursed Christy for six weeks – a fact known to all (Synge, 1995, p. 118). Christy perceives this demand as an insult to his manhood and sense of self. As a young man without deformities, he believes he is entitled to a more suitable marriage. Old Mahon, however, attempts to “thwart the natural process, the cycle of growth [...] violate the most vital and meaningful natural pattern” (Gerstenberger, 1964, p. 85) for Christy. Consequently, Christy kills his father to restore this natural cycle and to assert his place in the world. In this way, marriage becomes a fundamental motivation for Christy’s actions as it is

for Pegeen, who similarly seeks a union but not with Shawn. Pegeen emphasizes this notion, remarking that it is time for Christy to claim his “good share of the earth” (Synge, 1995, p. 111). Christy’s actions thus originate from the universal call to mate and procreate, a drive to choose to secure his rightful place, with a comedic flourish by escaping from a demon-like widow.

The act of killing, while serving as a release and renewal for Christy, falls short of being considered heroic. Parricide, the act of killing one’s father, remains an uncommon and universally condemned crime (Bourgeois, 1968, p. 203). For example, Oedipus’s profound grief and self-imposed punishment reflect the grave nature of this act and its significant impact on society. Historically, severe punishments, including death, have been levied for such crimes (Robinson, 2001, pp. 44-46). Bourgeois suggests that it was Christy’s storytelling talent that reframed the criminal aspect of parricide, noting that the villagers would not have admired Christy had he not transformed his supposed deed into a “gallous tale” (1968, p. 203). This perspective is supported when the villagers turn against Christy as the crime occurs in their midst. Concerned for their own safety, they seek to restrain him and deliver him to the authorities. The act, once celebrated by the villagers, now faces condemnation. One explanation is that the villagers, weary of their mundane lives, were keen to immerse themselves in Christy’s tale. His cryptic references to the police and the sudden revelation of his crime incited their admiration. To Philly, Christy seemed a daring figure who could challenge the police; for Pegeen, he was an escape from a marriage to Shawn, and for Jimmy, a rare treasure in a desolate place. Only Shawn saw him as a murderer, but Shawn’s cowardice made his words unreliable, especially on bravery (Synge, 1995, pp. 106-107). Christy himself was initially cowardly until he constructed his tale. His call to adventure was simply an attempt to evade the police or punishment. From the start, Christy is pictured as a parody of tragic or epic hero as his journey is driven by a cursed, ancient but parodic crime.

According to Campbell, destiny calls forth the hero from his society to a zone unknown: a distant land, a forest, a secret island, a region of both treasure and danger, or a dream state (2001, p. 53). Mayo is the sphere of dream or imagination for Christy till the end of the story. Considering the whole play, Christy comes here, falls in love, is betrayed, and goes back to his village. His deed remains “in the world of the imagination and unrealized in any objective or meaningful way” (Gerstenberger, 1964, p. 76). In this dream world, he meets Pegeen and experiences the illusion of being a hero and a love object. However, this illusion still affects his identity with a realization that will help him mature at the end complying with Campbell’s monomyth stages to be subverted later. Firstly, according to that, “the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the ‘threshold guardian’ at the entrance to the zone” (Campbell, 2001, p. 71). This zone is the place of experience, change, and maturity for the hero, and the entrance is not easy. When Christy arrives at Mayo, he goes to the public house first. This place is a microcosmic gate to the unexplored zone where a sort of transformation befalls Christy. However, this transformation does not help Christy find his true identity at the beginning; rather, it leads him to establish a new self-based on the same dreamy and imaginative character as before. This is a fake change. Furthermore, similar to the questioning of the guardians in the monomyth, they all ask Christy questions to solve his mystery in the first meeting with him in the pub: “You’re one of the tinkers, young fellow, is beyond camped in the glen? [...] Is it yourself fearing the polis? You’re wanting, maybe? [...] Were you never slapped in school, young fellow, that you don’t know the name of your deed? [...] Did you strike golden guineas out of solder, young fellow, or shilling coins itself?” (Synge, 1995, pp. 103-105). He is initially suspected to be a robber wanted by the police. After they are convinced that he is a sort of hero, Michael, Pegeen’s father, lets him stay with Pegeen. Campbell notes that the oldest account of a passage through gates of metamorphosis is the Sumerian tale of the mythological goddess Inanna. She is met at the temple by the chief

gatekeeper, who wants to know who she is and why she is there (2001, p. 97). Similarly, Christy is interrogated until he tells his secret about being there. However, the secret is unfolded in a humorous way to subvert the resolution of hero's mystery. Pegeen implies that if Christy hasn't committed any serious crime – such as murder, forgery, robbery, or butchery – there's no reason for him to be on the run, suggesting he's done nothing at all significant. Christy, feeling hurt, responds by expressing how harsh Pegeen's words are to someone like him – a poor, orphaned traveller with a prison sentence behind him, the threat of hanging ahead, and hell itself waiting below. Pegeen dismisses Christy's claims, insisting he's merely boasting and hasn't actually done anything significant. She doubts his bravery and suggests that someone as gentle as him wouldn't even harm a screaming pig. Offended by her words, Christy retorts, asserting that she's not speaking the truth, determined to defend his story and prove his courage. At the end Pegeen gets angry: “[*in mock rage*] Not speaking the truth, is it? Would you have me knock the head of you with the butt of the broom?” (Synge, 1995, p. 105) just like he did with his father. Christy, reacting with a sudden, horrified cry, pleads with Pegeen not to strike him. He then confesses, almost in shock himself: “[*twisting round on her with a sharp cry of horror*] Don't strike me.... I killed my poor father, Tuesday was a week, for doing the like of that (p. 105). As observed, the conversation reaches a parodic conclusion, as what initially seems to be Christy's grand confession and claim to heroism is gradually undermined by Pegeen's mocking disbelief and scepticism. Despite his dramatic claim of having killed his father – a confession intended to solidify his identity as a dangerous and courageous figure – the absurdity of the situation undercuts his heroic self-image. Pegeen's response, feigning anger with threats to hit him with a broom, satirizes the notion of heroism itself, reducing his dark confession to something almost farcical. The scene, similar to Campbell's interrogation gates of metamorphosis, serves as a threshold for Christy. The main gatekeeper in this dream-like place is Pegeen's father, who ultimately takes him on as a pot-boy to help Pegeen and guard the place. If he had not managed to pass, his quest would have been interrupted from the beginning, and there would not have been any metamorphosis in his life, even if it was illusory.

Christy is not a typical hero; in consequence, the metamorphosis he has undergone is not a true one in such a dream place. Considering his true acts, he is a liar and a mad person. The dialogue between Christy and Michael reveals this:

CHRISTY. I did not then. I just riz the loy and let fall the edge of it on the ridge of his skull, and he went down at my feet like an empty sack, and never let a grunt or groan from him at all.

MICHAEL - (*making a sign to Pegeen to fill Christy's glapp.*) - And what way weren't you hanged, mister? Did you bury him then?

CHRISTY - (*considering.*) Aye. I buried him then. Wasn't I digging spuds in the field? (Synge, 1995, p. 106)

The blow to the head is real as later Old Mahon arrives with a bandage and plaster on his head. However, the claim of burial is a lie; otherwise, Old Mahon would have suffocated. Old Mahon himself mentions that Christy broke his head with a loy (p. 125) but makes no mention of being buried. Christy keeps his secret and garnishes the story, noticing that everyone believes him and even encourages him. This leads him to start believing his own lie and beginning an imaginative adventure. His heroism is founded purely on a dream. When Mahon reappears, Christy is unwilling to abandon his fantasy and attempts to 'kill' him a second time. Shocked, the villagers try to make him understand that his heroism was merely an illusion. Pegeen's remark about the “great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed” (p. 144) provokes Christy to become even fiercer in defending his invented tale. He resolves to carry on his story of bravery even at the risk of death, declaring, “Then let the lot of you be wary, for, if I've to face the gallows, I'll have a gay march down, I tell you, and shed the blood of some of you before I die” (p. 145). Unfortunately, farcical enough, his only act of

violence is biting Shawn's leg. When Old Mahon reappears, Christy – still enraged – asks if he has come to be killed a third time. The villagers, frightened by the sight of the supposedly dead Mahon, flee, leaving Christy alone. Christy then declares himself the “master of all fights” (p. 146) and asserts to his father that he will be in charge from now on. Although his heroic actions turn out to be fictional, he still sees himself as a hero even though all he managed to do was to bite Shawn's leg like a dog. Before coming to Mayo, his father's interference with Christy's desired romantic life had driven him to an act of violence although it was far from heroic. Christy's misunderstanding of this act as gallous brought him to this final confrontation. Even Pegeen is initially deceived, interpreting Christy's actions as courageous. Despite the unmasking of the truth, Christy continues to view himself as a hero while Pegeen laments his departure, falling again for his gallant image: “Oh my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only Playboy of the Western World” (p. 146). At the play's end, it is clear that Christy's transformation is not from ordinariness to heroism but from a life of regularity to one filled with imagination, dreams, and illusion – a false metamorphosis that exposes his role as an imposter.

Christy dreams, and just when we expect him to awaken, he instead sinks deeper into his daydream. Many critics, however, argue that Christy ultimately transforms his fantasy into reality by the play's end. Alan Price is among them, asserting that Christy, initially a timid figure, is empowered by the villagers' admiration of his fabricated parricide. Their idealization fuels his imagination, turning him into the “daring playboy” they initially envision (1961, p. 162). This transformation blurs the boundaries between reality and fantasy, and culminates in Christy adopting the heroic persona he first pretended to be. However, since there is no real act of valour on Christy's part before and during the play together with after the obscure end of the story, it is doubtful that any genuine transformation in his identity has taken place. Consequently, the play's ending suggests not an awakening or rebirth but a continuation of the dream. Though Christy proclaims himself a master and Pegeen mourns his departure, both Michael and Old Mahon are aware of the truth. Old Mahon, unfazed and even amused by Christy's threats, walks away, glancing back with a broad smile and remarking, “Glory be to God. I am crazy again!” (p. 146). His lightheartedness signals that nothing has truly changed as Christy still clings to his dream. Michael, Pegeen's father, meanwhile, is content, looking forward to peaceful drinking sessions, and even Shawn feels relieved as he anticipates his marriage once he recovers from Christy's bite (p. 146). Christy, with the villagers' help, has matured only within an illusory hero adventure and remains a hero solely in this dream world – and in Pegeen's eyes as she still desperately longs for a saviour, not necessarily Christy. Thus, the ending subtly suggests a trace of heroism for the discerning reader or spectator who maintains some emotional distance from Christy. This ambiguous conclusion left Irish writer George Moore dissatisfied. He expresses this to Synge in a letter: “Your play does not end, to my thinking, satisfactorily. Your end is not comedy; it ends on a disagreeable note” (Greene and Stephans, 1956, p. 255). This ‘disagreeable note’ is the hollow illusion of heroism grounded in a crime as dark as parricide.

The second stage of the monomyth is *initiation*, and within this stage lies the “road of trials” where the hero must endure a series of challenges (Campbell, 2001, p. 89). For Christy, the first trial is the mule race. In the second act, Christy races against others in the village and emerges victorious. His second test is a duel with Shawn who serves as a foil to Christy, contrasting with him in demeanour and courage. Christy threatens to kill Shawn if he meddles in his relationship with Pegeen. However, both scenes are parodies of traditional trials with the comic element evident in the language. After winning the race, Christy declares, “(*taking prizes from the men*) thank you kindly, the lot of you. But you'd say it was little only I did this day if you'd seen me a while since striking my one single blow” (p. 135). In his confrontation with Shawn, he exclaims, “Take yourself from this, young fellow, or I'll maybe add a murder

to my deeds to-day” (p. 139). Christy, as if reminding himself of his supposed feat, repeats his violent tale of killing his father to reinforce his self-image as a hero, especially after the race. Despite the grand narratives that Christy and others construct around heroism, “this pure comedy finds its climax, symbolic and actual, in the games upon the sand. Christy Mahon, who has projected himself as a father-killer of epic proportions, participates in games which parody, perhaps, the epic games of traditional heroes” (Gerstenberger, 1964, p. 83). Thirdly, Campbell asserts that another test for the hero is meeting with a woman who is representative of Goddess of mythologies in this quest. This woman, as Campbell phrases, is the Queen Goddess of the World with whom the soul of hero performs a mystical wedding which is at the central point of cosmos (2001, p. 100). Pegeen is the Goddess for Christy. Christy’s “conscious drive has been the wish to impress Pegeen” (Price, 1961, p. 167). The drive that led him to kill his father in the potato field later urges Christy to win Pegeen’s love and kill him again as for the third test, which, paradoxically, will turn out to be a fake murder, which deconstructs the requirement of the test at the end as Pegeen will not accept him as bridegroom. As the play’s antihero, Christy is a distorted imitation of the warriors and heroes of ancient times on domestic level as well.

Pegeen is a crucial character in the play to serve as the sole motivation behind Christy’s knightly deeds. Christy’s decision to kill his father comes from his refusal to marry the widow, highlighting that the drive for a female partner is his main motivator. This desire keeps him immune to Widow Quin’s temptations and Shawn’s bribes. Christy even bribes Widow Quin himself to keep Mahon’s initial visit a secret from Pegeen. Pegeen, in turn, makes Christy believe he can become the ideal man he plans. Despite Christy’s self-deprecating remarks, Pegeen elevates him to a status reserved for poets and kings (Synge, 1995, p. 109), enabling him to recognize his potential as a hero. Campbell explains that “woman, in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know. As he progresses in the slow initiation, which is life, the form of the goddess undergoes for him a series of transfigurations [...] She lures, she guides, she bids him burst his fetters” (2001, p. 106). For Christy, Pegeen becomes an emblem of triumph. However, Christy, not a true hero but an antihero, soon realizes that Pegeen’s loyalty is fleeting. With Mahon’s reappearance, the myth begins to unravel, causing Christy to lose his fame and the mystical support of his ‘goddess’. Yet, he remains confident, telling Widow Quin that Pegeen will continue to praise him as before after he kills his father in front of everyone (p. 143). This confidence shatters when Pegeen, disturbed by his actions, intends to send him to the hangman, saying, “I’ll say, a strange man is a marvel, with his mighty talk; but what’s a squabble in your backyard, and the blow of a loy, have taught me that there’s a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed. (*To Men*) Take him on from this, or the lot of us will be likely put on trial for his deed to-day” (p. 144). This is a key moment for Christy’s character; Pegeen’s rejection disappoints him deeply and ignites his anger. The same impulse that led him to kill his father resurfaces as he feels now compelled to kill any again until Mahon’s entrance prevents him. Apart from the guiding female figure in traditional myth, there is also a woman often attempting to divert the hero, a role Campbell refers to as “woman as the temptress” who represents defeat rather than victory (2001, p. 111). Widow Quin embodies this role in the play, initially tempting Christy to live with her and later conspiring with Shawn to arrange a marriage that would allow Shawn to wed Pegeen. Widow Quin, however, is not the sole figure of defeat; relatively old Widow Casey, whom Old Mahon tries to pair with Christy, similarly represents loss and infertility. A parallel exists between the two widows, yet Widow Casey, who nursed Christy, also brings to mind an Oedipal connection. This dynamic evokes Campbell’s concept of the “bad mother” in the tales of Oedipus and Hamlet (pp. 112-113) although Synge presents it with irony. While Oedipus kills his father en route to Thebes and marries his mother, Christy kills his father and

leaves the village where Widow Casey resides as if consciously avoiding the curse. Synge plays with this irony by introducing Widow Quin, who resembles an “Irish Jocasta, a cynical mother-whore figure, who challenges Pegeen for Christy” (Benson, 1982, p. 123). Ultimately, Christy escapes this symbolic nightmare, aided by Pegeen’s presence. According to the monomyth, the hero who met the goddess and refused every call by the temptress meets his father, a meeting called “atonement with the father” (Campbell, 2001, p. 116). This meeting is a symbol of reconciliation between father and son. In the play, after Christy’s first murder, he avoids meeting him when he is alone with Widow Quin. He cowardly hides behind the door until he leaves. For the second meeting, he sees him after winning the races. However, this one brings an unexpected conclusion. Christy’s bluff is unearthed. The reconciliation gives its seat to another murder. The phase of the monomyth does not work here as Christy ‘kills’ his father again instead of negotiating.

Campbell describes the archetypal father figure as possessing a cruel, monstrous aspect – an “ogre” quality – “signifying a coarse and dominant force within the psyche” (Estes, 2004, p. xlix), a concept rooted in early human history. Campbell notes that the “archetypal nightmare of the ogre father” becomes real through the ordeals of primitive initiation (2001, p. 126). For instance, among the Australian Murngin tribe, a boy is first terrified by the symbolic ‘father’ snake, which comes for his foreskin, forcing him to seek refuge with his mother. Here, the woman’s protective role is essential (p. 126). Similarly, in Synge’s play, Old Mahon, bent on revenge, chases after Christy, who is initially terrified. Widow Quin then assumes the role of protector, using the “charms or power of intercession” defined in the monomyth (p. 120) to defuse the situation peacefully, despite the brutish tendencies of the father, who resists reconciliation. In their second encounter in Act Three, Christy views his father as “a raving maniac” (Synge, 1995, p. 141) while Old Mahon similarly describes himself as “raving with a madness that would fright the world” (p. 134). Christy’s perception of his father is that of a monstrous figure who must be vanquished for the community’s well-being, and he takes pride in his supposed feat (Price, 1961, p. 165), akin to the pride Oedipus felt after defeating the Sphinx. This act of murder allows Christy to assert himself within the community, temporarily adopting the role of a hero who has rid society of a mythical monster.

As claimed by Campbell, the hero who has met his father reaches a higher status of mental or physical level, a status called “apotheosis” (2001, p. 138). After the encounter with the father, the hero completes his transformation and becomes “a fully integrated adult male” (Howlett, 2010, p. 115). Within the play, there are two kinds of apotheosis: the first one is supplied by the people in the village, the other by Christy. Until the scene of the second murder, Christy has a personality that they want. He is naiver, roaming around, telling his story of victory over his father. “Full of exaltation, he wins all at the sports” (Strong, 1941, p. 41). However, in the second encounter, he is “cast down by his father into what he was before” (p. 41). Nevertheless, he thinks that he has proven a hero and shows his determination not to leave Pegeen (Synge, 1995, p. 143). In fact, saying that he has proven to be a hero after killing his father for the second time, he unintentionally admits that he was not a hero before. He knew that he did not bury his father’s corpse, and later saw that he was alive dwelling in the village. He was the “playboy of the western world” (p.127) for the people in the first apotheosis, and he knows and acts the playboy accordingly. However, after the second round, he obtains a different self-appointed ennoblement. He identifies himself as hero, becomes more savage and even more poetic as heroes in the epics:

If I can wring a neck among you, I’ll have a royal judgment looking on the trembling jury in the courts of law. And won’t there be crying out in Mayo the day I’m stretched upon the rope with ladies in their silks and satins snivelling in their lacy kerchiefs, and they rhyming songs and ballads on the terror of my fate? (*He squirms round on the floor and bites Shawn’s leg*). (p. 145)

For a heroic play, the elements appear well-established, with elevated language and imagery evoking ancient scaffold scenes featuring mourning audiences. In his climactic tirade, Christy “has reached the apotheosis of his career” (Benson, 1982, p. 131). However, this apotheosis diverges from the traditional monomyth and instead becomes a parody of epic heroes. The grandeur of his speech is undermined by the absurd image of a mad dog biting wildly. Throughout the play, Christy’s attitude is frequently likened to insanity or scamming, with metaphors such as “saucy liar” (Synge, 1995, p. 144), “looney of Mahon’s” (p. 127), “crazy pot-boy” (p. 112), “Wicklow sheep” (p. 107), “fool of men” (p. 132), “dirty, stuttering lout” (p. 126), and “louty schemer” (p. 127). At the beginning of the play, Shawn describes a man groaning like a maddening dog in the ditch and suspects him of stealing their hens (p. 103). Even Old Mahon, disillusioned by Christy’s transformation, likens him to a dog, saying, “sons going to the dogs against you” (p. 123). After Christy’s climactic speech, Shawn screams, exclaiming, “he’s the like of a mad dog, I’m thinking, the way that I will surely die” (p. 145). Christy’s apotheosis as an antihero is further discredited by the biting scene, where Synge’s depiction of Christy as a maddening dog undercuts the heroic dimension. This transformation into madness is a result of the societal conditions surrounding Christy. The villagers who initially accept a parricide as a hero themselves live in a state of delirium. Widow Quin, for instance, is reported to have killed her husband; Daneen Sullivan blinds a policeman; and Marcus Quin cripples sheep (p. 100). In such a world, madness becomes Christy’s only way to adapt and assert himself. The psychoanalyst R.D. Laing conceived of “madness as a struggle for liberation from false attitudes and values, an encounter with primary feelings and impulses that constitutes a possibility for the emergence of the ‘true self’ hidden from the false outer being, whose chief function is adjustment to the demands of society” (qtd. in Lupack, 1995, p. 13). By the end of the play, Christy has completed his quest by constructing a new identity – one that rejects the values of those who refuse to acknowledge him. His spiritual self-construction culminates in becoming more insane than the villagers themselves. The play concludes with Christy at the peak of his mad performance. The biting scene, in particular, exemplifies Synge’s cleverest “device of dramatic contrast” (Price, 1961, p. 177), where unexpected farcical elements follow moments of high tension. As Price notes, “To his handling of roguery, Synge brought all the subtlety he had learned from Molière...it stands out a mile in his handling of the dramatist’s use of continual contrast, whereby almost every speech creates a new situation or farcically reverses its predecessor” (p. 177). This use of unpredictability in events and dialogues sustains the dramatic structure of the play, blending the tragic and the farcical to enhance its critique of traditional heroism.

In compliance with the monomyth, the hero’s spiritual achievement is represented by the boon or blessing, a goal symbolizing the culmination of the hero’s quest. Campbell describes this boon as “a symbol of life energy [...] of perfect illumination [...] a realization transcending all experiences of form” (2001, pp. 175-176). To attain the boon, the hero must undergo a transformative process from immaturity to maturity through trials and encounters. Typically, the immature figure at the outset of the journey emerges as a fully realized individual upon completing the quest. In *Playboy*, however, Christy’s transformation diverges significantly from the traditional monomythical arc. After the killings and his ultimate betrayal by Pegeen, Christy gains a grim understanding of the duplicity and cruelty within the Mayo community. As Gerstenberger (1964, p. 83) observes, while the play does not change the world of the “wild coast of Mayo” it transforms Christy’s character. Yet, this transformation is a negative one, driven by his instinctual impulses rather than growth or enlightenment. Christy’s realization of Pegeen’s cruelty exemplified when she prepares to burn his leg despite all his efforts for her leaves him disillusioned and downhearted. Likened to an executioner, the harsh truth is personified in Pegeen. Christy’s romanticized perception of her was misguided. As she intensifies the fire with a bellows, she warns him: “Leave go

now, young fellow, or I'll scorch your shins" (Synge, 1995, p. 145). Stunned by her cruelty, Christy exclaims: "You're blowing for to torture me (*His voice rising and growing stronger.*) That's your kind, is it?" (p. 145). The experience Christy has in Mayo has transformed him to an alienated individual to his environment (Smith, 1999, p. xxii). At this juncture, Christy confronts the reality that Pegeen is not the idealized figure of his dreams, and he attempts to reclaim his agency by fighting back. According to Campbell, "the meeting with the goddess (who is incarnate in every woman) is the final test of the talent of the hero to win the boon of love [...] which is life itself" (2001, p. 109). However, Christy fails this test, unable to achieve the personal fulfilment or renewal promised in traditional myths. Instead of winning Pegeen's love, he experiences rejection and betrayal. The hero in myth is traditionally "the boon-bringer" (Campbell, 2001, p. 16), tasked with returning to society with wisdom or a transformative gift that renews the community. "The full round, the norm of the monomyth, requires that the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess, back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds" (p. 179). In contrast, Christy's journey offers no such renewal as Christy himself has no meaningful gift to offer on the way back to his people, which is also an acknowledgement of the hollow nature of his transformation: "Ten thousand blessings upon all that's here, for you've turned me a likely gaffer in the end of all, the way I'll go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgment day" (Synge, 1995, p. 146). Ultimately, with a distorted boon out of a self-constructed delusion, Christy's arc reflects the subversion of the monomyth.

In Campbell's monomyth, the third stage, *return*, marks the completion of the hero's transformation as they bring back the knowledge and experience gained during their journey. However, the hero, having entered a new world of wonder, is sometimes reluctant to leave and return to their ordinary life. Campbell illustrates this stage with the example of King Muchukunda in Hindu mythology, who, after a successful battle, refuses to return to his country and chooses instead to remain on the mountain (2001, p. 181-182). Similarly, from the outset of *Playboy*, Christy expresses an eagerness to stay in Mayo, where he imagines a leisurely and carefree life: "Well, this'd be a fine place to be my whole life talking out with swearing Christians, in place of my old dogs and cat, and I stalking around, smoking my pipe and drinking my fill, and never a day's work" (Synge, 1995, p. 115). Like King Muchukunda, Christy demonstrates a strong desire to remain in Mayo after proving himself as a hero, particularly through his victory in the mule race and his semi-confrontation with Shawn. Feeling encouraged by the villagers' admiration, he confidently challenges Shawn, who, intimidated, does little to stop him from pursuing Pegeen. Later, when Old Mahon arrives to take him back home, Christy desperately tries to secure his place in Mayo, even seeking Widow Quin's assistance to avoid leaving (pp. 140-142). However, Christy's second attempt at heroism – striking Old Mahon again – shatters the goodwill he had garnered. The villagers, initially eager to celebrate him, turn against him and plan to detain him for extradition to avoid being implicated in his crime. In a blatant reversal, Christy, who once longed to stay in Mayo, now pleads to leave: "(*twisting his legs round the table*) - Cut the rope, Pegeen, and I'll quit the lot of you, and live from this out, like the madmen of Keel, eating muck and green weeds, on the faces of the cliffs" (p. 144). In the end, Christy is not seen as an honourable hero whom the villagers wish to retain, but as a liability they are eager to expel. Pegeen's retort stresses this shift: "And leave us to hang, is it, for a saucy liar, the like of you? (*To men.*) Take him on, out from this" (p. 144). The monomythical hero's transformative return is overturned once again as Christy is released not as a celebrated figure but as a liability, serving as a means for the villagers to absolve themselves of complicity in his actions.

In the final stage of the monomyth, the hero is traditionally expected to return with an elixir to restore and renew society, often aided by supernatural powers. However, if the hero's success is rejected by the guardians or gods, the return is thwarted, and the quest may devolve into a lively, comical adventure instead (Campbell, 2001, p. 182). In *Playboy*, Christy's return is met with disapproval from the chief gatekeeper, Michael, and the villagers. After Christy's second attempt at murder, Synge once again introduces humour by juxtaposing a serious act with comical responses and actions. The villagers, still terrified of Christy's erratic behaviour, arrive with a rope. Philly, reluctant to engage with Christy directly, urges Shawn to take charge, claiming he is the soberest. Shawn, in turn, shifts the responsibility to Pegeen, who takes the lead, and they collectively tie Christy's arms. This is followed by chaotic scenes of burning and biting. In a surprising twist, Old Mahon, presumed dead, reappears and rescues Christy (Synge, 1995, pp. 144-146). Campbell explains that sometimes "the hero may have to be brought back from his supernatural adventure by assistance from without. That is to say, the world may have to come and get him [...] an apparent rescue is affected, and the adventurer returns" (Campbell, 2001, p. 192). Ironically, Mahon, who was previously an obstacle and adversary to Christy, becomes his saviour who is coming from death/nowhere/without. The narrative cycle renews itself, bringing events back to their original state. Mahon's declaration, "I am crazy again" (Synge, 1995, p. 146), signals this return to the beginning. Despite being saved, Christy, caught in his delusion, continues to envision himself as the master of his father, oblivious to the fact that Mahon is the one who rescued him. The antihero's deep-seated illusions prevent him from recognizing that he has achieved nothing heroic, reinforcing the ultimate failure to fulfil the expectations of the monomyth.

At the conclusion of the hero's journey, the hero typically realizes that the unknown, dark zone is an overlooked yet integral dimension of the unified world. The ordinary world and the realm of adventure serve as metaphors for the conscious and unconscious aspects of the self. The hero must deliberately descend into the unconscious or transition from reality to dream in order to integrate these dimensions. Campbell explains that "the exploration of that dimension, either willingly or unwillingly, is the whole sense of the deed of the hero" (Campbell, 2001, pp. 201-202). This journey is ultimately an inward one, aimed at mastering both worlds within the self. In this regard, Christy fails to fulfil the essence of the heroic journey. When his father returns for the second time, Christy has an opportunity to awaken from his illusions and reconcile with reality by which he would correct his mistakes. However, he chooses instead to remain ensnared in his dream world. As Price observes, "dream and actuality will disintegrate just as they were about to become one" (1961, p. 173). In Campbell's terms, the hero-son should rise against the father to achieve mastery over the universe (2001, p. 125). Yet Christy avoids becoming the master of both his internal and external worlds. Instead, he retreats further into the unconscious, refusing to master himself and settling for dominion over his father, proclaiming his dominance until the "judgment day" (Synge, 1995, p. 146). Ultimately, the antihero misinterprets the message and lesson inherent in his journey. Rather than achieving self-realization and balance, Christy remains trapped in his delusion and eventually fails to transcend the limitations of his dream world and achieve the integration expected of a true hero.

Conclusion

The entire narrative of *The Playboy of the Western World* revolves around Christy's identity and his incongruent quest for heroism. At the outset, Christy augments his actions by presenting himself as a grand hero, which spurs a similarly exaggerated response from the villagers. This interaction raises him momentarily to an admired status yet his illusions crumble upon his father's return and only divulge a wounded figure rather than a slain

adversary. Christy's subsequent attempts to substantiate his fabricated heroism ultimately degrade him into a mere antihero – a constructed figure of folly, deception, and madness rather than a traditional hero. Employing Lord Raglan's heroic scheme and Joseph Campbell's monomyth, the analysis exposes Christy's missteps in conforming to conventional heroic structures. Raglan's criteria, centred on ritualistic and noble origins, point out the protagonist's lack of suitable pedigree and absence of defining heroic stages. Christy's mundane beginnings, lack of significant lineage, and his ordinary, even grotesque, actions diverge sharply from Raglan's archetype. Campbell's model similarly subverts Christy's hero's journey, where, instead of achieving apotheosis or returning with an elixir of wisdom for the community, he spirals deeper into personal delusion and mock-heroic detachment. Ultimately, although Christy's arc mirrors certain structural aspects of the hero's journey, his divergence from both Raglan's and Campbell's heroic ideals underlines Synge's critique of false heroism. Christy embodies the hollow shell of an antihero – a parody of the myths, sagas, and heroic tales from which he attempts, unsuccessfully, to draw inspiration, which is also J. M. Synge's criticism of one aspect of Irish society.

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