

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

J.M. SYNGE'S THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD:

A DIRECTOR'S ANALYSIS AND PRODUCTION BOOK

by

RONALD MARK CHAMBERS

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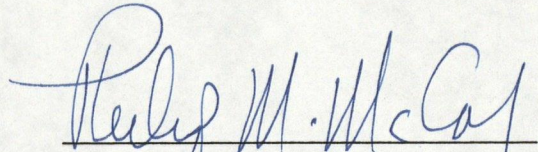
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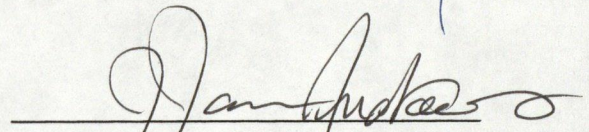


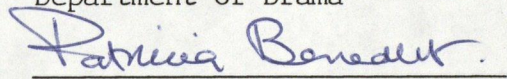
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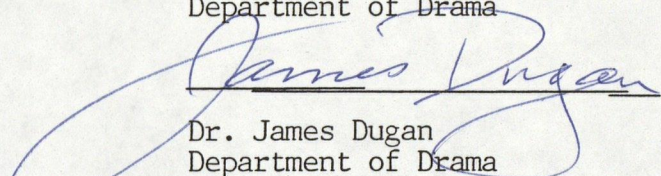
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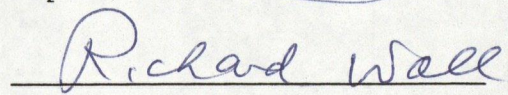
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis documents the preproduction analysis and production process for a staging of John Millington Synge's The Playboy of the Western World, performed at the University of Calgary in October of 1987. There is a dialectic in Playboy which operates between romance and reality, resulting in an amalgamation of these two seemingly incompatible elements within the character of Christy Mahon. The play has often been shocking to audiences because of its sudden change from a comic to ironic tone near its end. On another level the play offers an example to modern audiences of a lifestyle which tends to augment both the tragedy and joy of everyday existence. The play's structure, when analysed, provides much information relevant to its staging in categories such as pace, language, character groupings, action motifs and time lists. The characters in the play are forthright, and extremely susceptible to illusion and romance, but at the same time are very aware of the harsh realities which surround them, which provides for a substantial character analysis. One philosophy for rehearsing the play is the creation of a supporting and nurturing environment in the rehearsal situation. There is a possibility of combining abstractions with realism in the mise-en-scene for the play.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **THEORETICAL ESSAY**

The Playboy of the Western World is, in my opinion, one of this century's most complex dramas, because of the messages it contains and the moral issues it raises. Moreover, the play cannot be successfully categorized according to any conventional genre labels. In 1977 Bruce M. Bigley, in Modern Drama, went so far as to label the play as "anti-drama":

the play is actually less a mixture of comic and tragic elements than a denial of either convention, a kind of anti-comedy and an anti-tragedy, indeed a kind of anti-drama. It is not a play written in ignorance of generic or ethical conventions. It depends for its effect on its rejection of convention. (158)

In support of this assertion, Bigley notes that Northrop Frye does not classify Playboy in the Anatomy of Criticism, though it has been described in Foulke and Smith's The Anatomy of Literature. But according to Bigley their analysis touches

all of Frye's mythoi by describing it in the following manner: "a romantic hero has been built out of a tragic idea and immersed in a society that turns out to be ironic, yet this complex vision of human motives still ends in an exuberant celebration of the possibilities of life—elsewhere." (157-158)

I was unaware of these complexities when I proposed the play for production, but subsequent research showed me what a difficult task I had undertaken. Despite this, my initial love of the play at first reading, and



message I perceived have remained my primary motivations for its production.

There are two main ideas I wish to discuss in this essay. Neither of these may translate directly into a "production concept": rather, they provide a means for me as the director to focus my understanding of the script, something which is necessary in such a complex work. The first portion discusses my overall understanding of the text, and the identification of the theme which is most significant for me. The second portion discusses the world and atmosphere of the play, and its relationship to a Calgary audience in 1987.

#### The Director's Focus

I have already mentioned the complexity of Playboy's dramatic structure. I will deal more fully with the actual structures of the play in a later portion of the thesis. The play is also difficult to interpret thematically. I agree with critic Nicholas Grene who states in his book, Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays that "the dramatic substance of The Playboy is so diverse that we cannot afford to abstract a theme and say—this is what the play is about. As soon as we formulate some such theme...it distorts the play's vision" (145). In my personal analysis and my survey of critical work on the play I have come upon diverse thematic approaches. Despite this, I have noticed some patterns in the subjects, motifs, and themes which point to a dialectic between the romantic side of the play, and the realistic side. I have chosen the words "romantic" and "realistic" as operative terms for this essay, and in other parts of this

thesis, and therefore a more precise definition of the words as they are used in this context is necessary. By romance I mean not only "romantic love" and "adventure", but also "illusion" and the exaggeration and manipulation of absolute and objective truth. "Reality" should be understood as this objective truth in itself. One can never be sure in any situation what is the truth and what is the illusion until they are compared or juxtaposed, and that is how this dialectic operates.

The dialectic between romance and reality has led me to formulate a theme which will guide me in my direction of the play: The Playboy of the Western World describes the need in every human being for imagination and romance, in proper doses, to transcend the limitations of reality in order to gain courage, confidence, self-esteem, and the ability to change that reality. The means by which this idea is conveyed in the play are somewhat paradoxical. The theme is not expressed through a blatant assertion of romance and love, such as that which may be found in musical theatre, but through a careful amalgamation of the romantic with reality itself. Throughout the text romantic characters, actions, and images are counterpointed with concrete realities. This juxtapositioning creates an ironic comedy in which we are invited to ridicule romantic notions. The most obvious and primary action where this juxtaposition is seen is the reception of Christy's deed by the Mayo peasants. The stern deed is romanticised to a point where it becomes respectable and heroic. But later in the play the terrible reality of the deed is revealed to the audience through the bloodied bandages of Old Mahon, and to the peasants through a repeat performance of the parricidal act by Christy. These reversals shock

the audience into recognition of the nulling and naive practise of romanticising violence, of romanticising anything which is dangerous and harmful. But this dialectic works in both directions: Viewing things too realistically all of the time, without any means of comprehending, transcending, or altering perspective, is also detrimental. The lack of romance in anyone's life can be severely limiting to one's everyday existence and to one's potential for becoming something better.

Synge incorporates this dialectic in the carefully constructed text of The Playboy of the Western World in several ways. At first the dialectic operates in favor of realism, creating a satire on the romantic which is transpiring at the same time. Such a case occurs at the very opening of the play, with Pegeen ordering her wedding attire:

PEGEEN (slowly as she writes). Six yards of stuff for to make a yellow gown. A pair of lace boots with lengthy heels on them and brassy eyes. A hat is suited for a wedding day. A fine tooth comb. To be sent with three barrels of porter in Jimmy Farrell's creel cart on the evening of the coming Fair. (57)<sup>1</sup>

The opening words set the scene for romance, the anticipation of a wedding. Within the speech an appealing quality is created, a sense of delicateness, summed up by her request for a "fine tooth comb". However this romantic mood is dashed immediately when in the next breath she asks that all this wedding finery be sent, not in tissue or quaint boxes, but in an ass cart full of porter. The audience is immediately forced to drop their romantic enchantment and become critically aware of surrounding

circumstances. The audience may then respond to the comic incongruities of these extreme opposites. The romantic is satirized by letting the realistic emerge last in the syntactical arrangement.

This arrangement occurs continually throughout the text. Another direct satirization of weddings occurs very near the first example, when Pegeen discusses her coming wedding with Shawn, her fiance. The audience has its mind on romance again, reinforced through the arrival of the bridegroom himself, and through the subsequent flirtatious conversation between the two. But the tables are turned in Shawn's response to Pegeen when he reveals that their betrothal is based in economics, and not in love or admiration:

SHAWN. Aren't we after making a good bargain, the way we're only waiting these days on Father Reilly's dispensation from the bishops, or the Court of Rome.  
(59)

Later on in the same scene Pegeen expresses her fear of the dark and of having to spend the night alone. Shawn responds to her need and approaches her with sympathy, appearing to be overcoming his timidity and to be ascending to chivalry and courage in order that he may protect his wife-to-be. But the audience is fooled again; instead, Shawn transfers the responsibility to Pegeen's father, Michael James: "Then I'm thinking himself will stop along with you when he sees you taking on, for it'll be a long nighttime" (61) Thus it is revealed that Shawn has romantic, protective inclinations, but in intention only, and not in practical action.

Some of the most brilliant juxtapositions where romance is dashed by reality involve Christy and his story. An example of ironic contrast occurs at the initial telling of the tale. Christy expects the people in the shebeen to be so horrified by his deed that he refuses to tell the story even though he is being hounded to do so. He only admits the deed when he is threatened by Pegeen wielding her broom. Instead of being horrified the peasants are amazed and further intrigued. The recognition of Christy's courage by the peasants results in him being given the grand position of "pot boy", a further ironic contrast to what the peasants consider a "magnificent deed" worthy of heroic exaltation. Thus, once again, the romantic balloon is anchored to the earth.

The arrival of Christy with his story initiates a long-running conflict between Pegeen and Christy originating in her jealousy of his using his story to seduce women "in every cot and cabin where you've met a young girl on your way" (81). The cause is Pegeen's idealized perception of Christy as a hero for whom any woman would fall. Christy vehemently tries to tell her the truth, that he has never been with a woman, nor has he used his tale of parricide to seduce a woman. But her romantic vision of him will not be changed. This is a major source of dramatic conflict between the two and illustrates Pegeen's foolishness in being romantically blind to the person who is trying to convince her of the truth.

A different relationship is established between Christy and the Widow Quin. Before she is introduced to Christy, she is prepared to meet up with a burly killer, hoping that she can lead him to her house to have him for herself. She bases her conception on the stories of Christy which

have already begun to circulate in the community. She comes to the shebeen, hoping to lead the killer, Christy, away, because "It isn't fitting...to have his likeness lodging with an orphaned girl" (87). Upon seeing and hearing Christy her attitude adjusts to his meekness, a meekness which no one else seems able to perceive, and she says "aren't you a little smiling fellow? It should have been great and bitter torments did arouse your spirits to a deed of blood" (87). The Widow's trust in her vision of reality supersedes any romantic notion she, or others, might have about Christy. From this point on the Widow Quin acts as a wry and objective editor to Christy's romantic inclinations. For example, near the end of Act II Christy is devastated to discover that his quite-alive father has followed him to the shebeen. The Widow manages to send Old Mahon away without him knowing of Christy's presence, but Christy remains distraught over the possibility of his story being found untrue, and the probable loss of Pegeen which would result. Christy is forced to plead with the Widow not to reveal what she has seen, in doing so revealing his vision of Pegeen:

CHRISTY (in despair and grief). Amn't I after seeing  
the love-light of the star of knowledge shining from  
her brow, and hearing words would put you thinking on  
the holy Brigid speaking to the infant saints. (126-27)

Christy's image of Pegeen, distorted because of his infatuation, should elicit a sympathetic response in the audience. This sympathy, and respect for his condition, are altered when the Widow responds with the following perceptive comment: "There's poetry talk for a girl you'd see itching and scratching, and she with a stale stink of poteen on her from selling in the



shop" (127). Throughout the play the Widow responds to Christy's verbal dexterity with amused objectivity, ridiculing his verbal rhapsodies, and comically deflating his grandious, idealistic, perceptions.

Some of the characters themselves can be viewed as representational motifs of romance and reality. An example is the opposition of the characters of Philly Cullen and Jimmy Farrel. Both always appear together. They are polar opposites, the delineation of which can first be noted in Synge's character descriptions: "Philly Cullen, who is thin and mistrusting" and "Jimmy Farrell, who is fat and amorous" (61). In both physique and temperament one is a stereotype of the realist or cynic (Philly), the other that of the easy going, romantic believer, (Jimmy). Throughout the text, whenever the two appear, we have a balance of a positive, imaginative, and romantic view of the world from Jimmy, and a negative, unimaginative, and realistically critical view from Philly. One example of this polarity occurs in Act III, when both meet Old Mahon for the first time, not yet associating him with Christy, and Mahon shows them his battered skull and explains how it was obtained:

MAHON (triumphantly). It was my own son hit me.

Would you believe that?

JIMMY. Well, there's wonders hidden in the heart of man!

PHILLY (suspiciously). And what way was it done?

(135)

The contrast in reactions of Philly and Jimmy further illustrates the dichotomy between the two, and that which they represent.

In addition to the previous example of characters as representations to illustrate the dialectic, Synge develops other motifs throughout the play, representing either romance or reality, which can be paired according to their thematic oppositions. An example is the contrast established between weddings, associated with hope, rebirth, and romance, and wakes, associated with hopelessness, death, and reality at perhaps its harshest extreme. Weddings are referred to continually throughout the play: specific instances include Pegeen's wedding plans with Shawn, her wedding plans with Christy, the Widow's wedding plans with Christy, and the pretend wedding which occurs between the Widow and Christy in Act II. Of wakes, the most obvious example is that of Kate Cassidy's wake which summons Michael James and the others from the Shebeen in Act I. Also, Michael James scolds Christy for not bringing the body of Old Mahon to the shebeen so that his death may be celebrated. The conflict between weddings and wakes, life and death, is continued throughout the play and becomes a reflective commentary on Christy's choice of fates at the climax of the play: either he marries Pegeen or he is hung for murdering his father.

A second example is the contrast between idle, romantic hero-worship and practical respect. An example of this occurs in Act II when the village girls bring Christy his gifts of a boiled chicken, duck eggs, and a small cake, all things which he will consume as delicacies, pretty and ambrosial, but evidently impractical so far as long term sustenance is

concerned, being exorbitantly expensive. However, just as Christy is finishing his chicken Pegeen comes bursting in lugging a large can of goat's milk, which she has extracted from the goat herself. The chicken, in contrast, just happened to have been "crushed at the fall of night be the curate's car" (99). Thus we have the romantic worship of Christy exhibited through the presents from the village girls, and a realistic and far more practical respect shown by Pegeen lugging in the can of milk. Another irony is added to this when one realizes that Pegeen is doing this out of her persistent romantic belief that Christy is a true hero.

The ultimate contrast between romance and reality happens at the point of the play where Christy's illusion is terminated, and can go no further. This occurs as Christy is telling the most extravagant version of the story to the Widow. At each recounting of the story up to this point, Christy has gradually deepened the blow to his father from a tap on the head, to a splitting of his head, until this final version where Christy exaggerates the deed to a complete halving of Old Mahon: "a gallant orphan cleft his father with one blow to the breeches belt" (119). As Old Mahon is split in two in romantic fantasy, Old Mahon in one piece shows up very much alive in reality:

CHRISTY (He opens door, then staggers back). Saints  
of glory! Holy angels from the throne of light!

WIDOW QUIN (going over). What ails you?

CHRISTY. It's the walking spirit of my murdered da.

(119)

Christy hides behind the door, and Old Mahon, enticed by the Widow, describes Christy as the complete opposite of the Christy that the peasants have been envisioning. His description culminates in the Widow's ironic proclamation "Well, I never till this day heard of a man the like of that!" (123).

It is here that the overall structure of the play changes. Up until Mahon's arrival the juxtapositioning has been such that reality has always had the upper hand over romance; for the most part reality was used to satirize romantic inclinations. But despite this satirization, the romance has continued to grow overall, for the audience cannot help identifying with Christy's personal growth and love for Pegeen. Old Mahon's sudden arrival is an obvious threat to all of the developments which have taken place so far, whether they appeared to be based in reality or not. Christy is now forced to preserve his image: he is forced to take action, and not rely on verbal discourse as a means of winning respect. The girls arrive to take Christy to the games where, because of his desire for Pegeen, and his growing esteem based on his being told he is a hero, he excels "winning all in the sports below" (133).

The revelation that Old Mahon is still alive, and that Christy is a liar, is contrasted very effectively with one of the most lyrical moments

of the play, and the height of the romance. This is the scene in Act III after Christy returns from the races and proposes to Pegeen, who is finally won over and has come to trust the sincerity of Christy's affections. There is nothing, except one slight reservation on the part of Pegeen, that disturbs the delicate poetic romance of this scene. The romance becomes firmly established. And Pegeen's love becomes established as well, for she has finally witnessed Christy in heroic action.

This inversion introduces the thematic message that romance is important in all of our lives. Previous to this inversion all of the romantic actions, motifs, and developments have been satirized through a comparison to reality. The audience identifies with this satirization and laughs. But Christy must discard the romantic and redeem himself in reality. Thus the entire play takes an ironic twist as reality becomes a driving force in the "romantic" hero. There are still the romance-reality contrasts where romance is mocked, and where the audience laughs, but overall, the reality becomes not just a witty pinprick to the romantic balloon, but a harsh and threatening omnipresence. The peak of this harshness occurs where the peasants rope Christy and Pegeen burns his leg. This inhumane treatment should be revolting to the audience, as it is to Christy, who, upon Old Mahon's resurrection, comes to the conclusion that the peasants of Mayo are fools. The entire sequence of events in the last moments of the play, including Pegeen's loss of Christy, is often shattering to an audience.

Synge, all through the play, entices audiences to an anti-romantic, anti-illusory view of the world. At the same time he generates, through the audience sympathy with Christy's desires and spirit, a romantic identification with Christy's plight. So at the same time the play is mocking romance, it is secretly "sneaking in" a general desire for romance in the audience, a need for romance to replace the brutal reality at the end of the play. But by far the most powerful example of the value of romance is that of the development of Christy from a timid, repressed, self-conscious youth to an independent, insightful and courageous young man, not just in his romantic tales, but in reality itself. Christy draws upon the self-esteem which he has developed from the peasants reinforcement of his romantic attempts to deal with the world, to inspire changes in his own life and in the lives of others. Christy's growth, inspired by romance and shaped by reality, is a fine example of how these two disparate elements may be synthesized into personality. When Christy leaves the shebeen at the end of the play he has become aware of the realities in the community: the hypocrisy and brutality of the peasants. But at the same time their romantic perception of him has helped to realize his personal potential. In Christy's last speech of the play he thanks the people for helping him to transform:

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 judgement day. (173)

Christy has become a "likely gaffer", recognizing the harsh realities in this community. But along with this capacity for perception goes an ability to continue "romancing" through the rest of his life. Thus the romance and the reality have been amalgamated into Christy's being.

#### Synge's World and Calgary 1987

When The Playboy of the Western World was first produced at the Abbey Theatre in January of 1907, there was a vehement negative reaction from the audience: the Playboy riots. The Irish people, or, primarily the Dublin middle class, were disturbed by Synge's depiction of the West Irish peasantry's brutality, profanity, and seeming lack of morality. All of these things contradicted the urban conception of the peasantry as noble, sound-minded, pure, and hardworking: a positive example of Irish "character" for the growing nationalist fervor. The issue centered primarily around Christy being converted to a hero because of his parricide: whether or not the peasantry would do such a thing. Because the majority of the Calgary audience has no preconceptions about the Irish peasantry, the play should be examined to see if this ignorance might have any bearing on their reaction to a performance. In order to do this it is useful first to examine Synge's portrayal of the peasantry in Playboy. There are several inconsistencies between the peasants' treatment of

murderers in reality and the peasants' treatment of Christy in Synge's play. The inconsistencies show that the play does not depend on the audience understanding Irish peasant behavior in order to appreciate the play.

Both W.B. Yeats and Synge have famously testified to the esoteric psychology of the Irish peasantry, specifically in the West of Ireland and on the Aran Islands, where the peasants are known to protect murderers from the police. In J.M. Synge and the Irish Theatre, Maurice Bourgeois reports that "when Mr. Yeats first went to Aran, the people were surprised to find that he was only a peaceful tourist, not a murderer seeking sanctuary" (203). Synge heard of an actual case of parricide that he describes in his book, The Aran Islands. The story provided the idea from which Playboy was developed:

[An] old man, the oldest on the island, is fond of telling me anecdotes—not folktales—of things that have happened here in his lifetime.

He often tells me of a Connaught man who killed his father with the blow of a spade when he was in a passion, and then fled to this island and threw himself on the mercy of some of the natives with whom he is said to be related. They hid him in a hole—which the old man has shown me—and kept him safe for weeks, though the police came searching for him, and he could hear the boots grinding on the stones over his head. In spite of a reward which was offered, the island was incorruptible, and after much trouble the

man was safely shipped to America. (The Aran Islands 88)

Synge explains that the reason for this behaviour centers on the peasantry's understanding of human passion, "that a man will not do wrong unless he is under the influence of a passion which is as irresponsible as a storm on the sea" (The Aran Islands 88-89). But in Playboy we are never quite certain of Christy's passion until late in Act II when he rages over Old Mahon's sudden appearance at the shebeen:

CHRISTY (turning to the door, nearly speechless with rage, half to himself). To be letting on he was dead, and coming back to his life, and following me like an old weazel tracing a rat, and coming in here laying desolation between my own self and the fine women of Ireland, and he a kind of carcase that you'd fling upon the sea. (125)

Another inconsistency arises when Christy first explains the reason for killing his father in Act I. He tells the listeners "(in a very reasonable tone). He was a dirty man God forgive him, and he getting old and crusty, the way I couldn't put up with him at all" (73). According to Synge the sympathy of the peasants on the Aran Islands depended on the murderer being "sick and broken with remorse" (The Aran Islands 89). If he showed signs of guilt or shame over his actions, then "they can see no reason why he should be dragged away and killed by the law" (The Aran Islands 89).

But at the beginning of the play, when Christy is first lionized, he shows no signs of passion, nor of remorse.

Another inconsistency appears when one considers that Christy is not merely protected, but is regarded as a hero. Bourgeois points out that

Parricide is a crime abhorred in all countries; and if it is quite certain that Irish peasants would not inform against Christy, they would not for all that admire him. Above all, they would not admire the Playboy before he has developed his supposed deed into a "gallous tale," as is the case in the comedy. (203)

Thus it appears that the play does not have any justification in the reality of Irish peasant psychology for several reasons: Christy shows no passion, no remorse, and he is not just protected but is turned into a hero. Since the play does not seem to have any parallel in reality, it may be difficult for an audience to accept what is transpiring on stage, particularly when Christy first arrives. Of course most audiences are willing to suspend their disbelief when they attend the theatre. The parricide however, is so morally taboo that it could arouse a conscious reaction, especially when Christy first announces that he has murdered his father. But any serious concern in the audience is negated soon after by one pivotal line in the play. This is the line, quoted previously, where Christy explains that he killed his father because he was "old and crusty" and because he "couldn't

put up with him at all". Christy's casual response completely contrasts with the seriousness of the murder, and that irony cannot be anything but amusing. It seems that this single line is crucial in establishing the comic tone. To explain this I must relate a story from a research trip I took to Ireland in June of 1987.

During a stay on the Aran Islands I happened to stop one evening in a fairly remote pub where I was engaged in a conversation with a couple of the island's inhabitants. I was pleased that I had finally managed to find a location that was not reeking of tourism, when suddenly about fifteen young American university students and their two professors came into the pub. I found out that they were taking a "touring course" in Irish literature and had arrived on the Aran Islands to study Synge. Each person bought something to drink at the bar, and then they proceeded to sit down and started reading aloud The Playboy of the Western World. The whole situation was an ultimate irony in itself: the students struggled with Synge's language while weathered local fishermen watched and commented among themselves. What was most interesting was that these students, who were not actors, did not respond in any way to the text until the "old and crusty" line, at which they all burst out laughing. After this, they began responding with laughter to other ironies in the script. It was almost as if this line were the catalyst for an awareness of the irony.

The awareness of the irony, and the laughter incited by it, are crucial for the play to "work". Donna Gerstenberger comments on this in

her article "Bonnie and Clyde and Christy Mahon: Playboys All", where she compares audience responses to the film and to the play, and notes that they are very similar. According to Gerstenberger, "The audience which laughs at Christy Mahon's wild-eyed tale of killing his father with a loy can do so because this kind of comic mode distances, denies the human pain explicit in a split skull" (230). But when the graphic details of the murder are made available through Old Mahon, and when Christy makes a conscious choice to murder his father again "the audience at Synge's play is as outraged as the other characters in the play....By this strategy of violating comic propriety Synge makes the audience an accomplice to the deed, a perpetrator of all that follows" (230). It seems then, that whether it is possible or impossible for a man to kill his father and be praised "in reality" is of secondary importance for the effect of the play. What is important is that the audience accept the plausibility without question and merely laugh at the irony. Gerstenberger's use of the word "accomplices" to describe the audience's relationship to the play accurately describes its relevance for a contemporary audience. Though an audience in Calgary is not composed of father-killers, their ability to laugh at Christy and the peasants who worship his deed is akin to the kind of unquestioning complacency which allows things such as war, starvation, and environmental damage to rot the earth. And this is an important issue.

There is some information that suggests that Synge was not making a determined effort to "shock" his audiences. But whether Synge



was making a conscious effort is beside the point, for the play has unquestionably had this effect. What is important is that Synge's entire motivation for writing about the peasants of the West of Ireland suggests another level on which the play may be appreciated by a modern audience. In an article entitled "Yeats's Conception of Synge", Ronald O'Driscoll describes how Yeats believed that Synge

helped establish the foundation of a new art and a new style, a new mood of the soul. For unlike contemporary dramatists, he did not write for ulterior social or humanitarian reasons; he had no desire to impress a real or imaginary audience, and in his work there is neither judgement nor moral indignation.

The "contemporary dramatists" included Ibsen and Shaw, who often wrote to express social problems. But it appears from this description that Synge was indifferent to his audiences, in the sense that he was not concerned with creating any kind of desire for social reform. This is reinforced by Synge himself when, in a letter to the Irish Times on January 31, 1907, he wrote that "'The Playboy of the Western World' is not a play with 'a purpose' in the modern sense of the word" (Collected Works IV p. 364). What was important to Synge was the expression, through his plays, of the life he found in the West Irish peasantry. This "life" offered a venue for his own self-expression, which was inhibited until he visited the Aran Islands.

The peasants of the Aran Islands maintained a strong relationship with the natural environment which directly influenced their own psyche. With their whole lives surrounded and influenced by the capriciousness of the elements, the islanders were profoundly aware of the preciousness of life itself. William Dumbledon describes how this affected Synge in Ireland: Life and Land in Literature: "Completely lacking artificiality, the peasants embodied for Synge a wildly natural ideal, wild with a strength and beauty that he compared to the strength and beauty of wild horses" (100). The peasants' lifestyle was not couched in luxury, but contained a harshness, which counterpointed the joy.

The tragedy and the joy, derived from and fed by a hard life in a harsh, threatening environment, contribute to a sensuality which is communicated through the characters in Synge's plays. Synge describes the sensual quality in two of the prefaces to his works. In the preface to The Tinker's Wedding Synge states that "We should not go to the theatre as we go to a chemist's, or a dram-shop, but as we go to a dinner, where the food we need is taken with pleasure and excitement" (Collected Works IV p.3). Synge makes another sensual reference in the preface to Playboy:

All art is a collaboration; and there is little doubt that in the happy ages of literature striking and beautiful phrases were as ready to the story-teller's or the playwright's hand as the rich cloaks and dresses of his time. (53)

Later he makes his famous declaration that "in a good play every speech should be as fully flavored as a nut or apple, and such speeches cannot be written by anyone who works among people who have shut their lips on poetry" (54).

Some critics are aware of this strong sensuality. Ronald Gaskell, in "The Reality of J.M. Synge" notes that "for Synge the natural world is present, to the senses or the imagination, at every moment, and present not as a background but in its own right" (242). Many of the images created are not simply literary metaphors conjured up at the moment, but are based entirely on the immediate environment. Examples include the number of references to stars, roads, dogs, mountainy sheep, dung, blood, hills, stones, ditches, the sun, the clouds and the moon, as well as direct experiential references, such as walking, toiling, digging, retching, eating, drinking, racing, and fighting. Gaskell also stresses the physical simplicity of the characters' needs, reflected in the immediate environment. "In Playboy this simplicity—Christy's mug of milk by the fire before settling into a clean bed—deepens our enjoyment of the action" (242). The bed and the milk, though simple, mean a lot to Christy, who has been travelling on dark dangerous roads, and sleeping miserably in ditches. Christy experiences and projects a sense of coziness; shivers of content run up and down his spine. But these shivers balance the chills of agony he experienced before, which combine to provide a rhythm consisting of pleasure alternating with agony, a rhythm which persists for him

throughout the play. We become aware that without the agony we can never experience the full pleasure. And we revel in this simplicity and perhaps wish that life could be that easy. This sensual richness contributes to the aesthetic of Synge's theatre as a place for the enrichment of experience. Synge expresses a way of life which is both kind and cruel, beautiful and ugly, joyful and tragic, and which possesses a rhythm of highs and lows augmenting our awareness of these opposites.

Because of this richness, I believe that Playboy can offer an interesting contrast to the way of life experienced by many Calgarians. Middle-class affluence and a high standard of living allow many people to protect themselves, to insulate themselves from the environment. But this perhaps leads to a numbing effect which decreases sensitivity by providing the security of central heating, hot water, and technological gadgetry. Very often it must take some natural catastrophe, such as a snowstorm, flood, or tornado, to increase our personal sensitivity and to make us realize how vulnerable we really are. The modern dependence on television, food preparation appliances, and electric blankets encourages a false sense of security which at the same time isolates people from the rhythms of life itself, turning everything into a dull grey of mediocrity. Though The Playboy of the Western World will not convince people to alter their lifestyles, it may at least show Calgarians an alternative lifestyle which contains, along with much more harshness, much more joy as well.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> References to the text of The Playboy of the Western World are taken from J.M. Synge, Collected Works IV; Plays: Book 2 (Ed. Ann Saddlemyer. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1982). All subsequent references to the text of this play will appear in parentheses, by page number, after the reference. A different text was used for production, because a less expensive and less bulky playscript was needed: J.M. Synge, The Playboy of the Western World (London: Methuen, 1979).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS**



The following is a shortened version of a comprehensive structural analysis of The Playboy of the Western World. Because the structural analysis involves charts, graphs, and numerical data, some licence has been taken to summarize the information in a verbal form. The summary is useful as well, because it condenses the play's structural aspects into more easily manipulated and accessible bits of data, a way of viewing the play overall—the forest, rather than specific points, the trees. An overview such as this enables the analyst to view the play as a whole. The analysis breaks the play down into categories. It must be stressed that these categories do not function independently, but rather they combine intrinsically through action and mise-en-scene to produce what we know as a performance. The original analysis was done in October of 1986.

### Overall Structure

The play was first broken down through the use of an analytical tool known as the french scene chart. The french scene consists of a unit of action defined by either the entrance or exit of a character or group of characters, or by a major shift in focus within the scene. In Playboy, as with most other texts, the french scene is not noted by the author and must be separated by the analyst. Playboy, according to my dissection, contains forty-nine french scenes: twelve in Act I, seventeen in Act II, and twenty in Act III. The french scene chart also enables the analyst to determine the length of each scene through time calculations, and therefore to approximate the running time of each act and of the play as a whole.

Based on these calculations I have determined that Act I runs twenty-eight minutes, Act II twenty-nine minutes, and Act III thirty-two minutes.

Each french scene is described through a brief description of the action which occurs within that particular scene, so that a synopsis of the entire play's action can be viewed at a glance. The action summary of french scene 10, for example, is the following: "Widow comes to take Christy away. Widow and Pegeen fight over possession of Christy. Widow tries to stay the night. Pegeen forces her out." According to my calculations this scene should play about four minutes. The chart also indicates how many characters are on stage in the scene and who they are--in this case three, the Widow, Christy, and Pegeen.

Since the chart summarizes the basic action of the play in this form, the structure in Aristotelian form can also be derived. The following is a summary of action analysis using the Aristotelian terms of "inciting incident", "crisis", "climax", and "denouement". The inciting incident is Christy's slaying of his father, which happens before the action of the play begins. The incident is revealed through exposition when Christy arrives at the shebeen. The incident motivates Christy to escape from his father and provides him with a tale to tell. A secondary inciting incident, which I feel is important, is the reception of Christy's story by the peasants, which gives him the confidence to start embellishing the tale. The crisis occurs when Old Mahon turns up at the shebeen and Christy is forced to take action to resolve this complication and prove himself. The climax occurs when Christy murders his father again, and the peasants reverse their opinions of him and begin the lynching. This moment is extended to include

Old Mahon's revival and the reversal in status between Old Mahon and Christy. The denouement occurs from this point on, after Christy has left, when things return to normal, with Michael James asking for drink, and Shawn approaching Pegeen to reaffirm their marriage commitment. There is one major divergence from the traditional form—a second crisis. This consists of Pegeen's sudden realization that she has lost Christy. This crisis remains unresolved for it happens on the last line of the play.

Within this broad action are episodes of conflict relating organically to the major points mentioned previously. These include the conflict between the meek Christy and the courageous Christy, Christy's attempts to win Pegeen, Shawn's attempts to get rid of Christy and keep Pegeen, the Widow's attempts to get Christy for herself, and Old Mahon's attempt to recapture Christy, all of which occur after Christy arrives. Before Christy's arrival we become aware of conflicts of relationship within the community itself. These conflicts serve to "set up" the situations to follow, and add a further dimension to the action as a whole. These include the differences between Jimmy and Philly, Pegeen's differences with Shawn, Pegeen's attempts to get Michael James to help her in the shebeen, and the Widow's relationship to the community, (revealed through exposition.)

### Pace

Pace in Playboy is directly related to the action as described previously in the section on overall structure. Since there are so many different elements at work determining pace it is difficult to describe pace

in this summary in any kind of detail. For this synopsis I have tried to analyse the pace and rhythm of the play through two approaches: structural and organic.

The structural approach consists of interpreting numerical evidence contained in the french scene chart. The chart, revealing length of scene and act, also reveals the number of scenes in each act. When this information is compared it can be seen that the number of scenes per act increases. Although each act is one or two minutes longer than the previous, the ratio of scene increase is pronounced enough to suggest an increasing amount of shorter, quicker scenes, with characters going on and off faster. Thus structurally, the play's tempo appears to increase as the play goes on. This structural information must be supplemented with an organic approach: what is actually happening in each scene, including the circumstances and context of each scene. This interplay also sets and adjusts the pace in each individual scene, with the scenes combining to produce the rhythm of the whole play. Romantic momentum is generated whenever Christy tells his stories. There is suspense and a natural pace progression, driven forward by those who are listening and encouraging. Their attention fuels Christy, and he becomes more elaborate, more involved, more intense. But this forward progression is halted whenever reality is introduced into the situation. I note two clear examples of such events here. The first example happens when Christy and Pegeen are alone for the first time in Act I, and the Widow knocks on the door. Christy is just getting into his story for a second time and it is about to "take off" when he is suddenly interrupted by a frightening knock from the world

outside, the Widow, and the progression is suspended. The second example occurs when Christy is entertaining the girls and the Widow in Act II, and Pegeen suddenly bursts in on the scene, disrupting the storytelling and the gaiety of that particular moment.

So in a general sense we see pace increasing when Christy is telling his tales, only to be stopped when he is interrupted by external, realistic circumstances. What gets the play moving again is Christy's action to resolve the realistic intrusion. In the last example he is confronted by Pegeen's news of a "murdered da" in the papers. The pace increases when he decides to leave, forced out by her accusations, until Pegeen relents just as he is ready to go. With his confidence restored by her invitation to stay, he is ready again to begin a romantic progression.

It must be mentioned that the circumstances of each individual scene will dictate the pace, and that the pace will be motivated by the particular kind of situation transpiring. For instance there are points of pure exposition, such as Pegeen's opening speech; there are specific conflicts such as those based on internal differences of character, (Jimmy and Philly); and there are attitudes, such as Pegeen's jealousy and uncertainty over the fidelity of Christy. In each of these scenes, if the dramatic action is properly understood by each of the actors, through the character's desires, motivations, and circumstances, the pace and rhythm of the play should evolve naturally, and will contain more subtle detail than if imposed externally. The broad analysis provided here will serve as a guide, a basic understanding through which the pace can be critically observed to see if there is "something wrong" in rehearsal.

### Character Importance Time list

By calculating the total time characters are on stage and by comparing characters, an idea of character importance can be derived.

The time list, in percentages, for the characters in Playboy are as follows:

Christy 73%	Philly 35%	Nelly 21%
Pegeen 60%	Michael 31%	Old Mahon 20%
Widow 42%	Susan 22%	Peasants 12%
Shawn 38%	Sara 24%	Bellman 2%
Jimmy 36%	Honor 21%	

This information is useful for evaluating the relative importance of each character not only for his time on stage but for his dramatic purpose in initiating or complicating action, and for his value as an expositional venue. For example Old Mahon, though he is on stage only 20% of the time, is a much more important character than would first appear. He is directly responsible for Christy, and is the focus of Christy's story. There is also an example of a character who never appears on stage, Father Reilly, who is crucial in supplying a sense of the world of the play, in providing a motivation for Shawn, and in acting as a motif of authoritative repression.

Finally, with this information the director is given a guideline for the scheduling of rehearsals, and the amount of rehearsal time which should be devoted to each of the characters in the play.

### Character Groupings

This section of the analysis is useful as a preparation for blocking, and for helping to understand character relationships. The analyst makes notations of characters who often appear together, characters who are detached or seem alone, or any other specific information regarding character associations or function. This may include practical considerations, such as whether the character appears seldom and may be considered an extra. The analyst can also determine whether it is possible to use doubling in the play, based on these findings. The following are the basic character groupings found in Playboy:

Michael James, Philly Cullen, Jimmy Farrel: These men are not only seen together on stage, but it can be inferred that they spent the entire time between Act I and Act III together at Kate Cassidy's wake. Michael James is a widower, and Jimmy and Philly are likely bachelors. Together the group may symbolize the shortage of men who are willing to get married, preferring alcohol and camaraderie to a wife and children. This seems to be a common condition in Ireland, with many men preferring to live with their mothers until late in life, rather than getting married. When one considers the rigid marital requirements and the sexual repression of the Church, their motivations can be understood.

Susan, Nelly, Honor, Sara: These seem to be the not-quite-initiated girls of the area, who depend on one another for security. There also seems to be a hierarchy within the group, with Sara having the most status, followed by Susan, Honor, and Nelly, respectively. The four of them together, in their eagerness to see Christy, a man, effectively suggests how many

single women there are in the surrounding area desperate for a male, a point reinforced by Pegeen in Act II when she asks Christy, "What call have you to be that lonesome when there's poor girls walking Mayo in their thousands now?" (109)

Christy, Pegeen: The sections where these two appear alone emphasize a romance which, despite Pegeen's initial reservations, contrasts very effectively with the harshness of the rest of the play. The prospect of winning Pegeen is a catalyst for Christy's development, and Pegeen, gradually won over by Christy's sincerity, learns to trust her own love.

Christy, Widow Quin: The Widow acts as an antagonist to Pegeen in a quest for Christy's affections. However the Widow, as opposed to Pegeen, is immediately aware both of Christy's obvious frailty and of his passion. Her forthright and uninhibited desire for Christy suggests much physical and sexual aggression, which would contrast with Pegeen's reservation.

Shawn, Pegeen: This is a grouping which is artificial and tentative, continually drawing attention to the fact that it has been "arranged".

Christy, Old Mahon: Though during the play Old Mahon is usually detached on the stage, it is important to note that Mahon and Christy were a unit, and that Old Mahon is trying to reinstate their relationship. Also, most of Christy's weaknesses stem from Old Mahon's repression. It is interesting that when they are reunited at the end of the play, their relationship is reversed.

Peasants and Bellman: I have included the girls in the crowd scenes where the peasants and bellman appear. They are necessary for the offstage atmosphere of the play, when the outside world finally dovetails with the



inside world of the shebeen. We are familiar with all of the characters except the peasants and bellman, and it is worthwhile to note that their entry occurs when they bring Christy on after the games when they are full of praise for his actions. But the next time they enter it is with Old Mahon, this time savagely to denounce Christy. I think it is important that there is a strong sense of "the masses" with both of these scenes. As well, there should be a strong contrast between the two entrances.

### Time Sequence List

The time sequence list provides the analyst with information regarding the passage of time over the length of the play, and is also used to point out any relevant information concerning lapses of time between acts in the play and events previously revealed through exposition. The entire play takes place within a twenty-four hour period in autumn. It is likely sometime in late September or early October, because Pegeen speaks of "twelve hours of dark" (63), with the day being equal with the night. The play begins on a Friday night. This is revealed through Christy's statement that he murdered his father "Tuesday was a week" (73), combined with Michael James' question to Christy a few moments later: "And the peelers never followed after you the eleven days that you're out?" (75). There is a slight discrepancy in this information when Old Mahon states to the Widow in Act II: "amn't I a great wonder to think I've traced him ten days with that rent in my crown?" (121). There are two possibilities here. Old Mahon may have been unconscious for a day following Christy's blow, or else his tendency towards being "parlatic" has

made his accounting of the time unreliable. Also, a Saturday would be the most likely time for the games to take place.

Act II begins sometime the next morning, a Saturday, probably around eight or nine o'clock, since Pegeen has gone to do a typical early morning task, that of milking the goat. The early morning, with the girls entrance, increases the sense of Christy being such an attraction that people are willing to get up early in order to see him.

Act III may begin anytime after two or three o'clock on the same day, since when Christy is brought in after the mule race there is still one more event, the tug-of-war, to finish. And Pegeen talks of how Christy was "sweating in the heat of noon" (147), which likely refers to an event earlier in the day. None of the information in the act is reliable for telling the specific time. There is, however, a certain mood developed when the events turn near the end of the act. Lighting the play to suggest the approach of dusk would supplement the tragic turn near the end of the play. It would also increase a sense of the cyclical nature of the progression of events.

Also considered in the time sequence list is information concerning chronology previous to the action of the play, revealed through exposition. The play does not provide any exact information for the exposition time list, excepting Christy's confrontation with his father eleven days earlier. This is the primary inciting incident for the action of the play. There is, however, much information provided by Christy and Old Mahon during the play that elaborates upon their relationship prior to Christy's blow. For example, Old Mahon tried to force Christy to wed the

Widow Casey, who also, as Christy says, "did suckle me for six weeks when I came into the world" (103). This suggests that Christy's mother died at childbirth. Christy's loss of his mother, and his subsequent relationship with Old Mahon, will be dealt with more fully in the character analysis section of the thesis.

There are several other events which should be noted, though the times at which they transpired are uncertain. First, Shawn is preparing to wed Pegeen, and has made arrangements with Michael James to provide a number of material things in return. It may not be any more than a few weeks since the marriage has been arranged, for several reasons. They are waiting on a dispensation, because they are second cousins, to permit the marriage. Also, the marriage arrangement is still a novel topic of discussion, as when Michael James proclaims in Act I "I've got you a decent man, Pegeen, you'll have no call to be spying after if you've a score of young girls, maybe, weeding in your fields" (65). Finally, it is not likely that a prolonged engagement would occur. Second, Kate Cassidy has died. This likely occurred over the past two or three days, but the time of death does not directly influence any of the action. Third, the Widow has sometime in the past "buried her children and destroyed her man" (89). This has taken place perhaps several years previously, long enough at least for the Widow to acquire her reputation in the village. Because the age of the Widow is about "thirty" (86), her statement that she has "buried her children" suggests perhaps that they may have been stillborn.

### Language Analysis

The Irish are famous for their facility and for their respect for language. Playboy is a realization of this ability and respect derived from Synge's experiences with the language of the Irish peasantry. Because of this, a language analysis is crucial for arriving at a better understanding of the play. The format used in the structural analysis for evaluating language consists of choosing one or two characters from representational scenes, and then examining the language used by the characters, line by line, under three categories: first, the analyst determines the subjects or topics that are being discussed by the character. Second, the character's use of rhetorical devices or poetic devices such as simile or metaphor is noted. Finally, the analyst tries to determine what the character is actually doing with language. This is expressed in a transitive verb, such as "begging", "hurting", "praising", or "challenging". The analyst then summarizes the analysis to provide specific information about the character.

I have completed a language analysis for Christy in french scenes 17 and 18, and for Pegeen in french scenes 1 through 8. I have included a sample line from Pegeen's analysis: "You should have had great people in your family, I'm thinking, with the little small feet you have, and you with a kind of a quality name, the like of what you'd find on the great powers and potentates of France and Spain" (79). This line occurs in Act I when Pegeen is first speaking to Christy alone. The topic of discussion is Christy and the probability, (as Pegeen sees things), of his having a noble heritage. Pegeen bases her conclusion on two pieces of evidence: first, Christy has small feet, and second, he has a "quality" name. Critic T.R.

Henn, in the notes for his edition of the play, states that "the Mahons were a famous military family" (115). Although Christy's last name makes Pegeen's assumption of his nobility credible, her observation that Christy has "small feet" does not, except in a very oblique way. It appears then, that she is making wild assumptions based on a minimum amount of evidence, and that she is interpreting that evidence either through her preconceptions of Christy, or through a naive belief that small feet mean greatness, or both. But she does not consider more obvious information, such as Christy's meekness, his filthy and ragged clothing, and his small stature. The analysis of rhetorical and poetical devices within the line reveals a use of alliteration and simile, both of which occur in Pegeen's comparison of Christy to "the great powers and potentates of France and Spain", (emphasis mine). Also, the entire line consists of one very long sentence, broken up into phrases by commas. Pegeen's actual usage of the line is to "praise" Christy, with the ultimate objective, perhaps, of convincing him to stay with her. She may also be encouraging him to reveal more of his background.

Once the analyst goes through a scene, line by line, for a particular character, he should be able to gain an understanding of the character's language in each of the analytical categories. The following is a summary of the language analysis for Pegeen in french scenes 1 through 8:

#### Subjects Summary:

- 1) At times she is preoccupied with concrete realities,

especially those realities, such as dogs, the darkness of the night, and being left alone, which are a threat to her security.

2) Her topics reveal an evaluative and critical nature. She can be very critical of behavior in others which she does not deem satisfactory from her point of view, such as Shawn's fear of protecting her, or Michael James' wanting to leave her alone for the night.

3) She is pragmatic rather than idealistic, realizing the hypocrisy in the justice system and in religion.

4) She is very interested in the humans surrounding her, especially the young men, such as Shawn and Christy.

5) Her awareness of the concrete realities surrounding her can be masked or replaced with references to places and ideas of which it appears she has no absolute knowledge, such as her references to Norway. She takes this knowledge as factual.

6) Her references to the world around her tend to be depreciatory and scornful.

7) Her references to places far away tend to be full of wonder and admiration.

#### Rhetorical and Poetical Summary:

1) Many of Pegeen's lines are comprised of long sentences, broken up into phrases by commas. There does not seem to be any consistent rhythmic pattern from line to line, but the comma usage suggests a rhythm within each line.

2) Most of the poetic references take the form of simile. There is frequent use of the phrase "the like of" to set up a descriptive comparison.

#### Language Usage Summary:

1) Pegeen uses her language to maintain command over her immediate situations.

2) She uses her language to control others.

### Action Analysis

The action analysis involves selecting major scenes and characters from these scenes, and noting the actions described in stage directions. The analyst then attempts to find larger patterns of action within these notations which may provide information for motifs and possible interpretation. I have done action analysis for Pegeen, Christy, and Michael James. The following is a summary of the motifs derived from the action analysis of Pegeen from french scenes 1 through 7:

- 1) Pegeen is not afraid to express her feelings, especially hard or negative feelings.
- 2) Most of Pegeen's actions are meticulous and practical. She tries to maintain a crude but rigid order.
- 3) She demonstrates patterns of possessiveness, and makes attempts at asserting authority through her possessions. For example, she often goes behind the counter of the bar to assert her dominance and importance. The bar may also act as a refuge or form of security.
- 4) She is quite capable of manipulating others, especially those who are unfamiliar with her.
- 5) She treats Christy almost like a pet after Christy decides he is going to stay. There seems to be a strong element of hoarding, protection, and mothering.

This summary, combined with the analysis of other characters in a similar fashion, has led to the development of the following list of principal action motifs in the play:

- 1) The desire to dominate and possess people and things.

- 2) The desire to liberate oneself from those who are dominating or possessing.
- 3) The action cycle from birth and marriage to death, and the replacing of the old with the young.
- 4) The search for liberators, heroes, and anything else that can brighten the everyday lives of the peasants.
- 5) The desire to be secure.
- 6) The desire to be free. (This sometimes occurs simultaneously with # 5, as is the case with Widow Quin.)
- 7) Constant attempts at bribery, or the use of material possessions for influential purposes, such as Shawn's arrangement to marry Pegeen.
- 8) Inhibition or repression of natural growth by the loss of the mother figure, as in Christy and Pegeen.

The principal action motif of the play seems to be that of repression: the attempt to repress, and the attempt to liberate oneself from repression, as in the following examples:

- 1) Repression of individual will because of marital responsibilities, suggested by Widow Quin's murder of her husband.
- 2) Repression of freedom and individual will by parental authority, shown through Old Mahon's dominance over Christy, and Michael James' authority over Pegeen.
- 3) Repression of free thought and individuality by religion, demonstrated by Father Reilly's control over Shawn Keogh.
- 4) Repression of the Irish by the British, represented by the community's deliberate cheating of the law through the drinking of illegal poteen or the circumvention of the "bona fide" rule.



All of the above repressions are accompanied by a desire to be liberated from this repression.

#### Preliminary Identification of Important Themes

From the previous information I have prepared a list of preliminary themes. This information is derived from the analytical categories and is not exhaustive. It does provide the director with a foundation for further exploration in the design and rehearsal process. The preliminary themes include the following:

- 1) Eloquence rather than action can often make one into a hero.
- 2) Man's imagination can help him to believe what is not true.
- 3) Exaggeration and embellishment of deeds can be used to defend and influence people.
- 4) Vanity and conceit can be positive attributes if they help to bolster up a sagging self-esteem.
- 5) People will respond to visual action with greater insight than verbal description.

#### Preliminary Setting Notes

The following notes have been prepared based on ideas derived from the structural analysis. They are by no means concrete at this stage, but are an informed starting point from which the director can begin to work with designers on a possible production conception.

A quotation from Gaston Bachelard's treatise on human habitations—Poetics of Space—seems to me to suggest a good way for looking at the shebeen, especially in terms of Christy's growth towards

self-actuation: "When we examine a nest, we place ourselves at the origin of confidence in the world, we receive a beginning of confidence, an urge toward cosmic confidence" (103). In Act I we must see the shebeen as a safe place, a refuge, a place for nurturing and growth. As Christy becomes more and more confident, the shebeen should become more and more confining and claustrophobic, a place of anguish rather than comfort, restriction rather than growth. This idea directly influences the size of the shebeen as well. One way in which I have been gauging the interior dimensions is through looking at this progression, particularly as it relates to the final moments of the play, where the people of the community squeeze their way into the shebeen to capture Christy. I get a sense, for these final scenes, of trapping, of cornering a wild animal in a cluttered environment like a nest or den, where one might have to jump and stumble through many obstacles in order to escape.

There is a strong delineation between the outside and inside of the shebeen which seems to correspond with reality and romance respectively. My primary concern is that the audience should be able to verify what is going on in the outside world only through the information they receive in the shebeen by character actions, appearances, and verbalizations. Because of this, the means chosen to show the outside will be crucial. The possibilities which come to my mind at this initial stage include not showing the outside at all except for what can be seen through the door or window; showing the outside in an abstracted manner; showing the outside as an "overwhelmingness". Also, I do not foresee visibly placing any characters or actions of the play outside the shebeen, except

for immediately outside the door or window, as in the case of Old Mahon's second entrance in the play. There seems to me to be a very strong "surprise" element in the way that people suddenly show up at the shebeen. A reality which completely surrounds the shebeen will have to take this into account: the surprise element can't be weakened by a long visible entrance through the outside world to the shebeen.

I do not have any particular problem with the groundplan as prescribed in the original stage directions, except that I would like to have stronger axes established between the door, fireplace, and bar than are prescribed in the original stage directions, which has all three upstage in a more or less straight line.

The period should remain that of 1900 to 1907. Synge's subject matter and style identify him with the isolated West of Ireland which was free of modern, urban trappings. Any modernization might detract from the peasantry's vitality, which comes from their way of life, and might make their need for a hero less authentic. By mentioning period I do not mean "historical accuracy" to the point of complete precision. It might be interesting if the loy, for example, bore a greater resemblance to a common shovel. This would promote a familiarity which would bring its significance closer to home. If it were an authentic loy, the audience might spend more time considering its unique characteristics than concentrating on it as a lethal weapon.

I have accumulated pictorial evidence showing many houses and buildings in Ireland that have been brightened up through the painting of doors, window trims, and fireplace mantles with bright primary colors

such as red or green. Aside from being aesthetically pleasing, these colors could set the mood of vitality and spirit needed for the play, especially if combined with the earth colors traditionally associated with peasantry.

I would like to have as much intimacy between the shebeen and the audience as possible. With this in mind, I would also like to make sure that everyone in the theatre can see the set and the action fully; that there are no sight line restrictions at any point in the play. I will be happy to have parts of the theatre, (probably side sections 'A' and 'F'), roped off if required.

I get a sense of hard angles meeting softness and roundness, with the two merging or amalgamating into a compatible whole.

#### Preliminary Blocking Notes

I have noticed a polarity within the play between action or performance, and talk or eloquence which describes an action, often embellishing it. Though pictorial blocking patterns may be hard to impose on a naturalistic play, I have considered the following possibilities.

The first concerns the use of path configurations. It seems that the characters who are most practical, such as Pegeen and Widow Quin, would travel in relatively direct paths from place to place. Conversely, someone like Christy might move in an indirect, or curving pattern from place to place, especially when he is storytelling. This weaving might help to illustrate the "weaving" of tales which is going on. As well, whenever there are sincere transactions occurring movement should be as direct as possible. A second consideration involves possible imitation patterns,

either consciously done by the character, or imposed as an illustrative device by the director. For example Shawn may attempt at some points to imitate Christy's movements or behaviour. Third, distances should be varied between Christy and the others according to his own sense of security, so that when he is confident he might try to become more intimate, and when he is afraid he would try to increase the distance between himself and others. This might produce interesting results if it were combined with everyone else's feelings towards Christy. Fourth, it may be interesting to develop the idea that skepticism or objectivity seems to be negated whenever there is a large group of people on stage, such as when Christy first tells his story in Act I to the men and Pegeen, and in Act II when he tells the story to the girls and Widow Quin. This might be accomplished by placing people together in clusters which would deny each person's individuality in the group. Fifth, there may be a possibility of showing the passage of rumour or gossip, since verbal news seems to travel very fast in this community. Perhaps during crowd scenes groupings could be established with characters moving from group to group "spreading the news". Finally, the ground plan should facilitate character groupings with movements of single characters away from these groupings. There is an interesting dichotomy in the play between the freedom of being able to be alone, and the loneliness of being alone and wanting to be with others.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **CHARACTER ANALYSIS**

The data in these character analyses is compiled from a textual analysis in order to come to a thorough understanding of the characters and their actions so that sympathetic choices can be experimented with during the rehearsal process. The analysis is not made to dictate an exacting plan, but to provide a sound, objective foundation which will free the actors and director to experiment by doing things in different ways. Since the actors are the living embodiments of a performance, it would be presumptuous to force them to assume and implement some preconceived and untested plan without drawing upon their own creative abilities. Through understanding the characters objectively, the director can guide the actors, so that director and actor supplement one another in rehearsal in a reciprocal fashion, with the actor eventually achieving supremacy in both the knowledge and experience of the character he or she is portraying.

#### Christy Mahon

Christy's background has been well articulated in an essay titled "Role of the Feminine in Christy Mahon's Development: A Jungian Reappraisal of The Playboy of the Western World", by Gulshan R. Kataria. Kataria believes the most influential factor in Christy's personal development previous to the events of the play was the absence of his mother, and suggests that

being deprived of motherly love and feminine attention, Christy's displaced libido got cathected on nature—on the plants, ferns, animals, birds and hills. Though left alone and thrown on his own resources, Christy did not become an introvert: Instead he

unconsciously found some mystical channels out of his deprived predicament. (39)

Christy's closeness to nature is emphasized most clearly by Old Mahon when he tells the Widow Quin how Christy would lie "half the day in the brown ferns with his belly to the sun" and how Christy played with "little birds he had—finches and felts" (123). The actions are passed off by Old Mahon as laziness and a lack of responsibility in the youth, but they indicate, deeper down, that Christy has a rapport with the earth and with animals which he does not share with other human beings. This is suggested later on when Old Mahon tells the Widow of Christy's relationship with the opposite sex: "If he seen a red petticoat coming swinging over the hill, he'd be off to hide in the sticks, and you'd see him shooting out his sheep's eyes between the little twigs and the leaves, and his two ears rising like a hare looking out through a gap. Girls indeed!" (123). Thus Christy uses nature as a refuge from any kind of social confrontation. He has become socially retarded, the affliction becoming syndromatic because the comforts and securities provided by animals and plants encourage him to seek less and less human contact. The situation is worsened by Old Mahon's attempts at socializing Christy. Old Mahon's tactics seem to involve thrusting Christy into social confrontations, the most recent being the arranged marriage with the Widow Casey. The problem is accentuated by Old Mahon who is prone to violent fits of rage and insanity, perhaps incited by his frustration with Christy. Christy has a fear of the unpredictability of strangers, compounded by the unpredictability of his own father.



Christy's dependence on nature as a "mother" has not been entirely detrimental. His involvement with natural surroundings has developed an internal sensitivity and depth of character which become evident later in his elocutionary feats. Christy's sensitivity, his social alienation, and the rich environment of the natural world have all contributed to his becoming extremely imaginative. Old Mahon has recognized this imagination, but criticises Christy for it, calling him a "talker of folly" (121), and it seems that no one else from Christy's past was witness to these creative abilities. It may be that Christy's fear of people acted as a block, stifling any kind of output. This is reinforced by Old Mahon's accounts of Christy's schooling, how he was "a dunce who never reached his second book, the way he'd come from school, many's the day, with his legs lamed under him, and he blackened with his beatings like a tinker's ass" (137). Christy himself relates the exact situation in Act I when, during the inquisition scene, Pegeen asks him "Were you never slapped in school, young fellow, that you don't know the name of your deed?" to which Christy responds "(bashfully): I'm slow at learning, a middling scholar only" (69). So Christy has accepted himself as a "dunce", because he was told he was a dunce. This corresponds with a theme in the play: that what is said is often more a reality than what is seen. Christy's perception of himself as a dunce becomes a reality through self-fulfilled prophecy, so that the imagination which Christy so obviously possesses, is negated before it is given a chance to emerge.

All indications are that Christy Mahon was a shy lonely child who suppressed his fears by focussing on nature, on pets, on his own

imagination, on anything but other human beings. In doing so, he developed a sensitivity and insight which he was unable to share. His loneliness precipitated fantasies of love and protection which he did not have the courage to seek out in real life.

This summary of the past life of Christy should help to clarify the dramatic action of Christy in the time of the play. There are two major incidents which are important to Christy's character. The first is Old Mahon's order for Christy to marry the Widow Casey. This spawns the second incident, which is Christy's clouting of his father, and the subsequent escape.

Thus it may be surmised that the overall desire of Christy Mahon is "to achieve independence." The act of striking his father with the loy was the first manifestation of this action, motivated by his internal frustration with his father's repression. From this point on, in the course of the play, Christy evolves from being a timid youth to a mature, independent young man. This process occurs through two forces. The first is the praise he receives from the peasants out of which develops his growing self-esteem. This self-esteem in turn gives him the inner strength to become more outgoing and aggressive, even to an excessive degree. The excessiveness, shown in his bragging and uncontrolled ego, is continually interrupted by events or situations which force Christy to take positive action and confront these situations. These predicaments act as a governor to his growing self-esteem, controlling it from getting out of hand in any particular instance, and shaping his developing self as a whole. Also, the complexity and seriousness of these confrontations increase gradually as

the play proceeds. For instance, his first confrontation occurs in Act I, with the Widow and Pegeen arguing over him, where he is forced to decide between the two, and after some stressful consternation, chooses Pegeen. It is important that these confrontations always directly follow a moment when Christy was in egotistical exhilaration. Just before this scene, Christy had been going through the second round of telling his story to Pegeen, hailing himself as "a seemly fellow with great strength in me and bravery", when the Widow bangs on the door, thrusting Christy back into a state of humility: "CHRISTY (Clinging to Pegeen). Oh, glory! It's late for knocking, and this last while I'm in terror of the peelers, and the walking dead" (85). Other examples of such confrontations include the scene in Act II where Christy is telling his story to the Widow and the village girls when Pegeen charges in, and the scene later on in Act II when Old Mahon arrives for the first time, just as Christy is describing himself as a "gallant orphan cleft his father with one blow to the breeches belt" (119). And as the gravity of the impending situations increases, Christy elaborates his story more and more, these elaborations almost balancing the seriousness of the confrontations which follow. His most challenging confrontation is with Old Mahon, where Christy achieves dominance. This is directly associated with the games which followed Mahon's first appearance, for at these games Christy finally excels at putting his growing ego to work in physical action.

As Christy shifts between heroic status to human status his character alternates between his new found potential self and his old timid and shy self, between inner strength and self-conscious fear. Each phase is

articulated very clearly in descriptions of Christy offered by other characters in the play. In his self-conscious periods he is described by the Widow as "a soft lad", by Old Mahon as "a dribbling idiot", and by Synge in his stage directions through terms such as "timid", "bashful", "miserable", "naive", and "terror-stricken". Christy himself reveals a characteristic of this phase when he mentions his loneliness. This suggests that despite his fear of social contact Christy still had a longing for some kind of human interaction. In his courageous phase, Christy is described by Pegeen as a "fine lad", by Shawn as "a bloody handed murderer", by Philly as "a daring fellow" and by the village girls as "a marvel".

Another ambivalence in Christy can be perceived in his approach to resolving his conflicts either by the use of his increasing verbal aptitude, or else by physical action. His abilities with language are well demonstrated through the play. His physical action begins when he leaves the shebeen to go to the races, which he wins, and has its zenith when Christy "kills" his father in the presence of onlookers. But his final domination over Old Mahon is facilitated by an amalgamation of the verbal and the physical. Christy, in the end, does nothing more than order Old Mahon to do his bidding, the order being reinforced by his physical potential for action, now established.

Throughout Christy's time at the shebeen he does not let go of the "roots" he had developed previously, his affinity for nature. When he has won the races and returns to the shebeen in Act III his social acceptance has been established concretely, and with this achievement he makes his marriage proposal to Pegeen, suggesting that "when the airs is

warm, in four months or five, it's then yourself and me should be pacing Neifin in the dews of night, the times sweet smells do be rising, and you'd see a little, shiny new moon, maybe sinking on the hills" (147). This is more than a lover's romantic allusion to warm summer nights; this is a basic instinctual desire to leave the social world, which he has now mastered, to return to the green world with which he has the greatest ties. This action is reinforced at the end of the play, when Christy sees the true nature of the peasants, and leaves the shebeen, with Old Mahon and new insight, preferring to go "romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgement day" (173).

Christy is also described as lazy by Old Mahon, but it is a laziness which comes from a basic problem of not being self-motivated because, always being ordered to do things, he does not have any self-esteem. In the shebeen at the beginning of Act II he takes pride in cleaning Pegeen's boots, while at the same time considering how little work he will have to do. Thus he is consciously believing he will have an easy life as pot-boy, while unconsciously, and ironically, doing the work and enjoying it because he doesn't have to; he is doing it by choice.

During the play, Christy's motivating energy comes from his growing self-confidence which is often exaggerated into pure vanity. There are two important references to mirrors in the text, both involving Christy. In Act II he admires himself in the mirror of the shebeen. And it is here that we learn that he had access to a mirror when he lived with his father, a point that Old Mahon brings up later when he refers to Christy as "making mugs at his own self in the bit of glass we had hung on the wall"

(81). But the two instances of mirror-gazing occur in differing contexts, and reveal a subtle but important point about Christy's past and present. When living with Old Mahon, Christy needed to see himself in order to establish a personal identity of his own, an identity which was suppressed by his social alienation and Old Mahon's repression. But even this mirror could not provide a clear view: Christy refers to it as "the devil's own mirror....would twist a squint across an angel's brow" (95). Not until he reaches the shebeen does he have his first true view of himself, a view which he equates with everything he has heard Pegeen say about him the previous evening. There is nothing to suggest that Christy possessed any kind of vanity when he looked at himself in his mirror at home. He was merely trying to find his identity. And in the course of the play, he does.

#### Pegeen

Pegeen is a young woman who has been raised for her whole life by her father. She has been forced by Michael James to care for the shebeen, almost alone. Because of this responsibility she has had to adopt an aggressiveness which overshadows her sensitivity. She has been able to control situations fairly well through the use of this aggression, but retains an inner insecurity and dependence which she reveals to very few people. She finds the chores, the responsibilities, and the dangers in looking after the shebeen to be stressful. In order to relieve herself of this stress she has conceded to marry Shawn, an unlikely suitor except for the fact that she will be able to maintain control over him. She also finds her lifestyle to be mundane and craves excitement and sensation.

When Christy arrives, her longing is fulfilled, and she immediately rejects Shawn, an easy task. Christy's sincere devotion to Pegeen begins to erode, very gradually, her outward aggressiveness. There is an interesting contrast, for instance, between her "honeyed voice", a superficial application of affection used to get Christy to stay at the shebeen in Act I, and the true affection she feels for Christy in Act III, when she makes an objective analysis of her value to Christy: "Pegeen (with real tenderness). And what is it I have, Christy Mahon, to make me fitting entertainment for the like of you, that has such a poet's talking, and such bravery of heart?" (149). There is a development, to this point, from the scornful abrasiveness of her previous character. I think we see glimpses of this easy going and relaxed sincerity at various points in the play, such as when Pegeen teases Shawn in Act I with "rather scornful good humour", here combined with aggressiveness, or in Act II when Pegeen, with an almost matronly air tells Christy to "lay down that switch and throw some sods on the fire. You're pot-boy in this place, and I'll not have you mitch off from us now" (111). This occurs at the point when Christy is about to leave, after being harshly teased by Pegeen about his danger of being hanged.

Pegeen may be seen as having created a wall around herself, preventing any access to her softer, more sincere and sentimental side. During the play, she becomes more easy going and forgiving, loosening up and discarding the tough outer shell which she possessed earlier.

At the point where she is to concede to complete emotional expression, she learns that Christy's story was an exaggerated lie. She

responds with aggressiveness once again, but the shell cannot be erected as easily, for it is being weakened from within by the true love and respect for Christy which has finally matured. She tells Old Mahon "vehemently, fearing she will break into tears" (emphasis mine), to "take him on from this or I'll set the young lads to destroy him here" (163), a balance of the hatred of betrayal with an overwhelming love. The love is made clear after Christy leaves when she suddenly realizes her loss through the famous last line of the play.

There is a parallel process of change going on in Pegeen. Her aggressiveness is usually combined with an naivete and lack of insight, a myopism which is clearly revealed in her scenes alone with Christy. He tries desperately to make her understand that he is sexually naive, but Pegeen is oblivious to this fact. In performance this irony will hopefully arouse a response of humor in the audience, but it should also have them on the edge of their seats, wishing they could open her eyes. This effect might occur through a growing audience identification with Christy as they view his situation and see him trying to convince her of the truth. As Pegeen's aggression subsides, and her sincere, soft side emerges, she becomes more objective and, ultimately, gains insight. The major incident which opens her eyes is Christy's repeat slaying of Old Mahon, after which she philosophizes that "a strange man is a marvel, with his mighty talk, but what's a squabble in your back yard, and the blow of a loy, have taught me there's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed" (169).



## Widow Quin

There are accounts of how, in the writing of the play, the character of Widow Quin was close to dominating the play as a central figure. Her importance in the play remains, and as Nicholas Grene notes,

The Widow Quin has a very functional part in the play; she is the stage--manager of the piece, contriving action, supplying information, providing links between one scene and another. She is also something like the comic raisonneur, giving us a clear-sighted and realistic commentary on the action. (140-41)

While her importance as a plot element is undeniable, I am also interested in what motivates her as a person.

We are told in the play that the Widow was once married. But, as Pegeen tells Christy, "she hit himself with a worn pick, and the rusted poison did corrode his blood the way he never overed it, and died after" (89). If it were 1987 in Calgary, the Widow might have been able to get a divorce. Because she is Catholic, in conservative Ireland at the turn of the century, she is inhibited by both the Catholic church, and her social environment. The repression of the church ties in nicely with the omnipresence of Father Reilly and his dogma which is parroted by Shawn. But for Widow Quin, loving, honoring, and obeying is not as important as freedom, and she regained her freedom the only way she could, by a "sneaky kind of murder" (89) which could not be proven. Her forthrightness shows exactly how much she enjoys her independence, how much she needs it, and her act of murdering her husband shows that she had the courage to

get it back again. But she has not been completely satisfied alone either. She tells Christy in Act II

I'm above many's the day, odd times in great spirits,  
abroad in the sunshine, darning a stocking or stitching  
a shift, and odd times again looking out on the  
schooners, hookers, trawlers is sailing the sea, and I  
thinking on the gallant hairy fellows are drifting  
beyond, and myself long years living alone. (127)

At times the Widow enjoys her freedom, and at times she feels a great loneliness similar to that of Christy. This is why she pursues him so fervently; she recognizes his spirit of independence, and she believes that together they could establish a relationship which would allow for this independence because they both share a desire for freedom.

The Widow Quin is the only character in the play to see Christy without any romantic delusions. The first moment she sets eyes on him she tells Christy he would be "fitter to be saying your catechism than slaying your da" (87). But what she recognizes is not a hero, but a kindred spirit, someone who had enough gall at least to attempt an escape, as she did. It seems that the details are not too important to her, but the man is. For this reason I have considered a significant contrast between the way the Widow reacts to the story, and the way everyone else does. This contrast should occur most effectively in the Act II scene with Christy, the Widow, and the local girls. The girls will be mostly intrigued with the story, while the Widow objectively watches, and becomes intrigued with Christy, the person.

The Widow's affinity for Christy is one of the reasons she sticks with him even after Old Mahon arrives. Though Old Mahon is not dead, it is still quite obvious that he has been struck and injured by Christy, and her respect may even be strengthened. The Widow continues to support Christy, even after he has committed himself to Pegeen.

The Widow's relationship to the community is that of an outcast. Because of her actions, she has been alienated and is seen in a dim light. The interesting thing is that she is not bothered by this; she even seems to take delight in her position, which allows her to say what she wants to say, do what she wants to do. Pegeen lists some of the Widow's questionable behaviour when she is battling the Widow for Christy's attention in Act I, using the following statements to tarnish the Widow in Christy's eyes:

Doesn't the world know you reared a black ram at your own breast, so that the Lord Bishop of Connaught felt the elements of a Christian, and he eating it after in a kidney stew? Doesn't the world know you've been seen shaving the foxy skipper from France for a three penny-bit and a sop of grass tobacco would wring the liver from a mountain goat you'd meet leaping the hills? (89)

Robin Skelton, in The Writings of J.M. Synge, writes that the Widow's "view of life appears to be totally unprincipled," and that "her morality is dubious" (128). These traits appear in the Widow's frankness, a frankness which exposes the hypocrisy of the rest of the community. The world does know of her iniquities, yet she is perfectly happy, for at least she is being

honest in everything she says and does. She possesses a self-confidence, a self-centeredness and an inner security which allows her to be frank, which allows her to make quick spontaneous decisions, to contrive action, and enjoy doing it. And despite Skelton's remark about her "dubious" morality, she does have a sense of right and wrong. The Widow relies on her own judgement, filtering through each individual situation to arrive at an objective conclusion of her own, rather than relying on an unswerving universal morality, such as that imposed by the church. For instance, the events precipitating her murder of her husband are never specified; he could have been a wife-beater for all we know, and her "destroying" him would then be a justifiable act. In fact, her spontaneous reaction to each situation embodies perfectly the "wildness" which Synge prescribes for the play. It is not a wildness in the sense of animals tearing and gashing at one another, but an instinct for simple self-preservation. And it is not void of sympathetic understanding either, for the Widow, when she sees Christy swearing destruction on his father when he returns, is "scandalized", saying "have you no shame?" (125). In this situation she sees that Christy is free, and has been freed again by her sending Old Mahon away, and that there is no need for any malicious and vengeful action.

The Widow combines wildness with wisdom, a wisdom she has learned and enjoys learning. She tells Christy "if my hut is far from all sides, it's there you'll meet the wisest old men" (127). One gets the feeling of her as someone with clever insight, who mixes with thoughtful people in a hermit-like retreat, and who enters the world of the others as an entertainment.

There is only one point where the Widow cannot hold her own and must admit defeat. It is when she is confronted with the masses. It happens in the play when Christy's lie is revealed, and Old Mahon is being encouraged by the crowd to "Slate him now, mister!" (161). Christy appeals to the Widow, who responds by saying "I've tried a lot, God help me, and my share is done" (163). Though the Widow is able to manipulate situations when she is dealing with one or two people, she is helpless when confronted by the crowds.

#### Shawn

Christy calls Shawn a "quaking blackgaurd", an observation which reveals opposing characteristics in Shawn. Though he is bumbling, timid, and fearful, he also has capacities for cruelty, and he possesses, as a result of that, a selfish heartlessness as he continually attempts to maintain his possessions and control his destiny. His most obvious manipulative feat was the arrangement of his marriage with Pegeen, for which he exchanged his "blue bull from Sneem" and "drift of heifers" (155), prized possessions which were acquired through the same shrewdness that he exhibits when he tries to get rid of Christy, through bribery, in Act II. Overtly Shawn may appear to be a coward, but he is far from being any kind of pitiful "lost-cause". At one point he even considers the possibility that he too could have achieved Christy's heroism, except for the fact that "it's a hard case to be an orphan and not to have your father that you're used to, and you'd easy kill and make yourself a hero in the sight of all" (117).

Shawn's religious fervor is, I think, not a critical factor in his motivation, but a result of an inner guilt. He states, also in Act II, "If I wasn't so God-fearing, I'd near have courage to come behind him and run a pike into his side" (117). His actions are similar to the late twentieth-century phenomenon of evangelical hypocrisy, especially found in television ministries, where piousness is rewarded with material gain, at the same time functioning as a distorted rationale for this accumulation of wealth.

Shawn's lack of imagination can be directly associated with the repressiveness of the church, personified through Father O'Reilly. As a literary motif this is fine, but for Shawn as an actor-character I would still like to maintain the money-grubbing as the primary motivation. Shawn's desire to "get" and "keep" is an essential aspect of his nature which is represented in his lack of verbal effusiveness. He is by nature a "taker" and contrasts with Christy, the "giver". Shawn's imagination is stifled by his very essence.

#### Michael James

Michael James might be described in contemporary terms as a drunk, though his quest for good times, fun, and an easy existence may be as much a local group characteristic of the older men as an individual trait. Both Jimmy and Philly show similar longings to get to the wake, and to find more alcohol when they return. He is first described by Synge as "fat and jovial" (61). As a publican Michael James is necessarily outgoing, perhaps condescending in certain situations. He also has a strong positive self-regard, describing himself at one point as "a decent man of Ireland" (157).

His fun-loving traits are first exhibited when he makes "game" of Shawn, trying to force him to stay in the shebeen to look after Pegeen in Act I. At the same time, though, he manifests a contempt for Shawn which puts an edge on the fun, so that simultaneously we see that he is not entirely satisfied with Pegeen's future husband.

Michael James' fun loving spirit has a side effect: his lack of responsibility. He prefers to let Pegeen do all the work. I sense that he could be played as just having gained this freedom recently, perhaps within the past two or three years. With Pegeen maturing he has been able to give her the job and acquire a freedom which he is beginning to enjoy very much.

Another applicable detail in Michael James' background is the state of the locality, where nothing happens that is exciting anymore, a point which Pegeen makes when talking to Shawn at the beginning, and that Michael James echoes when he speaks of the immediate area as "the lonesome west" (65). Perhaps his drinking, carousing, and joyfulness are attempts to "fill in " this lonely backdrop.

#### Old Mahon

Old Mahon's dominance over Christy appears to consist of insane repression and tyranny. Mahon's anger and rage stem from the sheer frustration he has had in dealing with Christy's incapacities. This frustration is compounded by Mahon's alcoholism and age. His repression is motivated by a desire to have Christy around to look after him when he becomes completely incapacitated, or so that he, much like Michael James,

will be able to transfer responsibility to his offspring. But Christy is not as adept at responsibility as Pegeen and Mahon laments that "it's a terror...to have your sons going to the dogs against you, and you wore out scolding them, and skelping them, and God knows what" (137). This bit of philosophy comes immediately after Mahon has had a drink of poteen, and describes a softness, another side to his character which comes as a surprise. Immediately following this, Mahon even shows a bit of aesthetic sensitivity when he comments on the "right view against the edge of the sea" (139). These mood swings, from irascibility to emotional sentiment offer an insight into Mahon's condition.

There is one final trait of Old Mahon, gullibility to suggestion, shown most comically in Act III when the Widow convinces him that he is a "sniggering maniac" (143). It is interesting that Mahon relishes his new title, much as if it was an assertion of a personal identity which he had been lacking up to this point. This also demonstrates very clearly the power of words throughout the whole play.

#### Jimmy Farrel

Jimmy is completely gullible and completely carefree. As a minor character with these attributes, he is crucial to the plot structure and to the thematics of the play. In Act I Jimmy enters the shebeen with Michael James and Philly and immediately establishes himself as a romantic when he refers to Pegeen as a "fine, hardy girl" (63). Throughout the play Jimmy is the person most easily convinced of anything, who assumes the most positive outlook. Again in Act I, when Christy reveals



his murder, Jimmy responds with "Oh, Glory be to God!" (73), and in Act III when Old Mahon reveals his side of the story Jimmy comments that "there's wonders hidden in the heart of man!" (135).

Jimmy is not critical or evaluative in any way; rather, he simply believes everything he hears with wonder and uninformed admiration. He is not suspicious of second hand information, as when he relates his story of a man seeing skulls in Dublin, "ranged out like blue jugs in a cabin of Connaught" (133) with unfaltering and serious belief. It is also noticeable that Jimmy is undaunted by any kind of morbidity when he relates this story to Philly, much the same as when later on he is convinced by the Widow's story of Old Mahon being a mad man. Jimmy goes so far as to find a personal "experience" analogous to the problem of Old Mahon, stating that he "knew a party was kicked in the head by a red mare, and he went killing horses a great while, till he eat the insides of a clock and died after" (137).

#### Philly Cullen

Philly can best be described as the exact opposite of Jimmy. Philly is suspicious and cynical and counterpoints Jimmy's naive romanticism. But interestingly, Philly's complete mistrust also makes him in many ways as naive as Jimmy, for Philly often becomes bitter and unhappy, and misses much of the fun and excitement which is evolving around him. When he enters with Jimmy at the beginning of Act III, Philly has nothing positive to say about Christy, but concentrates primarily on

how Christy will eventually "be rightly hobbled yet" (133), an uncaring and vindictive comment which smacks of resentment.

Where Philly developed his cynicism and morbid nature can only be surmised by a comment he makes in the same scene, when he finally believes Jimmy's story about the skulls in Dublin:

It was no lie, maybe, for when I was a young lad there was a graveyard beyond the house with the remnants of a man who had thighs as long as your arm. He was a horrid man I'm telling you, and there was many a fine Sunday I'd put him together for fun. (135)

Any young lad who lives near a graveyard and amuses himself by putting together skeletons is bound to be a little bit off center.

Sara Tansey

Because the four village girls are minimal characters there is not enough information in the text to provide anything more than a brief sketch of their characters. Of the four, the best-written is Sara Tansey. Sara appears to be the leader of the group, and is regarded by the other girls with a certain amount of respect. For example, they seek Sara's advice on matters such as Christy's boots:

SUSAN. Is that blood there, Sara Tansey?

SARA (smelling it). That's bog water I'm thinking, but it's his own they are surely, for I never seen the like of them for whity mud, and red mud, and turf on them,

and the fine sands of the sea. That man's been walking, I'm telling you. (97)

Sara's confident and authoritative answer, based on a minimal amount of evidence, illustrates her spirited and forthright personality. In fact Sara seems almost like a protege to the Widow Quin, and may even use the Widow as a role model. There is evidence of this in Act II, when the Widow congratulates Sara for the "right toast" (105) that Sara proclaims for the Widow and Christy. And in Act III it is Sara who returns with the Widow to try and save Christy from being lynched.

The other three girls do not appear to have any distinctive characteristics as they are written, however the actresses used for these parts should be able to enlarge the characters with some of their own ideas.

#### Peasants and Bellman

As with Susan, Honor, and Nelly, these characters are open to various interpretations. My only concern is that they do not appear to be desirable to either Pegeen or the Widow. This is in order to emphasize the concept that there is a shortage of eligible men in the community.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **REHEARSAL PHILOSOPHY AND STAGING PRINCIPLES**

## Rehearsal Philosophy

It is often difficult for a director to express his precise method for the staging of a play. In my development as a learning director I have encountered diverse methods and strategies which can be used in rehearsing a stage production. I believe that I have integrated many of these strategies in my approach. I am also aware that my own personality is a tremendous influence, both positive and negative, on the work I do, and I am constantly trying to be aware of how this is affecting the actor in his process. At the present time I have found three general concepts which have been of great use and which I will briefly outline here.

The first concept is based on the ideas of the psychologist, Carl Rogers. Rogers believes that all living organisms have a natural tendency for self-improvement, for growth in a positive direction, given the proper nurturing environment. In human beings this principle extends to include the expansion of experience and the motivation towards creativity. He calls this the "actualizing tendency". Rogers discusses this tendency:

I am most impressed with the fact that each human being has a directional tendency toward wholeness, toward actualization of his or her potentialities. I have not found psychotherapy or group experience effective when I have tried to create in another individual something that is not already there; I have found, however, that if I can provide the conditions that allow growth to occur, then this positive directional tendency brings about constructive results. (qtd. in Liebert and Spiegler 314-15)

This idea is applicable to the director, who should not be forcing his ideas on the actor, but instead should encourage the actor to find his own ideas. I have recently tried to incorporate this into rehearsals by providing a supportive environment where the actor is able to feel confident and self-assured, and thus able to search for the best possible results within himself. This also places the actor in a responsible and creative position in the process, where his work is his own and is valued for being so.

The second concept, which is complementary to Rogers' theory, I learned from William Ball, director of the American Conservatory Theatre, in his book A Sense of Direction. One of Ball's seminal ideas for the director working with the actor is to say "yes":

As a director, emphasize the creative. Keep saying yes to the ideas and don't talk too much. Use just a few phrases. The reason you don't speak much is that what is to be created cannot be easily packaged in language. (21)

Ball's idea stems from a complete faith in the intuitive. He believes that by saying "yes" the intuition will take over from the rational in the actor's brain. In order for this to happen the first three ideas that the actor comes up with must be put to use "no matter what they are, no matter how stupid or ridiculous they may seem to be—to use them without question, without derogation, and without reservation, to use the ideas as they are delivered" (16). He mentions that this is not easy for a director to do, for he must be disciplined and mature. But the result is that the actor is "exhilarated by the realization that everything he contributes is being used.

That's when the universally right idea is delivered unfettered, untroubled, undiluted, unmixed, uncluttered, unsullied, pure and perfect" (17). Probably the most difficult thing that a learning director must accomplish is the ability to let his actors be creative in the way Ball describes. It takes a tremendous amount of trust and self-confidence in the director. However I continue to strive for this goal to the best of my ability.

The third concept comes from a famous essay based on a talk given by director Tyrone Guthrie in 1952. The essay is titled "An Audience of One", and in it Guthrie states that "the one really creative function of the producer [director]....is to be at rehearsal a highly receptive, highly concentrated, highly critical sounding-board for the performance, an audience of one" (255). As the "audience of one" the director provides feedback to the actor which allows him to better his performance. The director also has the responsibility, by being this "sounding-board", of shaping the production into a unified whole, since he has a strong idea of the play's unity from his preproduction work. I have found this responsibility, the final word, can be used in a way that makes a director more than an autocrat. Because I have the last word in many aspects I am able to encourage the company to feel free to make suggestions, to give advice. This usually happens when rehearsing a play anyway, except that it is often done behind the director's back. By allowing actors the freedom to make suggestions a collaborative unity and sense of good will is established. Another positive result is that the director is able to supplement his ideas with many more from different perspectives. And since the director is the final authority, he is able to select or reject the ideas which are generated for the benefit

of the play as a unity. Retaining the "final word" in such a situation does not depend simply on the status given to the director, but also on the respect he earns from the actor during the process, a trust in the director's authority and knowledge.

Aside from all this, each play that a director chooses has its own intrinsic requirements, which necessitates a certain rehearsal strategy. My primary consideration for Playboy has been how the actor will deal with the language in the play. I have gained some insight into an approach from a recollection of Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, in an essay called "An 'Un-Irish' Play". Shiubhlaigh was the first actress to play the character of Nora in Synge's In the Shadow of the Glen. She discusses her process as an actress working on the play:

At first I found Synge's lines almost impossible to learn and deliver. Like the wandering ballad-singer I had to "humour" them into a strange tune, changing the metre several times each minute. It was neither verse nor prose. The speeches had a musical lilt, absolutely different to anything I had heard before. I found I had to break the sentences—which were uncommonly long—into sections, chanting them, slowly at first, then quickly as I became more familiar with the words. Neither Fay nor Synge offered me much help during rehearsals. I found it difficult to understand this until Fay explained that I had been chosen specially for the part because of my comparative inexperience as an actress. "When you read a book or a play you supply your own characters. The author just makes suggestions which you, the reader, enlarge upon. If you were a more experienced



actress you might read into this part something which, perhaps, was never intended. Be the mouthpiece of Nora Burke, rather than Nora Burke. You will be corrected only if you are inaudible or if your movements are wrong." (24)

The most interesting aspect of this long quotation is director William Fay's choice of an inexperienced actress who does not have any preconceptions. If this concept is valid then student actors may not have too much difficulty with the language. In any case Shiubhlaigh provides a description of how she dealt with Synge's speech which may be useful in rehearsal.

#### Blocking Philosophy

I have always found organic blocking to be effective when directing. Organic blocking is a process whereby movement patterns and picturization are developed through stressing the dramatic action within each particular scene, so that movement develops from character relationships. This type of blocking places emphasis on the actor finding movement patterns, and on his use of space and distance, so that in most cases the blocking is sincere and shows no evidence of externally imposed patterns. However, with a scene with more than three people, this type of blocking becomes inefficient and confusing. For most of the larger scenes I will place actors in positions to get them started, and watch the development from there, making suggestions as the scene progresses to clarify stage pictures and focus. This way, I am assured that the actor is contributing through dramatic action, and I also have the ability to watch and suggest alternatives. It seems to me that such blocking leads both to

consistency and spontaneity. The blocking is consistent because the actor is finding the movement for himself, and is not likely to wander once a well-motivated movement is found. The blocking is spontaneous because all movement erupts from the character motivation and intention. There are also times when an actor will start to establish a movement or interaction which he will stop prematurely. If the director can sense this, he can encourage the actor to go further, to continue what he has already started. I find that this is particularly effective in making use of the full stage.

Many scenes still require preset blocking because of their size. Two scenes which I will use as examples are the girls' scene at the beginning of Act II, and the entrance of Old Mahon, with the crowd, in Act III.

The action in the girls' scene is quite straightforward, dictated primarily by the objects associated with Christy which they will be investigating. My intention when they are in the shebeen, thinking they are alone, is to have them investigate, through the use of tactile and other sensual means, everything that Christy may have touched or whatever may be his personal possessions. The text calls for Christy's boots and the settle to be noticed by the girls. I would like to have a sense of them arriving and filling out the entire area of the shebeen. This cannot be accomplished if they are all focussing on either the bed or the boots, so I will have Christy's bread and milk from Act I left on the table from the previous night, which will provide another point of interest in another area of the shebeen. I would like Sara to be the girl who investigates the bread,

for two reasons. First, she does not speak in the scene until she snatches the boots away from Nelly, who discovers them. Having Sara go to the bread while the others are worshipping the bed and boots will also help to establish her independence and superiority over the other girls, while using more of the stage space. Moreover, when Nelly discovers the boots and Sara makes her first statement, Sara will have a strong cross into the group, and then out of it again when she actually picks the boots up, so that the others will be forced to follow her. Once Sara has the boots on I would like the others, except Susan who goes to the window, to start radiating to the perimeters of the shebeen, continuing their investigation. This will allow two more things. When Sara has the boots on she should be able to move into focus at the center of the shebeen, with the others watching from the walls. And with the others separated and at a reasonable distance from one another, Sara will be able to prance around showing the boots off to each girl, thereby increasing the comedy of her walking in oversize boots. In doing this Sara also becomes symbolic of Christy, a symbolism which becomes immediately ironic when one is aware of Christy sitting frightened to death in the inner room. The more flamboyant Sara behaves, the more irony is created.

Old Mahon's entrance in Act III with the crowd is a complex scene which is made even more difficult because it is staged on a thrust, and the entrance of Old Mahon and eleven others must take place from the vom, an aisle which passes through the audience to the thrust. Actors entering through the vom face upstage, and must be "turned around" for the audience to have a frontal view of the characters.

The scene must convey a sense of claustrophobia for Christy, with the peasants not only threatening him with violence, but also making Christy feel trapped and caged, with no way out. The scene combines the sudden aggression of the peasantry with the historical aggression of Old Mahon, and as such is the pinnacle of suppression for Christy. The staging necessitates that not only Old Mahon and Christy remain in focus, but also Pegeen and, for a short period, the Widow as well. Old Mahon will enter first, with the crowd behind, just as Michael James finishes blessing Christy and Pegeen. Because of the long entrance it is necessary that the audience focus is moved from the blessing to the vom, which will require a strong vocal noise to move audience focus. Old Mahon will charge in and chase Christy further upstage; that is, further into the shebeen. Christy will attempt to escape through the upstage door, which will be blocked by Michael James. He will then try to escape downstage, but will be prevented from doing so by the crowd which is rushing in. The crowd must move upstage, and Christy must move into a trapped position in the shebeen. The crowd reaction to Christy, and Christy's reciprocal reaction should allow this to happen. I would like to have one or two people block the door downstage and will try and provide, as much as possible while retaining sight lines, a sense of Christy being encircled by this mob, with Old Mahon trapped as well.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **JOURNAL**

This chapter records, in journal format, my process as a director from the first design meetings to the opening night of The Playboy of the Western World. The journal emphasizes the discoveries which I have made, and also documents many of the adjustments I have made through collaboration with other artists, designers and actors, involved in the project. In some cases entries have been edited. The unedited journal is approximately twice the length of what is recorded here.

March 5, 1987

#### Design Meeting

I began the meeting somewhat tentatively, showing Douglas McCullough, (set and costume designer), photographs of Ireland from some of the books I had been looking at. Philip McCoy, (thesis supervisor), was present as an observer. I wanted to discover what ideas Douglas had about the play himself rather than to impose any kind of scenic stipulations or even thematic ideas. I did prepare a preliminary list of themes, motifs, and thoughts which Douglas had not yet read. We tended to get into a discussion of the play in a far too intellectual, literal sense, primarily because I had been thinking this way and I think Douglas picked up on my mode of thought. We discussed, for instance, the ramifications of my idea of "romance vs. reality". Douglas wanted to know which elements were romantic and which were realistic. I said "straight down the middle" which is of course vague. As the meeting progressed my apprehension subsided and I began to think more freely. We discussed contrasts necessary between certain elements of the set and costumes. Douglas tended to react against the play being designed too naturalistically, and

favored instead the idea of making certain things important, giving them greater significance. For example the shebeen, if it were completely naturalistic, would have all the trappings of a shebeen which might create more of a visual clutter than anything else, and certain dominant elements, such as the loy, would be lost amidst all of this verisimilitude. Douglas suggested I look at Wyeth's painting, "Kearner's Farm", for ideas as to the qualities which can be achieved with the whiteness of the shebeen. We also discussed a focus on detail in the set for certain scenes: for instance an actor touching or using certain props, which would make these props more significant in the stage picture as a whole. We also discussed Canadian/Irish similarities, for instance the barrenness of the prairie compared with the barrenness of the West of Ireland.

We did not come to any conclusions about the actual use of space in the University Theatre, deciding to wait until the theatre was available so that we could actually go on the stage and get a more accurate sense of what might work.

March 12, 1987

Design meeting

I did a free association exercise where I was able to articulate some of my feelings about the play. The associations were reduced and categorized into visual images and textures which emphasized sensual images rather than intellectual concepts. I have listed a few examples of these associations as follows:

Color-red	Shape-box in sphere	Music-Offenbach
Instrument-trumpet	Line-straight	Texture-rough

Since these are spontaneous associations they cannot be rationalized, but after viewing them collectively I began to feel that they were appropriate sensual signifiers of the play, and were far more tangible for Douglas than any of the intellectual concepts I had been expounding so far.

I presented these associations to Douglas, and he was quite receptive. Their very nature allowed a freer discussion because we were not hampered by the stumbling blocks which a completely rational approach would create. I had also done what I call a "glance and mark", where I perused art books and photographs, some of them not relating to Ireland at all, inserting bookmarks at the photos and pictures which struck me as most relevant when thinking about the play. I included "Kearner's Farm" in this exercise, finding some striking images which Douglas became excited about as well. The discussion centered upon the whiteness of the shebeen, as it stands on its own and as it is integrated with the other "wooden" elements of the set such as the furniture, the potential for adding texture through shadow, and the sky of Ireland, especially the sky as it meets the horizon. Though I had not yet made any stipulations about what the outside would consist of, it was seeming to become important as a comment on what goes on in the shebeen.



March 16, 1987

Design Meeting

Met Douglas at 8:00 a.m. in the University Theatre to pace out the floor and examine the possible size, shape, and arrangement of the shebeen in relation to the architecture of the theatre itself. It became quite obvious to me that there would be problems in this space. Our discussion centered on the potential use of two optimal playing areas on the thrust stage which are located downstage right and left, and on the placement of the upstage wall slightly above the proscenium. We tossed about the idea of having the fireplace downstage centre, which should work well in terms of picturization. With this in mind we discussed the possibility of building a facade of a gable roof, or the skeletal structure of such a roof, which would be attached to the upstage wall. There remained a problem with the "inner room" which would almost have to be located "going off" of the upstage wall, except that if it extends this way it will cut off any lateral movement outside of the wall. Nothing has been decided on this yet.

I asked about the outside. Douglas suggested that the area of the thrust which was not occupied with the shebeen simply be painted flat black to designate it as a neutral area. I was not enamoured with this idea, feeling instead that the shebeen should be surrounded with something other than blackness or neutrality, though I wasn't sure what it would be. Upstage Douglas was interested in having a pile of turf, and perhaps the remnants of ass carts or other crude implements scattered about. I found

this interesting, especially when he mentioned that the pile of turf would could match the texture of the wall in the shebeen to a certain extent.

Douglas had already advised Thomas Legg, (shop carpenter), that three or four pieces of "ancient" furniture would have to be built. I was glad to hear of this because such furniture pieces would emphasize the strength and solidity within the shebeen which we had already discussed. The meeting went well in general, except that I found myself reacting to Douglas' ideas with a fair amount of reservation, hesitating to accept anything but remaining accessible and observant. We ended the meeting on the note of "thinking it over".

March 19, 1987

#### Design Meeting

After consulting Philip about reservations I had about planning so far we met with Douglas for the regular meeting. My reservations were based on the problem of situating the fireplace directly center downstage with the door directly upstage in the wall. This arrangement would limit the visual interest in blocking because a strong vertical axis would be created between the main door and the fireplace leaving the sides parallel to this dominant axis dynamically inaccessible and relatively uninteresting. Secondly, the upstage wall would have to have the main entrance to the shebeen, the entrance to the "inner room", and the outside window placed within it, creating a strong horizontal plane far upstage which would tend to localize action there. Also, this would necessitate anyone onstage to face upstage towards anyone entering, isolating them from the audience.

In the case of Playboy the reaction of those watching someone enter the shebeen is almost more important than the character who enters, so that it becomes important that their reactions be visible. Also, the bar should be placed in an upstage position because of its size. With all of this upstage a visual clutter would be created. In addition to this, the "inner room" would need some kind of representation showing that it is attached to the shebeen, which creates an additional placement problem. Because of the architecture of the theatre, the inner room would have to be extended into the proscenium upstage, as opposed to being a room which leads offstage to left or right. This limits the possibilities for lateral, horizontal movement left or right across the the outside of the upstage wall, which I feel is crucial with the main door and window situated there.

Douglas was rightfully concerned and taken aback when I introduced the need for an alternate approach. If the changes were suggested any later in the process it is not likely that they would have been possible.

I think that the limitations which I have outlined are mostly my responsibility for I had insisted on the upstage wall as an element which would reinforce the naturalism/realism which I had been tending towards. Philip introduced the possibility of increasing the abstraction, especially in the outside world. This had been in the back of my mind for the play as a whole but I discarded the possibility, I think, because of a fear, a need to "play it safe". However I felt liberated at this suggestion and became excited with the possibilities this would permit. To escape the problem of the inner room it was suggested that the room itself be played in view of

the audience. For instance we would see Pegeen enter the room, undress, and go to bed at the end of Act I. From this evolved the possibility of discarding the back wall and using an open stage, with no representations of walls, doors, or windows. The meeting ended with these ideas in the air, with the design concept regressing to a certain extent. I suggested what I would really like to do is look at a scale model of the University Theatre, with scale representations of set pieces and actors. The equipment was readily available and was set up in the model construction room for me to experiment with, as I had been having a terrible time visualizing any possibilities in this difficult space. Despite the "coup" the meeting was concluded quite positively.

March 23, 1987

#### Design Meeting

After studying the model off and on over several hours I developed a groundplan suggestion which would retain the upstage wall, (for Douglas' sake since he was excited about the visual and textural possibilities for the wall), and the inner room, which would be positioned adjacent to the downstage end of the shebeen. This would allow the door to the outside from the inner room, which is required in Act III, to go directly into the vom. I placed the fireplace about center on stage left, the table down center stage right, the bar upstage right, near the wall, the window about center in upstage wall, and the outside door upstage left in the wall. Douglas expressed reservations about the inner room in the downstage area as it is a bad spot, too close to the audience. I had thought of the

possibility of sinking the room, but Douglas suggested it might be architecturally illogical, (in terms of the architecture of the shebeen). He also noted that he was not as concerned as I had thought about keeping the upstage wall. We decided to discard it altogether and concentrate on an open stage.

Douglas had come up with an idea which would delineate the shebeen from the outside by elevating the floor slightly, which would be made out of stone. Surrounding the raised floor on the "outside" would be grass, and a stone foundation which would support the raised floor. This outside area would surround the shebeen, radiating a distance of three or four feet from the outside "walls". Thus the strength and solidity of the shebeen would be contrasted with the outside. We decided to place the outside door downstage left, with outside entrances coming from the vom. The people inside would be far more visible when reacting to entrances. This would also eliminate problems of long crosses between the wing and shebeen which is what would occur if the door were placed upstage. That would also deny any possibilities of surprise entrances which are important to the play. Besides the change in the position of the outside door, the groundplan remained essentially the same, except that the notorious inner room needed a stronger placement. We decided to put it on stage right, still visible to the audience, with the door just downstage of the bar, which remains upstage right. This would emphasize the bar and inner room as "Pegeen's" areas. The outside door of the room would lead on the the "grass", or path in the grass which would lead back into the vom. This would add interest in Act III when the Widow and Sara escape through this

door. They would be able then to sneak behind the people who are crowding in the main doorway to lynch Christy, who is still inside the shebeen.

With the shebeen and the areas immediately outside reasonably well defined, Douglas introduced an idea he had for the upstage area, an abstract design which would consist of a disc-shaped backdrop which would be hung upstage and would be painted with an abstract portrayal of the Irish landscape, as it is romantically perceived by many people. This abstraction would contrast with the solid, earthy, heavy, gritty and essentially non-romantic interior of the shebeen. It would be positioned in such a way as to vaguely suggest, in combination with the rest of the set, an opened clamshell, facing the audience, showing the contrasts between the light and airy backdrop and the tangible stone and wood of the shebeen's interior. I was very intrigued by this idea. I believe he may have developed it from one of my original free associations of shape which was box in sphere. In addition to this Douglas had an idea that an absolutely straight and narrow red ribbon or cord would be strung in mid-air from wing to wing, somewhere between the shebeen and the drop. He could not rationalize his idea, but I found it appropriate none the less.

We concluded the meeting positively with these ideas, after actually putting them on the mock set with red thread and cardboard, though they are still tentative. We were still uncertain about the size of the shebeen. Douglas suggested I walk through some parts of the play with a script in a large space to get a better idea of the size in accordance with

pace as developed in line readings. I have booked a room to do so before our next meeting.

March 26, 1987

#### Design Meeting

Met with Douglas briefly to discuss the concept as it has developed so far, and whether or not I still approved. Douglas was apprehensive previous to the meeting; he had checked the model and found that I had removed the backdrop. He was thinking I had perhaps decided against the idea. However when he asked me I told him I had moved it so that anyone viewing the model, which was accessible to many people, would not have any kind of preview into the design. I assured him that I was still very much enamoured of the idea and had grown more excited, as he had as well.

Once this was set straight we discussed the relative size of the shebeen with emphasis on interior dimension. I had booked a studio and did a line reading by myself, testing physical dimensions, and came to the conclusion that the size we had would be suitable. This was based on a compromise between two factors. First, the shebeen needs to be small enough to maintain the comic pace. A large groundplan would necessitate long crosses in many instances, which would detract from the pace and rhythm needed at many points in the play. Secondly, the shebeen needs to be large enough to allow people, Christy especially, to "draw out" their stories as they are spoken, stringing them along. Longer crosses are necessary in these instances, to enhance the fact that people are being

toyed with. Douglas pointed out that it would be interesting to have the shebeen small enough to be constantly "interfering" with the drawing out of tales: for example Christy, in the middle of a discourse, might find himself bumping into furniture, or having to alter his path or direction while telling a story. This would certainly emphasize the irony of his character, but I'm not sure if I want him to appear so buffoon like. A lot of this also depends on the pace of delivery in the storytelling. I may be wrong in assuming they take their time, it might be possible that Synge conceived the tales as coming out much quicker, thus, decreasing the amount of time given the spectator for "objective analysis". The delivery of these speeches of course depends on much more than simply pace, but at this point pace seems to be an important consideration for the groundplan. I hope to gain some insight into these problems in my trip to Ireland. I am assuming, and even hoping, that I will be taken for a ride by the Irish capacity for language and story telling. Perhaps by viewing in retrospect such a personal experience I can come to an understanding of the exact nature of "streeleen", (an Irish term for a long stream of talk), and how it applies to movement. Also, there is the original intention of having the shebeen become increasingly claustrophobic and confining, especially for Christy. With all of these factors taken into consideration I feel that the size is appropriate. There are still possibilities for adjustment through furniture placement. For example the table could be moved out from the wall, cutting down on open space; this could even be done by the characters as the play progresses.



I was concerned during my walk-through that I might have placed the furniture (including the fireplace and doors) in positions which decreased the obliqueness of the angle created by the axes between these pieces, thus weakening their dynamic potential and visual interest. I was also concerned with a potentially "dead" space directly upstage of the fireplace, behind the settle. Douglas assured me that we could adjust accordingly in due time. I mentioned that we might have a sightline problem if the pieces downstage are very large. Philip suggested that the furniture be designed and placed so that there is a progression in height towards the back of the shebeen, (upstage). Douglas assured me this would not be a problem.

We confirmed that the door would remain downstage left and basically confirmed everything else that we had discussed so far. In our discussions about the furniture Douglas mentioned how it would have to be broken down or "antiqued" to achieve the two-hundred year old look necessary. I mentioned that it was important that the furniture retain an angularity with straight lines and no round dimensions, to increase the contrast with the "outside". Douglas agreed, saying even the stools will have square seats. We had, incidentally, decided to eliminate the barrels in the shebeen long ago. Douglas believed they would have too much sense of "newness". I did not like them because of the roundness, which should be supplied by the characters and not the furniture.

With these things well on their way I asked if we could start discussing costume. Douglas said anytime, except that I should prepare him a character analysis that he can read before the discussions, which I

will do. We discussed briefly the roundness and vitality of the characters, and on this note he suggested our next meeting include Jim Andrews, (lighting designer). Douglas felt that a strong texturing of the light would be best in order to achieve an effect of multi-dimensionality in the characters. By "breaking up the light" an effect of light encompassing the characters with patterns playing over their bodies can be achieved. We discussed textures as a further enhancement of this quality, for instance the folds in clothing, frills, or tatters, all adding extra dimension which light can accentuate.

March 30, 1987

#### Design Meeting

At this meeting Douglas and I introduced Jim to the concept so far. Douglas had enhanced the model to include a representation of the stone floor and a representation of the circle which would surround the shebeen.

We discussed lighting in a very general sense. All windows and doors will be delineated with light. For rehearsals window frames and door frames will be used so that the actors will get a concrete idea of where they will actually be. We discussed the interior light source, which is most important for Act I. Douglas sees all of the light coming from the fireplace, which would be fine considering the "inside walls" of the shebeen could be white and would reflect enough to create a considerable brightness. I was worried that all this fire light might become too romantic and would detract from the edge and irony. However at this

preliminary stage such a consideration is not crucial. I suggested at least one more interior light source, an oil lamp or candle, to increase the internal texture by having a primary light in another part of the shebeen. (It would be placed on the table or the bar, opposite the fireplace.) Both Douglas and Jim thought this would be fine. I also thought it would be good for Pegeen to take the lamp into the inner room when she goes to bed, where she would turn it down, so that we would vaguely be able to see her there. We discussed the localization of light in Act I, coming to an agreement that it could be focussed about a foot inside of the walls. This would increase the visual isolation of the shebeen and would provide places where characters, such as Shawn, could essentially disappear into the shadows along the wall, an action which is essential for Shawn in Act I. We also briefly discussed the function of the drop in relation to the set, how in places it will be dimmed out or eliminated completely, along with the blood-line, as I have come to call it. These decisions will be made as the mood of the play emerges in rehearsal. The drop itself may be illuminated from the dresser, which will be placed upstage center and could have the lighting instruments concealed within. Douglas and Jim discussed construction of the set in a practical sense. When Douglas mentioned the floor I inquired as to the sound it would produce. He hoped there would be no sound at all.

May 29, 1987

Design Meeting

I met with Douglas in his office to discuss costuming. I had

given him some brief notes previous to this, which included abstract visual associations, suggestions for color and texture. As well, we had a lot of visual sources to cull from, and during the process up to this point we had occasionally touched upon characters and their relation to the set, so that already there was a substantial framework established before these more specific discussions. I also settled on having only two peasants. Though we had the resources for more, I anticipated that the size of the set, especially the entranceway into the vom, would create problems if there were more bodies to contend with.

We spent considerable time discussing the progression of the costume of Christy which is important in presenting the irony as well as contributing to his personal development as an actor/character.

We concluded the meeting, with Douglas saying that he would try to have some preliminary sketches done by the time I returned from Ireland.

June 4, 1987

#### Design Meeting

This was a very good meeting with Douglas and Jim. We discussed lighting and set possibilities, and I was able to get an idea of the kinds of things they were leaning towards, the images and atmospheres which excited and intrigued them the most, all of which I need to think about to see if they will be appropriate in the show.

The inquisition scene in Act I was one topic of discussion. That particular segment of the play seems to be important to all of us. I

emphasized that the mystical atmosphere we had been contemplating may not be appropriate if it becomes too dim or moody. This is because there is a strong comic element present at the same time, that of the villagers on the edge of their seats, craving to find out what Christy did, so that there is an intensity there as well. Also, throughout the entire act, which is the only one where artificial inside light is needed, the lighting conditions should remain very much the same, unless a lamp is adjusted, or the oil in the lamp happens to burn out at "just the right moment", which is ludicrous. The inside lighting will have to be balanced with the disc and blood-line elements, which might allow for greater license in altering light intensity, color and texture inside the shebeen. It is too early to predict exactly how this will work, whether the shebeen will become integrated with the disc in with the disc in abstraction, or whether it will remain an independent abstract element. I did mention, however, that I was interested in a subtle adjusting of the disc and blood-line, through lighting cues, based on the rhythm of Christy passing from his self-confident bragging states to his insecure states. Christy is very much a reactive character; that is how he grows and changes. The disc could be associated with Christy alone. Or, it could be associated with the characters influencing Christy, and/or the movements of the scenes themselves. The other possibility is that the disc either reinforce or contradict the moods. These decisions have a lot to do with the environment of Ireland, which I have yet to experience. I should get many ideas there, and this, combined with visual and rhythmic developments during rehearsals should provide ideas as to when the disc should be most prominent, when the least

conspicuous, and when and what images, textures, and ultimately, moods, can be portrayed.

Since I am leaving for Ireland on Monday, we discussed what I would be able to do for them when I am over there. Douglas wants me to bring back a rock and some soil so that he can see what the colors are like. I mentioned I was going to take a lot of photographs. Both Douglas and Jim emphasized that I get a good visual image in my mind of what the scenes looked like, to compensate for discrepancies in film recording. I will be using slides which will make this less of a problem.

Douglas was still uncertain about Christy's jockey costume, so I left him a picture of the costume Jack Yeats drew for Synge for the original production, a design which I was quite happy with, and which may give Douglas some ideas.

July 9, 1987

Notes

I have just returned from Ireland, very tired, but full of insight. Though I kept a journal during the trip, many of my experiences simply cannot be described in words, and it may actually be a detriment to do so. In addition I think I need some time to assimilate all the knowledge I gained. I brought back many slides, though I was afraid to bring a "rock" since I was travelling through New York and didn't want to get involved in a customs hassle. I noticed that the rocks in Ireland don't appear to be too strikingly different from the rocks we have here in Alberta.

July 11, 1987

Design Meeting

Douglas and I had spoken on the phone previous to this meeting, where I vaguely, and under exhaustion, tried to relate some of my experiences. Douglas had finished the preliminary sketches and was apprehensive, it seemed, about what I would think. He told me on the phone that he had pushed the irony we had discussed earlier quite far, to an extent he termed "Molierish". He was also interested in developing a Christy-Shawn parallel centering upon Pegeen's attempt at transforming each in turn from timid wimps to courageous young men worthy of being her husband.

I was interested yet frightened of what I might see. My fear dissappeared when I viewed the sketches. All were appropriate, and the abstractions we had been discussing were focussed clearly into distinct manifestations of character. The pushing to the "Molierian" degree did not affect me, though I do need time to think about it more. There was an emphasis on rags and tatters that was skillfully depicted. All of the characters, as portrayed, embodied the necessary farcical elements, yet, to my eyes, did not appear ridiculous or unbelievable. The parallel between Shawn and Christy I was still uncertain about, and we left that tentative for the moment. Douglas did not want any comments until I had time to look at the costumes by myself. We made photocopies of the sketches to that I could think about them for awhile. I am going to work at a theatre company in British Columbia for a couple of weeks, and we agreed to meet and discuss the designs further when I returned.

Aug. 6, 1987

Design Meeting

I presented a few suggestions for costume changes to Douglas. On the whole, I still liked what he had created. The Christy-Shawn parallel I rejected, feeling it would depend for its full effect on proper casting, which has limited possibilities. Douglas had a few swatches on hand of material he was planning on using. It was impossible to gain insight into the costume as of yet because these sketches were preliminary, and color renderings still remain to be produced.

Douglas had already started on the final model of the set. I asked him if it would be possible to move the bar unit downstage, because I felt it was a central feature of the interior of the shebeen and was somewhat isolated in its position, which was far away from most of the audience. We experimented on the model with the idea, and I asked if we would move the door to the inner room behind the bar and make the entranceway narrower. Douglas seemed to like this idea, and said it would be no problem. I went one step further and wondered if we could put a corner on the stage left side of the bar to make it L-shaped. This was not a problem either. The effect of these changes I am quite pleased with. It increases the sense of the inner room and the bar as "Pegeen's areas". It also, as Douglas pointed out, makes the sense of there being a door to the inner room. For instance, in the village girl's scene in Act II, they will be able to line up behind the bar, giving the sense that there only is it possible to see through the chink, increasing the visual suggestion that there is a door present.



We also had a brief discussion centering upon doors, specifically how to make the auditory knocks without anything to knock on. Douglas offered some advice, suggesting that it is not so much the door but the action associated with the door which is crucial, so that the opening or closing of a door is punctuated in some way within the text, the dialogue, or the action of the moment. Earlier Douglas had mentioned how it might be interesting, at the end of Act I, to have Pegeen cleaning up, stacking the stools, in preparation for the closing of the shebeen for the evening. We made a connection between this and an simultaneous incident, that of the Widow getting booted out and Pegeen slamming and bolting the door. Without the door, the exit of the Widow, the termination of the scene, and the audible sound associated with the slamming might be accomplished by Pegeen slamming an overturned stool down on a bench which we could situate at the entranceway. This solution works well in theory, but it must be experimented with to see if it will be practical. And it will take a lot of thought, imagination, and experimentation to make all the other entrances and exits work in a similar fashion, without becoming redundant, tedious, anticipatory, or stylistically detracting.

Following this discussion Douglas and I went into the model room to examine the incomplete model of the set in relation to the model of the University Theatre. We then began toying with the idea of rotating the set a few degrees so as to put it on an angle, a favorite with many designers. Actually it was something I had been wondering about myself, and I was excited when Douglas suggested made the suggestion. We tried rotating the set both clockwise and counter-clockwise, and it seemed the

best when in the clockwise position. Besides being more visually interesting, the tilted set offers several other benefits. First, the entranceway to the shebeen becomes more proximate to the entrance into the vom. I had been anticipating a problem of having to "squeeze" any group of more than four people into the vom in a single line, this occurring because with a long cross between the shebeen and the vom, it would look ridiculous to have a group of people travel in single file. And if they spread out after leaving the shebeen, they would have to form a line again to exit through the vom. The shorter cross alleviated this problem. Secondly, the rotation situates the fireplace area in one of the "optimal" acting spaces defined by Douglas and Philip. Third, the angle suggests a randomness of situation in relation to the surrounding environment, an architectural feature I noticed many times while I was in Ireland. And fourth, this positioning created an emotional sensation of something being not quite right, just a little bit different, or "off".

Sept. 9, 1987

#### Notes

I met with Philip today to discuss my apprehension of the "no door" problem. I said that we were considering using a combination of mime and light cueing of the door entrances, and outlined the problems inherent in this, especially in Act I. He suggested that the convention of the door opening be eliminated altogether, at least in the beginning, to see if there is a possibility of it working. Philip did not like the idea of miming door openings, but I am still thinking it might add an interesting element,

and might describe more strongly the delineation between the inside and outside which is very important in Christy's development. The only problem which might arise is the actors' practical ability to mime the entrances and exits. If this gets sloppy in the slightest way the convention will become ridiculous.

One other point of discussion was the ever-present dilemma of whether to use accents or not. I had spoken with people who advised me not to make any attempt at accent for it would always fall short of the ideal. Philip stated that a large percentage of the audience would not be concerned with that, though the critics will mention it surely and some Irish audience members will be very aware of the inconsistencies. Philip also believed that a lilt would be of assistance to the actors in helping them attain the rhythms of the language, if nothing else. Also, the accent could always be cut if the actors have too many difficulties.

Sept. 13, 1987

Notes

The auditioning is now complete, including callbacks. Sixty people showed up, and read in pairs or groups of three the scenes which I had preselected. I had told the Assistant Stage Managers to inform everyone in the waiting room that I would like them to make some kind of attempt at an Irish accent when auditioning. This enabled Craig Downie, (dialect coach), who was present, to get an indication as to their potential. Aside from this, I watched for instinct, imagination, vocal variation, and, more than anything else, magic, charisma, energy, and the ability to take

risks. Several people had auditioned without reading the play, which was obvious in their readings, and for the most part I could not take them seriously.

Overall I was disappointed in the quality of people who auditioned. It was the confirmation of a fear I had ever since the play was selected: That it would be virtually impossible to fill the roles even closely to the optimum which is necessary. This is by no means the auditionee's fault; if any it is mine for choosing a play that requires such incredible virtuosity in talent. This is the moment when the play's potential is finally realized. I am faced with difficulties, but I must view these difficulties as a challenge, and not be aware of "how it could have been if only...".

I am still in a quandary over Christy. One of the possibilities I had selected was a young man who was very intuitive and sensitive, but somehow lacked the punch and sparkle of "The Playboy". I had considered another actor for Christy who would make a wonderful Shawn, however his mannerisms and physicality would make Christy's final departure very ironic, and I don't think the idea of the young man having grown and emerged would come across at all.

Pegeen was done most effectively by one actress from the Department, though she played the scenes incessantly hard at the audition. I had her read the Christy-Pegeen love scene in Act III, where Pegeen finally succumbs to Christy's charm, and she was "softer", but only cerebrally. I also have a problem with her vocal variation, especially in pitch. At the audition the range was rather limited, perhaps on account of

the "hard" mode she was in. She has a fine sense of accent and catches the rhythms very well.

I liked a community actress very much as the Widow. She was unfamiliar with the character but I sense tremendous potential. She was able instinctively to portray the lustiness needed, and was catching the commandeering, manipulative nature of the Widow very well.

I managed to find actors to fill the roles of Michael James, Jimmy, and Philly. All three make an interesting combination together, and there is a fine contrast between the actors who will be playing Jimmy and Philly.

There were a lot of possibilities for the village girls, and I have selected three, though I have only assigned a role for one as of yet. Another girl who I was very interested in could not be contacted over the weekend. No one appeared who would make a suitable Old Mahon as of yet. Earlier James Dugan, (Department head and producer), seeing my quandary, offered to play Old Mahon if I was really stuck, though he does have several other commitments we would have to work around. I still have one other actor from the Department to consider. He was unable to make it to the callbacks but I am quite familiar with his work, and I am considering him for either Shawn or Christy. I will decide on the casting of the Bellman and Peasants when the major roles are filled.

Sept. 14, 1987

Casting and Read Through

After consulting with James and Philip I have posted the cast

list. Old Mahon is still not settled, though James was present for the read through, and has indicated that he will play the part if necessary.

Before we began the read through, I took some time to have Douglas and myself explain some of the aspects of the design to the cast. Douglas had the model of the set present and we emphasized to the actors how their contribution is crucial on such a stage in terms of their three-dimensionality, their use of the playing space. Douglas displayed the costume renderings and the cast was very impressed and excited, for Douglas was able to capture, besides the costumes, the spirit of each individual character who will wear them.

After this I had the cast sit down in a semi-complete set to do the reading. I asked everyone simply to read the script, without acting, without accent. I feel it is necessary at this point to be provided with the opportunity of listening to the text calmly and without any pressure to perform, especially considering the language difficulty in Playboy.

Sept. 15, 1987

Rehearsal: Week One

We rehearsed on the set through the week with some of the furniture not yet in place. I was interested in seeing the actors move about on their own, feeling out the space, without any pressure from myself. This allowed me to watch closely their initial interpretations and as well to see problems in blocking. I made a few suggestions here and there, nothing concrete, and watched what happened.

Sept. 20, 1987

### Rehearsal

I called the entire cast in at one o'clock to show them about seventy slides of Ireland which I had taken when I was there. I was combatting the problem of a "slide show" becoming a boring reiteration of someone else's holiday; there were good-humored jokes passed around by the cast. I had reduced the number of slides to be shown, anticipating this problem, trying to select those which might give them an idea of the landscape and ambiance of the country. For example I showed one or two slides of a West Irish beach, the kind on which the games would take place, in particular the mule race which the Widow and Old Mahon watch. Another was a slide I took of a "furzy ditch" to explain to Christy the kind of place he would be hiding. This took about forty minutes and was well received.

I then had Craig Downie speak to them for a few minutes about his working methods as an accent coach. He stressed the necessity for hard work, it being worthwhile when a consistent product can be attained. He also stressed that this work is useful for any actor if he wants to be versatile and get work, because the use of accent and voice is important in the theatre.

By this time it was two o'clock and I dismissed everyone not in Act II and proceeded to work through the act.

Though everyone else is making good progress, there were a few problems with the girl's scene at the beginning of Act II. The first time we went through it they came on without any of the excitement necessary.

With a pep talk, they became more energetic and focussed the second time through.

The Widow is a little off the mark, being a bit overbearing and one-dimensional. I explained that the Widow is not quite the same as a stereotypical spinster. She has quite a bit of finesse, light-footedness, and is highly manipulative and dextrous. For instance, when she comes in to discover Christy with the girls, the actress would savagely order them to get Christy's breakfast. I explained that the Widow was much more tactful, almost in a managerial way, in getting rid of the girls, asking her to become a bit more cajoling and less brutish. Such choices, besides being essential to her character, would make the Widow far more interesting.

Shawn is also posing some difficulties. I keep asking the actor to go to extremes, so that he might be able to find some things, and we can always cut back later on. I tried a few things in the "Cleave Scene", where he tries to bribe Christy with clothes. I walked on during the scene and threw a quilt over his head. I also gave him a large awkward window frame to carry around. Everyone looked at me like I was a lunatic, but I think it helped find some of Shawn's bumbling insecurity. I also had Christy play along in the scenes, getting him to do whatever he could think of to threaten Shawn, using the whole theatre space. This included the scene where Christy is supposed to be off changing into Shawn's clothes. Christy made both verbal and physical assaults on Shawn, who reacted accordingly. I did this a few times. It was fun, yet both were exhausted afterwards.



I did the same exercise with Old Mahon, getting Christy to try to annoy and irritate Old Mahon, once again in as many ways as possible. This gave Old Mahon an almost tactile sense of the frustration he has with Christy, the frustration being something he must convey in this scene, where he is talking to the Widow only. Until now the element of annoyance, which is extremely comic, has been washed over by sheer rage and anger. We also improvised the potato scene, where Christy "slays" Old Mahon. As an exercise they did this quite well, and I was pleased to see them both pulling specific information from the text, such as that centering around "the Widow Casey".

Sept. 21, 1987

#### Rehearsal

Greg Curtis, (Philly), managed to acquire four hurly sticks and a hurly ball, so the openers for Act III were able to sample an indigenous Irish game as part of their warm-up. Though it is unlikely that Mayo peasants would have experienced much of the game, it perhaps added a bit of contextual spirit, especially when the actors noted how physically dangerous the game can be.

We then worked the beginning of Act III, trying to establish more of an animosity between Jimmy and Philly in this scene. We made some progress, though I'm not quite certain at this point if we are heading in the right direction.

Since all the cast were present except Shawn, and since we had the table present which had just been built in the shop, I wanted to work on

a complicated bit of blocking in Act III, where Old Mahon makes his entrance to confront Christy, followed by the fight. The problem with this scene is getting all of the crowd, who are following Old Mahon, onto the stage and into a position where they would not obstruct the fight.

The final crowd scene worked on was that where Christy is carried in after the races. I integrated the two peasants and the Bellman into this, and everything went quite smoothly. I had some problems with the "Blessing" scene in Act III with Michael James, Shawn, Pegeen, and Christy. There were a few blocking problems at the end of this which I have yet to clarify. Also, Michael James is playing the scene with perhaps a bit too much intoxication, to the extent that it affects the pace, and muffles his enunciation. At the same time I would like the intoxication to persist through the actual blessing itself, so some kind of a common ground must be reached.

The last scene I wanted to work on was the lynching scene, now that we had the table, and it was "thrown" into the position it would be in for that scene. A half-hitch knot was made up and we proceeded, very slowly, in plotting it out. It is very complicated, and everything requires perfect timing. The half-hitch may not work as it was occasionally hurting Christy. I will talk to Michael Taugher, (technical director), about this problem since he knows a fair amount about knots. I dismissed the cast and congratulated them on fine, hard work, and good progression.

Sept. 22, 1987

Rehearsal

My major concern during this rehearsal was the progress of the inquisition scene in Act I. I had a difficult time getting the men to question Christy with the sparkling delight needed, so I had each of them, before their line, say "fantastic!", which made an big difference. Christy is somewhat lost, trying to discover the internal reality of his character. He plays externally very well, but is floundering when I try to persuade him to listen and react. His changes are very subtle, but are encouraging. Both Pegeen and Christy are very worried about learning their lines by the deadline. I have tried to be as encouraging as possible, but I am not prepared to make any concessions when the deadline arrives.

Sept. 23, 1987

Rehearsal

I asked the girls to do something to warm up, both for rehearsals, and previous to performance, which would initiate a group energy flow. I suggested tag which they went at with great enthusiasm.

I worked with Christy on his monologue. He has been getting a bit excited, and tends to have a capacity to lose control very quickly, letting his basic energies flow at abandon without any finesse or subtlety. For example, when the girls arrive, he gets so frantic that he forgets important individual moments, such as looking to see where he can hide, and picking up his jacket so that he can actually get dressed, which is Christy's foremost intention in the scene.

When the girls made their entrance, I noticed that three of them seemed physically exhausted though they had time to rest after their game of tag. This became critically apparent with Susan and Sara, who did not have enough breath to make it through their speeches, and had not organized their breath control. I asked them to work on the speeches, and to become aware of the points, rhythmically, where they could breathe. Honor has stumbled consistently over one short speech. It seemed to me that none of them had looked at it since we last did the scene.

I asked Shawn, as a task, to pay particular attention to the words, the enunciation, in his speeches. I gave an example of how effective it might be with his reading of "Sneem", which was always fun and interesting, and asked him to look for more examples, suggesting that Shawn's meticulous nature might be reflected in his speech. I had told him I thought he might try being a little whiney earlier, but this has washed over everything and become tedious.

There is still a problem with Old Mahon's first entrance. I am trying to decide how it should be played physically. Synge has described the scene as "stationary comedy" in one of his notebooks. We worked a bit on the Widow antagonizing Old Mahon into telling more about Christy, which she certainly does, but we need more specific actions to do so, other than walking around and playing cat-and-mouse.

There were some tense moments in this rehearsal. I think some of the principal actors are getting tired. I am going to try and arrange days off for each of them next week.

Sept. 24, 1987

### Rehearsal

I started the rehearsal this evening working with Pegeen and Christy on their scenes in Act III and Act II respectively. I noticed that both of them were lacking in facial expressiveness, so I spent a few minutes having them work on facial masks. Then we worked on the Act III scene. I simply had them go through it several times, trying to get them to listen and react to one another. Eventually they made a noticeable connection, which increased as I emphasized eye contact between the two of them. The scene became quite touching and sensitive. But the moments were soft, quiet, and could only be appreciated if you were sitting next to them. It will be a difficult thing for them to project this to a theatrical level, but I insisted they be aware of how important the projection of such feeling really is.

We moved on to the Act II scene between Christy and Pegeen, which contains difficult transitions. For Pegeen it is the change from jealous fury, to harsh teasing, to bewilderment at Christy's loneliness, to reluctant apology for teasing him. For Christy it is a change from elation to horror to sadness and back to elation again. Both have been finding these things quite well through experimentation and their own intuition.

We moved on to working the fight scene and the lynching scene near the end of the play. I have not been able to accomplish much here because of the difficulty of working on the scenes with book in hand. In the lynching scene for example, Christy has a lot of talking to do while all

of this complex physical action is occurring. But I feel it is necessary at least to familiarize them early on with the mechanics of the scene.

During the fight Christy hit his head on the table leg. I was worried about injury in this scene all along. I feel it is necessary to have someone with more experience at fight choreography than myself to be working on this scene, both for safety reasons, and for finding the theatrical potential of the scene. We did not have any provisions in the budget for a fight choreographer, but I am going to speak with James Dugan in any case to see if something can be arranged.

Sept. 25, 1987

Run-Through

Tonight was scheduled for our first run with blocking. Jim Andrews, the lighting designer, was invited so that he could get an idea about stage usage. We had, up to this point, been using window frames, mounted on the set, for the actors to get a concrete idea of where the windows should be placed. Jim suggested their removal, which I thought perhaps premature at first, but then considered it would be a good idea to see if the actors had acquired any consistency in playing the windows.

Before we started I had everyone do a volleyball warm-up. I've found that this simple exercise, which consists of having the actors form a circle and try and keep the ball in the air as long as possible, has increased the sense of group co-operation and ensemble within the company. After this we were able to go over to the University Theatre to test some of the difficult entrances and exits, and to get a sense of the space we would be

playing in. I also checked the acoustics for the crowd cheering which is to occur in the vom. It sounded quite good, spreading out over the entire house. But I noticed that several acoustic panels had been set up just downstage of the proscenium for a concert, and I suspect that they contributed to the good sound dispersion. We will have to try it once again when we have the set in place.

Before we began I had a short talk with the actors, where I instructed them to be aware of five things: 1) Talk to whom you are talking to. 2) Listen to whom you are listening to. 3) Breathe. 4) Relax. 5) Keep going despite any problems which may arise. The last note was to make sure the actors developed a sense of continuity, and to encourage the actors to work out, for themselves, any predicaments involving properties or blocking. Their ability to resolve such problems now gives them the confidence to do so later on, and even in performance if such a situation arises. It also, I hope, will increase their spontaneity.

The run-through was quite smooth. There were problems, of course, but I perceived, for the first time, a wholeness and unity. The worst scene was the inquisition, primarily because Michael James, Jimmy, Philly and Pegeen did not have a sense of the excitement and intrigue of this new stranger. They also tended to pick up on Christy's rhythm, which has been slow, and tired, at least initially. Christy begins, later on, to react to the attention he is getting, which is fine, but by this point the previous rhythm has been established in the others. I don't think they understand yet the extent of their interest and curiosity about Christy, and the great respect and admiration they must exhibit after he reveals his

deed. I mentioned this in the note session, and everyone agreed that they did not feel that excitement yet.

I spoke with Jim Andrews and Lynn Dickson, (production coordinator), to get some objective comments afterwards. Jim said he liked the blocking, except for the lynching scene where Christy, with his legs around the table, faces upstage most of the time, which I was aware of. He suggested that the problem may be that I'm taking it too literally when the script states that Christy's legs must be the only way Christy is attached, and suggested that Christy might hold the table leg with his arms, or arms and legs.

The major comment from Lynn was that a large portion of the dialogue is incomprehensible. I thought this might happen, but I was not prepared for the extent of the problem. Because I am familiar with the text I understand everything. However I do not want to start hounding them on articulation at this point, until their intentions become clearer, and they develop more of a sense of the life, and extravaganza which is necessary. I think that forcing them to articulate at this stage will inhibit the development of other aspects of the performance. We don't have an audience for three and one half weeks, and I believe there is plenty of time to resolve this problem. Another reason I am not concerned as of yet about "communicating" the lines stems from a review of Playboy by Robert Greenwood when it was last presented in Calgary. The review refers to a Theatre Calgary production in 1978. Greenwood wrote that "the words are there, but the Theatre Calgary Performers made an attempt to speak it so well, they lost the meaning and fun. The characters, for the most part,



became elocutionary exercises, reducing their reality to an auditory challenge to stay involved." (Albertan 2-11-78) I think that if I can extract more of the spontaneous energy and life out of the performers, and have this as a strong foundation, I can correct the enunciation and articulation later on. The problem does not restrict itself to simple voice problems, however. Some characters are rushing through their speeches and not finding the available textures. Pegeen, for example, directs much of her forcefulness into the speed of her delivery, rather than using the words themselves.

Sept. 27, 1987

#### Rehearsal

After the reasonably successful run-through on Friday, I now begin the tedious and stressful task of getting the actors off book. I have arranged to do so with a one day interval between each act that they are required to learn, which is perhaps a bit too short a time. But the acts themselves are quite short so it shouldn't be too much of a problem. During the first couple of rehearsals where the actors cease to carry their scripts, the director can do nothing more than be patient. For their benefit, I have tried to reduce the tension of these periods by arranging line-runs in informal and fun atmospheres. I encourage them to experiment, be silly, be ridiculous, and not to concentrate on what they have "learned" previously. This is to allow a release of the childlike qualities, the sense of "play" from which many discoveries can be made.

For today's rehearsal, I brought everyone outside for a couple of line runs in the grassy area between the University Theatre and the Library Tower. Some of the things which we did may seem ridiculous, but were enjoyable exercises at a time where I could do nothing more. During one line run I had Jimmy, Philly, and Michael James approach, and begin their lines from the opposite end of the field we were in, which increased their projection, their sense of distance travelled from "above at the cross-roads" (57), and increased the sensitivity and listening abilities of Pegeen and Shawn. I also had Christy hide in one of the bushes nearby and groan "wicked like a maddening dog", then emerge from the bush for his entrance into the scene. These tactile physical sensations cannot be imagined as graphically in a studio or rehearsal space as well as they can in a real physical environment, and though this carefully mowed and pruned parkland is not the ruggedness of the Irish West, it is certainly more sensual than the black box of the Reeve Primary Theatre. Because we were outside on the grass I encouraged everyone to be as physical with one another as possible. This resulted in one instance of the Widow and Pegeen getting into a real tussle, stuffing leaves into one another's clothing, kicking their shoes off and shoving each other around. This increased their sense of animosity, and at the same time helped to decrease actor tension. The physical contact between these two, and the others, I think increased the co-operative trust among everyone. The actors knew their lines quite well, except for Michael James, who stumbled and missed many cues.

We moved back into the theatre and on to the set for the third run of the act, where they were able to integrate the blocking. The

theatre seemed very dreary and depressing after being outside, and everyone was quite tired after the two previous runs, but everything went well nonetheless.

Sept. 28, 1987

Rehearsal

I gave Pegen a night off tonight, and I am going to try and accomodate Christy and Widow Quin the same way. I am anticipating that time off for these principals will give them a bit of rest, and at the same time will allow them to do work on their own. Many of the things I am suggesting or working on in rehearsals will not provide immediate results. But subtle discoveries on the part of the actors and gentle hints at the right times by myself can lead to better things when left to develop on their own.

Tonight I began by working on the girls' scene in Act II and I became quite concerned that it has not progressed in anyway from when it was first blocked. The girls are not playing off one another, are not acting or reacting in any way. I worked with them on the moments in the scene, trying to help them break it down into more simple parts which they can concentrate on individually. I also asked them background questions, such as "Where did you come from?"; "Who found out about Christy first?"; "Why did you tell one another?". I also tried to help them find a more contemporary allusion to what it is they expect to find, asking each of them to imagine someone or something that they would all die to meet or see. We experimented a bit with adolescent giggling girlishness, but it

seemed to me to make the scene silly and whimsical, and removed all of the forthright qualities from their characters. I also encouraged them to do homework on their own, and not rely on making all of their discoveries in rehearsal. If nothing has happened by the next rehearsal, it may warrant "taking the scene apart" to find another approach.

The Widow is fine in the scene, discovering more and more all the time. Christy has many problems, especially when it comes to handling props, such as the mirror and the presents which the girls give him, and in basic movement. An example occurs when the girls trap him in the inner room. He has a terrible time reacting, and connecting with the intention that he must get out of there. The scene is somewhat contrived anyway, since Christy could very easily leave the mirror in the room if he is that afraid of being caught with it. The only way I've been able to rationalize this action is through Christy's panic at the situation.

One other problem has been achieving the celebratory climax during Sara's toast, which is interrupted by Pegeen's entrance. I explained to Sara that she must be caught up in the spirit of Christy's story; his verbal ability is infectious and inspiring. She told me she has been working on it, and promises to work more. I'm not sure it is "work" which she needs, but the ability to relax and release. I don't think it is a problem of Christy not giving enough, for he has been doing a fine job in this story.

Sept. 29, 1987

Rehearsal

Before we began the line-run tonight to get the actors off-book

for Act II, we had a small costume parade, where Douglas and myself were able to view the girls and the peasants. There were some minor adjustments to be made, but for the most part everything looked good.

The first line-run was done off the set, in the Reeve. I asked everyone to stand up and move about while doing the run, but within a relatively confined area. I also asked all those not participating in any particular scene to remain close by and be supportive and encouraging to those who were running a scene. The actors knew most of their lines except for Christy, who had to be cued very often. His not knowing of the lines, and the stumbling and calling for cues dampened the energy and enthusiasm of everyone, and several people, including myself, were quite irritated.

We took a break, then did a second line-run, this time in the storage area of the Reeve Primary, a large room filled with risers, a mezzanine storage area with ladder access, and plenty of nooks and "spaces". This again, was to decrease the tension and increase the imaginative play. The actors responded quite well to the physical environment, and Christy made a noticeable improvement in recalling his lines, though he still could not be considered "off-book". It was especially frustrating for Pegeen for she had almost everything memorized, but was constantly set back by his drying. We took another break and ran through Act II on the set with blocking, during which I took some brief notes. I then dismissed everyone.

Sept. 30, 1987

### Rehearsal

Tonight was devoted to scene work to give actors another day before they must be off-book for Act III. This was also an evening off for Christy.

We worked on the opening scene from Act I. I started with Pegeen and Shawn, doing text work to clarify intentions. I pointed out some transitive verbs in their exchange which I thought were appropriate. This proved to be a great help and was much appreciated. When they ran the scene it had greater clarity, transitions, and form.

We moved on to the next scene, up to Christy's entrance. I was trying to clarify moments and tighten the scene up. Work progressed very smoothly.

The next scene rehearsed was the beginning of Act II up to Christy's entrance, with the Widow, Jimmy, Philly, and Old Mahon. I'm having some problems still with Jimmy and Philly's scene together. We worked it several times, with different choices and textures and it made some improvement, though I still feel that something is missing, that I am not approaching the scene from the right angle.

I finished the evening working with Old Mahon and the Widow on Old Mahon's first entrance in Act II. During a break Old Mahon asked me what exactly was meant by a particular note card I had placed on the bulletin board in the green room. (I had put up some notes which I thought relevant to the actors so that they could look at them in their leisure, along with a map of Ireland, a survey map of County Mayo, and an extensive glossary of all the terms used in Playboy.) The note was from a

book by Padraic Colum, and read: "Yes, in the West of Ireland there is an extravagance of movement, of gesture, of words" (208). I explained what was meant by this, using examples from a few of the people I had met in Western Ireland. One person in particular was especially useful, a man named "James" that I met in a pub on Achill Island in County Mayo. James was a sheep herder/farmer, inarticulate, passionate, who used flamboyant gestures which I attempted to imitate for Old Mahon. He watched closely, with amusement, and then we went in to work the scene.

Before the scene had been dull, it suddenly became outrageously funny and interesting. The Widow suddenly had strong, frustrated and uncontrollable reactions from Old Mahon as a result of her provocations and questioning. I congratulated them at the end of the scene and asked them to try it again, requesting that Old Mahon push it even further by being as inarticulate as possible, mentioning that "James", had few teeth and an excess of saliva which made him slur and spit. This was an exercise, but the scene became even more interesting. It was a discovery of an anti-eloquence in the play especially suited to Old Mahon's relationship with Christy. The next time through I had Old Mahon add some of the persuasive Irish gestures, such as slapping and poking the person you are having a conversation with. This added another dimension for the Widow, for she was able to return, mockingly, some of these pokes later on in the scene.

Oct. 1, 1987

Rehearsal

Tonight I had the actors go off book for Act III in the same way as described for the first two acts. The line runs went well, except that Christy is not off book and as a result progress was delayed.

Oct. 2, 1987

Tonight was scheduled for a complete run of the play. If every actor had progressed in getting off-book during the week this would have been a productive run-through. As it turns out, Christy still did not know his lines and this ruined everyone else's development by sapping the energy and momentum of the cast. One of the actors has offered to help Christy with his lines tomorrow, which is a day off. I strongly advised Christy to take advantage of this offer.

Oct. 4, 1987

Rehearsal

I had spoken to James Dugan about the problems I have had choreographing the fight sequence in Act III, and he offered to come to this rehearsal to see if he could be of assistance, since he has been to some stage-fight workshops. The cast went through the fight as it stood so far to let James see how it might be improved. I then turned the cast over to him, and he made some vast improvements. He also worked on the lynching scene and clarified most of the action here as well.



Oct. 5, 1987

Rehearsal

Tonight we continued to work on Act III. Christy is still having problems with lines but he is much better than before. We worked on the new fight-sequence and lynching scene and the actors are beginning to feel comfortable, though Christy still makes some physical errors. There were a few minutes left in the rehearsal period and I wanted to check up on the girls' scene from Act II. There were still many problems and I decided that it would have to be reworked. There was not enough time left, but I rescheduled the rehearsal for Thursday so that this could be done.

Oct. 6, 1987

Rehearsal

As the inquisition scene in Act I needed improvement, I decided to work on it first tonight. The actors must have done some homework on the scene because there was a marked improvement even the first time through. I congratulated them on their work, and continued to work on the scene to clarify some blocking concerning Shawn's movement in the scene. He had been hiding behind the settle during the scene, and tended to upstage Christy to a certain extent. I explained that it might be better if he moved to the stage right side of the cupboard, out of terror, when Christy first mentions the murder. I had to sacrifice a bit of comedy in doing this: previously Shawn had been knocking over the broom and the loy that lean against the stage left side of the cupboard when he asks Pegeen if

she wants him to stay and keep her from harm. Now, however, there is a much stronger focus on Christy.

I worked on another scene with Shawn in Act III, where Michael James tries to convince him to threaten Christy with the loy. There was a problem because the loy was always in its normal position, leaning against the cupboard, and it was impossible to place Shawn in a position which would put the loy on his "western side". (We had decided that "west" was stage right, because the inner room is referred to by Philly in Act I as the "west room".) I found a solution when I realized that it was possible to have Christy move the loy and lean it against the bar after he threatens Pegeen with it in Act II. With the loy in this new position, the scene fell into place quite easily.

Michael James' blessing of Christy and Pegeen follows this scene. The "blessing" monologue has been a problem, seeming forced and unnatural. I believe that the problem began with the actor's concern over "getting the accent right". He has been taking a very technical approach, repeating words in the monologue to make them "sound right". This was confirmed when I spoke to the accent coach afterwards, who told me that Michael James was the character who needed the most work in accent; he had obviously become aware of this and was trying to compensate. I asked the accent coach to stop working with Michael James until he is able to internalize some of the other more important aspects of the character.

Oct. 7, 1987

Rehearsal

Tonight was reserved for the scenes involving Christy and Pegeen alone. Their scenes in Act I and Act II made many improvements over the evening. Their scene together in Act III has many problems. They are not connecting, and are not even beginning to express the uninhibited romance needed, much less projecting it to an audience. I tried to help them by discussing love, not as the abstraction as it is usually understood, but as an action of selfless caring for another person. For example, Pegeen speaks about how she will go along with Christy when he is out poaching, for she is "a great hand a coaxing bailiffs" (149). I also mentioned the need for a strong sexual tension, which they have been uncomfortable in expressing.

Oct. 8, 1987

Rehearsal

The Widow has been away for two days, and she brought some new and interesting aspects of her character in this evening: more specific outwardly expressible actions. We worked on her scene with Old Mahon in Act II and the race scene in Act III, and these actions helped to stimulate the other characters in these scenes to discover more themselves. I reblocked the portion of the race scene after Old Mahon recognizes Christy and tries to go after him. The moments had always been a bit too fast and lacked focus: I added more time by having Old Mahon get his stick, which he leaves beside the fireplace, before he goes for the door. Also, when

Jimmy grabs Old Mahon to prevent him from leaving, I had Jimmy lose his balance so that both he and Old Mahon end up on the floor. I liked the image which was created: Old Mahon pulled to the floor reduces his status and makes him appear silly, in contrast to Christy who has just won the mule race.

I also reworked the girls' scene in Act II, and the scene was improved greatly. I did so by working with them on their relationships to one another, and by reblocking their very entrance, so that Honor notices that Christy has been sleeping on the settle while still outside, and is then able to burst through the other two girls who are already inside the shebeen. This added an extra moment in the scene: before they had been rushing in from the very beginning. Now they were able to play a few moments of disappointment which "set up" the opportunity for a second explosion of excitement when Christy's bed is seen by Honor.

Oct. 9, 1987

Rehearsal

This evening was the last in the Reeve Primary Theatre before moving to the University Theatre, where we would be inundated with new problems, with a new environment, and with new people who would be doing the technical work on the show. Because it was the last time with just the cast and the stage managers, I took the first half-hour of rehearsal to read them an Irish Folk Tale to show my appreciation of their work so far, and to provide an example of "storytelling" which is so important to the Irish, and to Playboy. Everyone appreciated this very much.

We then did Italian, (very fast), run-throughs of the race scene, because the actors were having difficulty picking up their cues while maintaining the focus out of the window, and the excitement, in the scene. We also reviewed the fight scene and lynching scene, and then did a run-through of Act III. It being the end of the week, the actor's energy and concentration was very low, and the run was not very good.

Oct. 11, 1987

#### Rehearsal

Today was the first day in the University Theatre. I had the actors wander around the set to feel it out, since the rocks were now in place and there was a danger of them being trampled. We rehearsed the fight scene and the lynching scene before we began the run. There was a problem during the lynching because the overturned table would not slide on the new heavily-textured floor. Michael James pushes the table from behind: I altered the point at which he applies pressure and it worked better, but not that well. I hope that the texturing on the floor will wear down a bit to make the sliding easier. If not, that particular business may have to be cut.

The run was poor, but I had anticipated it being so, because the actors had a whole new set of problems to contend with, such as the set, and the fact that they had a small audience consisting of the technical people who would be working after the show. I had a meeting afterwards with Philip, who watched the run. He pointed out that the major problem

was with articulation: most of the dialogue still could not be understood. He also pointed out places where the blocking needed adjustment, and that both Christy and Pegeen were not reacting with enough expression to communicate the action to the audience.

Oct. 12, 1987

#### Rehearsal

This evening I tackled the problem of articulation. There were two approaches I could have taken to resolve this problem. One would have been to adamantly assert that the actors make everything clear. I chose instead to encourage the actors to concentrate on the problem by reminding them that they have done very good work and that it would be a shame to have all of that work ruined by the simple fact that they can't be understood. I asked them to play a simple game during the run, where all they had to do was try and "out-enunciate" the other people on stage, emphasizing that it was a game, and that they should enjoy doing it. This proved to be a success, for the enunciation and projection improved throughout the whole play. I tried to listen objectively, and took notes of places where some actors were still incomprehensible. I will continue to emphasize enunciation until opening. The run-through was better in other aspects too, now that the actors were getting used to their new environment.

Oct. 13, 1987

Rehearsal

Tonight I worked individual scenes until 8:30, and then we began the run. I have begun watching each run-through from different positions in the house to check sight-lines. So far there have been no major problems. I gave notes after the run-through, most of them centering upon the actors finding individual moments, and on the need for greater facial expression, especially when reacting. I also pointed out places where some actors need to play a body reaction when they first enter the shebeen, because they are facing upstage. One case I mentioned was Shawn's entrance in Act II for the bribery scene, where he comes in to find Christy and Pegeen alone on the settle.

Oct. 14, 1987

Cue-to-Cue

I had hoped to find some time to rehearse after the cue-to-cue was finished because there were few cues which needed to be set. Though the cue-to-cue went smoothly, it still took over two hours. Jim Andrews suggested that I block the curtain call in the time remaining, which I did, though I usually like to do that the night before dress rehearsal, so that the actors don't start "taking bows" until shortly before they deserve to.

Oct. 15, 1987

Rehearsal

The actors wore their costumes for the first time this evening, and there were few problems. I had asked them before the run started to use their costumes in whatever way they could to enhance their characters. Pegeen and the Widow also received wigs. I am concerned about Pegeen's, for she has a small face and the wig seems to dominate her whole head, as well as obscure her face when she is in profile. I mentioned this to Douglas, and he said he would try to trim it down. There was a bit more sparkle in the entire performance tonight, as the costumes are adding more dimension to actors' perceptions of the roles. I still had many notes, however, concerning "missed moments", reactions, articulation, and timing. I have also been adjusting the volume of the crowd cheers from the vom, though I cannot be certain of a proper volume until we have an audience.

Oct. 16, 1987

Rehearsal

Before tonight's run began I had an hour and a half where I was able to work scenes. The first was the race scene in Act III. I was concerned with the actors watching the race having a unified focus, so I went through the text and numbered each line of the scene, and then placed numbered cards in the audience in the area towards which the actors in the scene would be looking. Then the actors simply memorized the numbers for each line and focussed on the card with that number as the scene progressed. The cards were numbered from 1 to 10 and were placed



to that the audience would get a sense that the characters were following the progression of the race. This worked very well.

I also worked on the crowd scenes; specifically the entrance of Christy and the crowd after the races and the crowd during the fight scene. In both of these scenes the crowd has been quite subdued, I think because of a fear of being too loud and upstaging the principal actors. I told them how important their energy is in these scenes; that the whole pace and energy of the play could be ruined if they did not have the energy required. Any actor entering late in a play who has not been on stage before must attain an entrance energy which either matches or exceeds that which has been developed during the play's progress.

The run-through was good. The notes I gave afterwards were concerned primarily with cutting down on unnecessary pauses, especially transitional pauses. I explained that an audience does not want to wait for a character to have a psychological revelation or change of tack; that though it took a pause to develop these transitions in rehearsal the pause must be extinguished during the performance. As a final note I asked the actors to make sure they took advantage of the next day, which was their last day off, to get as much rest as possible.

Oct. 18, 1987

Rehearsal

Today was a long day, starting at 10:00 a.m. for a make-up call. There was a press photocall at noon, with the run beginning at 2:00, and by this time the actors were getting tired. The run went quite well

nonetheless. There are two scenes which are still "problems", both in Act III. The first is the opening scene with Jimmy and Philly, and I have scheduled additional time during the day tomorrow to work on it with them. The second is the Christy-Pegeen love scene. I am at my wit's end trying to figure out what to do to make the scene work. Pegeen does not seem interested in, let alone enamored with, Christy. As a last resort I asked Pegeen, for tomorrow, to participate in the crowd cheering which occurs just before her entrance for the love scene, in the hope that, if nothing else, she might acquire an energy level that will help her carry the scene.

Oct. 19, 1987

#### Dress Rehearsal

I worked with Jimmy and Philly on their opening scene for Act III today at noon, doing a small amount of reblocking and helping the actors clarify their intentions. The scene now works much better.

I was quite proud of the run-through, and I only hope that what we have achieved remains consistent. I gave a few notes and asked everyone to rest as much as possible before the preview.

Oct. 20, 1987

#### Preview

Much of the hard work over the past few weeks was superseded tonight by nervousness, and as a result the play lost some of its unity and texture. Christy, for example, threw many of the other actors off by

overplaying in some scenes. Many of his monologues were rushed and many fine moments were lost. Though the audience responded fairly well, I was aware of how much better the show has been. Because the play was "off" I could not make an accurate determination of what was working for the audience and what wasn't. I gave the actors notes afterwards, and scolded Christy for what seemed like a lack of confidence in what he had created so far, a lack of confidence which was manifested in nervousness and uncertainty.

Oct. 21, 1987

Opening

I hate opening nights, because of the additional pressure arising from the tradition that, whether openly acknowledged or not, this is the point where a play is "judged" on its success. Still, everything went quite well, despite all the pressure, and I am very confident that the show will continue to improve as the actors have more and more experience in playing it with an audience.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **POST-PRODUCTION ANALYSIS**

In this post-production analysis I will try to relate some of the successes and failures which I perceived in the production, and to record some constructive criticism from fellow students and faculty members.

Viewing the play in retrospect, I have come to a conclusion that the play's effect depends for a large part on the audience's ability to detect the verbal irony. Designer Douglas McCullough made an astute comment to me during a rehearsal. He stated that most twentieth-century audiences are not attuned to verbal irony, and it is likely that they will miss much of the richness in the text because of this inability to note the irony. The modern audience is constantly bombarded with messages encoded in visual images, rather than as pure language, and as a result I think much of the play's verbal texture was missed by most audience members. I have never been certain if the verbal irony could somehow be augmented in performance. I have heard that if a play is well directed and performed, it should be able to be understood even if it is in another language. I have tried to do this with Playboy, but I still think that the language of the play remains an important factor in the play's ultimate comprehension. Other problems are the large amount of esoteric reference, and the dialect itself with its novel syntactical arrangement. It takes a while for an audience unfamiliar with this dialect to become "attuned" before they can comprehend. And by this time much of the play has passed them by. I did include a glossary in the programme explaining some of the unfamiliar terminology in the play. But I think a glossary would only be useful to an audience in retrospect, so that they can look at it after an act has ended,

and "catch up" on the action that has just taken place. But this is inefficient and tedious.

I felt that the actors, on a whole, were able to find most of the important aspects of the characters they were portraying. There were many technical problems with accent, articulation, and projection, but a director cannot be completely responsible for an actor's lack of technical skill. With the limited number of actors auditioning, I had to sacrifice technical ability in many cases for the actors' appropriateness for the character. I think that most of the play was realized by the actors to the best of their abilities. Christy never fully achieved the full dimension of "the Playboy", but as an actor he rose to the challenge of the role, and in doing so extended his abilities as a performer. I was never satisfied with Christy and Pegeen's love scene in Act III, which always failed to achieve the romantic dimension necessary to make Pegeen's loss of Christy at the end of the play truly poignant. Perhaps if I had stressed the language in the scene, this may have covered for what I felt was a strong inhibition in the actress playing Pegeen: she seemed to avoid letting caring and loving feelings emerge. One other problem was the fight scene with the crowd, also in Act III. I believe it failed to achieve the viciousness and brutality needed to contrast with the comic mode in the rest of the play. A reason may be that the crowd in this scene were always afraid to express, both vocally and physically, their cruelty towards Christy. They were afraid that they might upstage the principal actors in the scene. I informed the crowd many times that the principal actors would be able to top the crowd's reaction, which worked well when I was around to spur the crowd

on. In addition, the lynching scene in Act III, should have been far more treacherous and "painful". A tone of treachery is difficult to develop in this scene when Shawn is continually arousing a comic response. If I had encouraged more viciousness in Shawn the audience may have had a more serious and concerned reaction.

The show remained fairly consistent throughout its run. At times some actors, particularly Christy, "mugged" moments of the play in order to arouse a response from the audience. Such over-acting, though it does produce a reaction in the audience, is not truthful. I asked stage management to give the actors notes when such behavior became too obvious. I also remained closely involved with the cast through the play's run. Some people feel that the director should turn the play over to stage management. I refused to do this in this situation for several reasons. First, there was no preview period, as in professional theatre, for the director and actors to fine-tune a performance with an audience present. Second, these were not professional actors, but students, who do not have enough performance experience to make their performances consistent. Third, many discoveries still remained to be made, and I think it is absurd to forgo improvements because of a "rule" that the director should detach himself from the production after opening night. I found that all of the actors were eager to hear my advice throughout the run of the play.

As for the set, many people in the Department, including students, were confused by the disc and the red line, the abstract elements of the mise en scene. This confusion may have stemmed from an inability to attach a particular "meaning" to these elements. The disc and red line,

however, were never meant to mean anything that could be described verbally. I spoke with many audience members from outside the Department who did not feel intellectually threatened by the abstract elements. As a result they did not find the abstractions distracting, but rather an enhancement.



## **CHAPTER VII**

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