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The development of plot in J.M. SYNGE' S "The playboy of the western world"

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Abstract

The present research work deals with the development of plot in the famous play of J.M. Synge "The playboy of the western world" which was first performed in Abbey theatres, Dublin on 26 January 1907. The play was also on attack on the evils presented on Irish people and culture of Irish society. J.M. Synge is very much impressed by the culture and tradition of Ireland. In this novel, he depicts the culture and tradition of Irish people. So, the present research paper deals with the development of the plot in the play and the attack on the evils presented in the society of the Ireland and Irish people.

Keywords: Plot development, playboy, western world, J. M. Synge

1. Introduction

John Millington Synge was born on April 16, 1871 at Newton little at Rathfarnham near Dublin. He was barrister who has inherited some property in Galway, which affords him to attain good education. The surname "Synge" is concerned with him was granted by Henry VIIIth to one of his ancestors due to his sweet voice. Synge was a lover of nature as is estimated from his works where nature is personified and a crucial role is played by her, gives us the impression that Synge, as lords worth, finds the life in every minute petal of a flower, or in the waves of sea: Nature is only on the background, and he is not much concerned with its aspects. Nature is also in the hands of merciless God, for Synge.

Synge was a mixture of sensitiveness and strong will power. He was not interested in social aspects nor was he concerned with the political and economic issues. He took the life as it was. Yeast has aptly said, He was wise in judging individual man, and as wise in dealing with them as faint energies of ill-health would permit but of their political thoughts he long understood nothing."

1. Riders to the Sea (1903)
2. The Shadow of the Glen (1905)
3. The well of the Saint (1905)
4. The playboy of the Western World (1907)
5. The Tinker's Wedding (1908)
6. Dirdre of the Sorrows (1910)
7. When the Moon Has Set (1968)

He was totally inspired by the people of Ireland and the society of Ireland. He is greatly impressed by their culture and tradition. He follows the strange life of the people who are brought up in the atmosphere quite different from the sophisticated society.

"The Riders to the Sea", "The Shadow of Glen" and "The Playboy of the Western World" are the stories taken from this Ireland. Yeast attributed to Synge, "the true Irish heart he lives in Aran speaks Irish and knows the people." The impression of W.B. Yeast is remarkable in Synge's career and life. Yeast wrote, "Synge is invaluable to us because he has that kind intense narrow personality which necessarily raises the whole issue," J.M. Synge is the innovator of the Irish Literary Movement.

2. Discussion

"The playboy of the Western world" received great critical attention. When the play was first produced in Dublin in 1907, it waked many angry protests and caused riots. The hostility of Irish people to this play was due to moral and religious reasons. It was thought that the play depicted the Irish people and their country in dark colour. The play depicted the Irish people

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to be immoral and their women folk to be lacking in virtue. Apart from these some lines in the play were thought to be obscene. J.M. Synge attacks some of the accepted values of settled life of Irish people. He ridicules certain aspects of Irish social, domestic and religious life. This play is also an attack on the conventional type of relationship between parents and children in those days.

The play is a subtle attack on the custom of marriage because the playwright seems to be attacking the customs of arranged marriages in Ireland. Shown's marriage was arranged with Pegeen. But Pegeen did not have a healthy opinion about Shown. She felt that he lacked guts and bravery. She fails in love with Christy; she tells her father that she will not marry Shown. Her greedy father first feels angry but finally he also agrees to the proposal. Shown on the other hand lacks courage and strength of character. He tries sending Christy away from Pegeen by offering some valuable things. But Christy plainly rejects the offer and gets angry. Though, Shown is not happy with the relationship of Pegeen and Christy, yet he does not have the courage to oppose it openly. In another incident, Christy tells the village girls and Widow Quin that his father wanted him to marry an elderly widow she was ugly, lame and blind of one eye. She was a woman of loose morals. Synge exposes the undesirability of arranged marriage in a comic manner. This amusing account forms a great part of the comedy of the play.

The play reveals that the children of early 20th century did not enjoy cordial relations with their parents. This unhealthy relationship is exposed through the relation of Christy's father who has a poor opinion about him. He cannot believe that any decent and rich girl would ever think of marrying his son. He calls his son a born-idiot. On the other hand, Christy tells Pegeen that his father used to ill treat him like a military man; he further tells Pegeen that his father wanted him to marry an ugly old widow, who was immoral. All this shows that the father and the son did not have good relations. Christy even attacks his father twice with a spade. They get reconciled in the end but on certain conditions.

The playwright also satirises the protection of a criminal. Christy enters in the shebeen at night. He says that the police are looking for him because he has committed a serious crime. He tells that he hit his father with a spade. The police are after him to arrest. Everybody there is greatly impressed by the young fellow's action, except Shown. Everybody thinks that he has done a heroic deed. Pegeen also expresses her admiration for Christy for his bravery. Widow Quin also feels attracted towards him at first sight. The village girls also take care of him and bring various presents for him. Widow Quin even tries to win him as a husband for herself. She tells him that he will be very happy with her and he will also be perfectly safe from arrest at her house. She calls him, "The playboy of western world." There are many incidents like this in the play which shows that the play is an attack on Irish people for their strange attitude.

The playwright attacks the evil of excessive drinking in a comic manner. Michael, Philly and Jemmy go to attend the wake because plenty of free liquor flows there. Michael even could not return with them because he was over drunk and was unable to walk all the distance. In other incidents, Christy also tells that his father used to drink a lot. He

generally asked him to work hard and treated him in a bad manner. This was, according to Christy, the main reason of dispute between them. All these incidents show that the play is a satire on the evil of excessive drinking.

"The playboy of the western world" is a dramatic masterpiece. The unity of construction and structure is one of the striking qualities of the play. There are no digressions in the play and everything is related to the central theme. There is a single plot which develops without deviating from the theme. The theme of the play is the transformation of a man's character by virtue of the supposed murder of his father by him. The reader is mainly concerned in the development of the theme. There is the unity of action, time and place in the play. The action of the play covers just 24 hours and the whole action takes place in a public-house situated close to the sea-coast of Mayo. Christy and Pegeen are the central characters and form the allied theme. But this does not interfere with the development of the main plot which is the growth of Christy's character. In fact, the theme of love and marriage is employed to advance and promote the main action.

When the play opens Pegeen is writing a letter which shows that her marriage to Shown Klough is approaching. She has hardly completed the letter when Shown enters. From the conversation between Pegeen and Shown, we come to know that Pegeen is not happy with the circumstances. She has fed up with the kinds of young fellows. She has seen in the village she has no good opinion about Shown, who is a coward because he refuses to stay with her for the night. It prepares us for Pegeen's welcoming any young man who shows some degree of courage in him. When Christy comes to the public-house, he talks to Michael and his boon companions.

He tells them that he has killed his father with a spade. The listeners show a favourable reaction to his story and encourage him. Jimmy calls the young fellow "So brave" that he is capable of facing even a devil from hell. Pegeen also praises him highly and she is offered the job of his pot-boy in the shebeen. The foundation of Christy's becoming a hero is laid here and he receives praise from all the characters except Shown. Christy becomes quite intimate with Pegeen. His moral is raised when Pegeen admires him for his small feet, his quality name and his capacity to talk like poets. Christy gives an account to his past life in simple and straight forward words. His account of his past life is important because it highlights the transpiration in his character in a small period of time.

The next incident in Act-I is also very important. Widow Quin arrives at the Sheen quite late in the night. She has heard that a murderer of his father has come to the sheen. She expresses her desires to take away the young murderer to her own house. On taking a good look at Christy, Widow Quin feels attracted towards him. Pegeen has also developed a liking for him and she does not want to lose him. She pushes Widow Quin out and insists that Christy should not go with her to her house. Christy feels happy with the fact that two fine women have fought over him. This new feeling of self-importance marks an important step in the development of his character.

The events and incidents of the coming acts are also intimately related to the main theme. There is nothing irrelevant and useless in the play. The second act begins with a soliloquy in which Christy expresses his complete satisfaction with his new job. This is another evidence of the self esteem which he has acquired. The attentions of the girls further make him important. He is greatly appreciated by girls and they offer him many presents. Christy feels very happy and declares that he split his father's body from head to waist in one blow just then Pegeen enters and disturbs the merry-party. She drives away the girls and tells him that he is in some danger of arrest by the police. It demoralise Christy and he gets sentimental. He says that he will go somewhere else to avoid his arrest. However, Pegeen makes him relaxed and he decides to stay there. Shawn and Widow Quin now arrive there. Shawn tries to offer many things to Christy. He wants him to leave the place because he himself wants to get Pegeen. Christy straight forwardly rejects his offer and decides to stay there. Shawn leaves the place at the indication of Widow Quin. She then talks to Christy and says that she would prove herself a better companion for him. Christy rejects her offer also and talks in a boastful manner. But his courage once again comes down when he catches the sight of his father coming towards the public house. He seeks Widow Quin's help and she agrees to help him with certain terms and conditions.

The next situation in Act-III is also very important and constitutes one of the highlights of the play. Christy receives many prizes for his victories at the games. He receives high praise from the crowd and gains great confidence. Pegeen also naturally feels attracted towards him. There is a passionate love scene between the two in which both speak in an ardent and poetic manner. Pegeen gets ready to marry him without any delay. Her father first objects to the marriage but soon gets ready for it. This is another climax in the plot. Then there is another reversal which has both comic and tragic implications. His father comes to scene once

again. He starts beating Christy, but Christy receives the beating passively. But Pegeen gets furious when she discovers that Christy's father is alive. The crowd also possesses taunting and mocking remarks. Christy feels enraged by this and hits his father with a spade. But this time the reaction of Pegeen and crowd to the murder is hostile. They tied him over to the police. This is another anti-climax in Christy's career. But finally Christy's father appears once again and unties the rope of Christy. He agrees to go back with his father on some conditions. He says to his father will be at a sub-ordinate position and he himself will rule at home. He then makes his final speech in which he says that he has become a hero, which makes the final climax of the play. He leaves that place, leaving Pegeen heart – broken.

3. Conclusion

Thus "The Playboy of the Western World" is an attack on Irish character and mentality. J.M. Synge satirises various aspects of Irish society. Most of the characters in the play have their own weaknesses. The playwright has tried to give a realistic touch to the play. The play attacks some of the accepted values of the Irish people of that time. Synge seems to challenge certain aspects of the domestic life of his time. The play is a comedy with a subtle challenging or accepted values of settled life.

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