Entertainment palates however have changed in the traditional libel mask and color...

...the audience support of the mode..."The Emmaus,..."

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the idea of music making a direct contact with the past.¹ Thomas Davies's popular ballads also explored political issues and expressed a sense of cultural difference from the English. Whereas Moore and Davies's nationalism was nostalgic dreaming and idealization of the heroic past, Aubrey De Vere, another minor Irish writer, depicted Ireland as suffering for humanity and the Irish as the chosen nation.

Writers of the Celtic Literary Revival (the Celtic Twilight or the Irish Literary Renaissance) also recognized the value of Irish folklore and mythology as a source of literary inspiration. Heroic tales, legends and folk stories served as basic material for their writing. Lady Augusta Gregory collaborated with Yeats in a number of plays, J.M. Synge and Edward Martyn wrote peasant comedies. Throughout his life W. B. Yeats heavily relied on Irish myth; in fact, the interest in myth and the idealization of heroic action are central to his art. Convinced that political involvement had corrupted Irish literature, he wanted to free the Irish dramatic revival from patriotic stereotypes. He firmly refused to subordinate the movement to the patriotic cause, for he did not wish to sacrifice artistic aims for political propaganda. However, he did not manage to avoid being carried away by idealization of the Irish. Since Yeats realized that perfection is not possible in the real world, he celebrated heroism doomed to failure. He retreated from the confusion and disintegration of the modern world into myth and presented an idealized version of Irish past. The past, as presented in myths and legends becomes an ideal realm and offers an escape from the disappointments with the present.

Although John Millington Synge belonged to the Celtic Twilight, his treatment of Irish myth and folklore is remarkably different from that of his contemporaries. The scope of his interest was limited to a specific place and time - he found Irish folklore more appealing than ancient heroic myths and sagas. Whereas Yeats, the major figure of the Celtic Revival, was devoted to purely poetic theatre and strove to create a symbolic and subjective drama, Synge showed preference for realism. A true-to-life presentation of peasant life was one of his main concerns. Most of his plays are directly based on specific folk tales, sometimes even on real life events. Synge's work contains elements of Irish oral tradition, also of folk custom and belief. The language of his plays is based on peasant idiom, although it is more a selection and a conscious stylization than a faithful representation of peasant speech.

² In a letter to Stephen McKenna Synge wrote: "I do not believe in the possibility of a purely fantastic, unmodern, ideal, breezy, spring-dilly, Cuchulainoid National Theatre'. We had The Shadowy Waters on the stage last week, and it was the most depressing failure the mind can imagine - a half-empty room, with growing men and twittering females. Of course, it is possible to write drama that fills your description and yet is fit for the stage than The Shadowy Waters, but no drama can grow out of anything other than the fundamental realities of life which are never fantastic, are neither modern nor unmodern, rarely spring-dilly, or breezy or Cuchulainoid". Quoted from R. Taylor, The Drama of W. B. Yeats, London, 1977, Yale University Press, p. 12.

³ "On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of the false joy of the musical comedy, that has been given them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality". J. M. Synge, Plays, Poems and Prose, London 1988, Guernsey Press, p. 108.

¹ In The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls the harp, which is an emblem of Ireland, symbolizes the soul of the nation that will never die.
Folklore Information in the Plays of J.M. Synge

A significant feature of the plays of J.M. Synge is the incorporation of folklore. The plays are rich in traditional Irish culture, and Synge's use of folklore adds depth and authenticity to his works. The incorporation of folklore is not just a matter of surface detail, but a fundamental aspect of the plays' themes and characters.

One of the most famous plays by Synge, "The Playboy of the Western World," is based on a traditional Irish tale, and its characters are drawn from the rural Irish countryside. The play explores themes of love, greed, and the conflict between tradition and modernity.

In "Riders to the Sea," another of Synge's plays, the influence of folklore is evident in the characters' speech and the setting. The play is set in a rural Irish village, and the characters are deeply rooted in their traditions.

Synge's plays are not just entertainment, but also a reflection of the culture and society of his time. By incorporating folklore, Synge was able to capture the essence of Irish life and values, making his plays both entertaining and thought-provoking.

In conclusion, the use of folklore in Synge's plays is a testament to his commitment to authenticity and his deep understanding of Irish culture. It is through the incorporation of folklore that Synge is able to create works that are enduring and relevant to this day.
Follow the instructions in the Plays of J. T. Page

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Follow these illustrations in the Play of J.M. Sage
perform the miracle again ("The Lord protect us from the saints of God.") is remarkably impious and ironic. This apparently well-meant utterance expresses his thorough defiance of religion and, ultimately, God, since the miracle performed by the Saint has brought only misery and argument.

On the whole, Synge's attitude to religion is rather complicated. He saw Irish peasants as fervently Catholic, although he also noticed the superficiality of their devotion to the Church. Therefore, he presented their ardent faith rather ironically. For example, in The Well of the Saints there is a discrepancy between the notions of saintliness and the language the Saint is described with ("straying around", fasting until he is as thin as "one of the empty rushes"). The peasants do not understand the notions of self-denial, fasting and contemplation. When the Saint points out to the joys of having sight and admiring the image of God on the earth, the Douls show little understanding:

"There is a great sight, holy father... What was it I saw when I first opened my eyes but your own bleeding face, and they cut with the stones? That was a great sight, maybe, of the image of God..."

The Saint means well but the miracle that he performs brings only misery and suffering. He is naïve and out of touch with reality: when the Doul's are publicly humiliated and begin to curse each other, the Saint innocently asks whether their minds are troubled with joy.

The portrayal of the young priest in Riders to the Sea is also ironic. He seems to exercise great authority among the islanders, e.g., he is in a position to prevent Barley from going to sea. He cares for the peasants (he brings clothes of a drowned man to be identified by Michael's family and offers Maurya consolation) but he is young and inexperienced and his consolation means little to the old woman. In fact, it is rather ominous. The priest assures Nora that God Almighty will not leave Maurya destitute, with no son living but in the end she does become bereft of her sons.

In The Playboy and The Tinker's Wedding Synge's attitude is overtly anti-clerical. Father Reilly never actually appears on the stage, though he is much talked about. He interprets religion as a series of prohibitions and Shawn Keogh is seized by a dreadful fear of him. The Tinker's Wedding is a satirical comment on the role of the Church. The picture of the priest is unusually one-sided: he is presented almost as a caricature of a priest. He is not different from the tinker: he is lazy, enjoys drinking, playing cards and singing. The tinker's at least admit that this is their way of life, whereas the priest is a hypocrite (he complains to Mary about his hard work - visiting the sick, listening to the sins of the peasants and saying the Mass "with your mouth dry"). He is greedy and engages in a bargain with the tinker, who wants him to marry them for nothing. He even suggest that it would be easy for them to steal some money.

Synge's description of life in rural Ireland is not in the least exaggerated. The conditions in the west of the country at the turn of the century were indeed "squalid, brutal and perverse". Young men emigrated to America; evicted farmers, migrant workers, tramps, tinkers and beggars were roaming in the country. Farms were small and the soil stony; crops were poor and people starved whenever the blight struck potatoes; most men were drinking heavily and the degree of mental illness was high. The system of jurisdiction was thoroughly corrupt and the Church sought to exercise absolute control over the lives of the peasants, increasing the degree of their subjection. There was little hope for success in life, for the whole country was going into slow decline. All these economic, historic, political and social issues provide the background for Synge's peasant plays. The picture that emerges is dismal but realistic.

In rural Ireland Synge found sadness and deprivation but also vitality and humour. His peasant plays are comedies, though his sense of humour belongs to the Irish comic tradition; it is bitter, often with a touch of macabre. Humour is often connected with death and violence. Synge seems to be fascinated by the grimness of life, his plays are obsessed with death, ageing and ugliness.

In all his works Synge expressed an acute awareness of death. In many of his poems (Queens, Epiaph, On an Anniversary, To the Oaks of Glencree, A Question and I've Thirty Months) prominence is accorded to an urgent sense of death. In Riders to the Sea Maurya recognizes the inevitability of death and accepts the loss of her two sons with resignation. His characters are vividly aware of the finality of death and the transience of human life (e.g., Mary Byrne in The Tinker's Wedding would much rather get a drink even though she risks a beating from Sara than spend a lonely night, for she knows well "it's a short while only till you die").

Old age is repulsive and horrifying, e.g., in The Well of the Saints Mary Doul cruelly reminds Molly Byrne, "a fine-looking girl with fair hair" that she, too, will get old:


Perceived Importance in the Plays of W. Shake