

THE ART OF J. M. SYNGE

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THERE is a fashion of scenery in the West of Ireland of a kind peculiarly apart. A road, may be, will be running like an irregular ribbon of gray over a desolate scene, losing itself in a gray horizon, threading its journey painfully enough through a landscape of brown forbidding bog. Even to the very margin of the road will the bog encroach, making it seem as though it were poised over abysses. Not a tree stabs the skyline, or lends distinction to the landscape. Where the turf has been cut away, brown puddles gleam purple as they reflect the sweeping mists and clouds. If there is a habitation of man in sight it will not relieve the brooding passion of the scene. A cottage of stone at best, with an enclosure of coal-black soil furrowed for seed and hardly won from the morass, it falls into the formless unity of the visible universe. Such a scene has no distinction, yet it is passionate with temperament. It holds out no details for the eye to fasten on. It is one large, brooding gesture of magnificence, psychic and strange. The very hills are merged in the gesture. One could imagine it rising to a very fury of energy, but that it does not do so.

Such is his country; such was the man Synge; and of such a sort was his work, for, do what he will, a man cannot make his work other than an effluence of himself. He was a man in whom the very energy of thought turned to brooding, even as in his work the very energy of dramatic instinct achieved results that evade the more obvious meanings of the word dramatic. He was of a type of Irishman that, though pronounced enough in the race, has received but little heed in a day that clutches for the obvious. His very furling himself in undemonstrative emotion was the cry of greatness that sought a friendship that could not be granted it. That he was a peaceful man did not belie the earnestness of his Nationalist conviction: it flowed from the

very strength of it. His resolution raised him above demonstration. There was something of a contempt for the opposite side in it infinitely more scorching than a fury of words. If greatness be magnificence rather than eccentricity, he was supremely great. Like the landscapes he strode over, not in the manner of an alien waif of humanity, but as a very part of them, merged in them, he was not particularly distinct but vitally characteristic.

From a passage of his account of his life while on the Aran Islands a phase of this side of him comes out, casting strangely significant lights right and left in elucidation of much. "It was one of the dark sultry nights peculiar to September," he says, "with no light anywhere except the phosphorescence of the sea, and an occasional rift in the clouds that showed the stars behind them. The sense of solitude was immense. I could not see or realize my own body, and I seemed to exist merely in my perception of the waves and the crying of birds, and of the smell of seaweed." That he should have spoken of himself on a crucial event near the end of his days as reading Spinoza is significant; but philosophies do not make a man; a man weaves his philosophy from his temperament, or loves that philosophy his soul inclines to. Self is itself; and the September night on Aran Islands was before Spinoza.

Nor was he the less himself because he "seemed to exist merely in the perception of the waves and the crying of birds, and of the smell of seaweed." It is a poor philosophy that sees individuality only in irritability. Spontaneity is the breath of being. And it was because he was spontaneous that mood flowed into mood in him, and emotion succeeded emotion, till in the very quiescence of vital self he passed into a large unity that seemed only perception. Such a temperament will seem little likely to achieve the clash and oppugnancy of dramatic art; and indeed it was the cause of the chiefest difficulty in his drama, a difficulty that happens to be its chiefest beauty.

It was an extraordinarily fine instinct in Mr. Yeats that sent Synge to the Aran Islands. It might almost be said that they were waiting to cradle him, and wean him to artistic maturity. His art derives from nothing but himself; but so much does he

owe those far islands in the Atlantic that, however much one clings to the conviction that the soul of man is its own sufficiency for the greatness of his utterance, it seems difficult to imagine how he could ever have won to artistic speech in any other surroundings. That the Aran Islands should have provided him with the scene for one play, and given him the plot for another, is a small matter. They bred his soul; they fed him with their own great silences; they sang him the music of speech to which his soul responded with the shout of discovery; they found him the cadence he cried for; they steeped his mind in an atmosphere that ever thereafter marked all things he did. His artistic soul came to them a starveling; it went out a grown man in full vigor of health.

Many instances of this could be adduced. Let two examples be sufficient, seeing that they accord with two distinctive characteristics of his work.

He says of the people of Aran: "The direct sexual instincts are not weak on the island, but they are so subordinated to the instincts of the family that they rarely lead to irregularity. The life here is still at an almost patriarchal stage, and the people are nearly as far from the romantic moods of love as they are from the impulsive life of the savage." He is indeed speaking of the people of Aran; but he might well be characterizing his own plays. The roots of both alike are in very homely earth; they both alike have little affinity with the stars. In one of his poems he passes in review all the great Queens of romance; and adds sardonically:

Yet they are rotten—I ask their pardon—
And we've the sun on rock and garden.

In another he regards even the mythology of Ireland, so sacred to the comrades in art with whom he worked, and sings:

Adieu, Sweet Angus, Maeve and Fand,
Ye plumed yet skinny Shee,
That poets played with hand in hand
To learn their ecstasy.

We'll stretch in Red Dan Saly's ditch,
And drink in Tubber fair,
Or poach with Red Dan Philly's bitch
The badger and the hare.

It even becomes an art creed, for, disavowing exaltation for his poetry, he says: "It may almost be said that before verse can be human again it must learn to be brutal"; and the mind of the reader inevitably goes back to the Aran mother laughing and mocking at her daughter writhing with the toothache.

Yet if the strength of the earth be characteristic of Synge's work there is another characteristic that links with it, which no less recalls the Isle of Aran. It is a strange and mystic sense of doom that broods over all his dramas, even though it be a comedy like *The Well of the Saints*. Like a background of tragical intensity it is never absent from his work: an impersonal pain significant of impending terror. And one remembers what he himself has written of the keening of the women of Aran: "This grief of the keen is no personal complaint for the death of one woman of over eighty years, but seems to contain the whole passionate rage that lurks somewhere in every native of the island. In this cry of pain the inner consciousness of the people seems to lay itself bare for an instant, and to reveal the mood of beings who feel their isolation in the face of a universe that wars on them with wind and seas." Or again, as he speaks with men fishing after having come from a funeral, he says: "I could not help feeling that I was talking with men who were under a judgment of death." The deep sense of doom, or, as he expresses it elsewhere, a "Desolation that is mixed everywhere with the supreme beauty of the world," is never absent from him. It winds in the very cadence of his speech.

It was such a man that the Isle of Aran shaped for work. Even though it be true that he colored the inhabitants with something of his own brooding intensity, the deeper truth is that they waked this mood in him to artistic realization by the touch of affinity. They made it musical in him; and gave it a voice to speak by.

When he turned to dramatic work it was to frame a story he had heard told at Inishmaan into a play. But it was to frame

it in the light of a rich discovery. He himself protested later that when he was writing *The Shadow of the Glen* he "got more aid than any learning could have given me from a chink in the floor of the old Wicklow house where I was staying, that let me hear what was being said by the servant girls in the kitchen." Yet it was Inishmaan and Aranmore that gave him to know that the speech of servant girls and ballad women in Ireland mattered very essentially in his art. A flaming richness of imagination, a haunting and beautiful cadence and construction of speech, they gave him, that under his hands swelled to new harmonies of lovely music. It is not that all tramps between Kerry and Mayo speak as Christy Mahon speaks. It is even likely that a good number would repudiate it—Pegeen Mike herself was amazed at it. But, if they did so, it would be the handling of the instrument they would repudiate, not the instrument itself.

When on the great Blasket, off the coast of Kerry, Synge once took the violin from the island fiddler and played on it for the people to dance to, they were not so happy to his playing as they were to the fiddler they knew; but the fiddler himself recognized the abler player. He saw that whereas he only used the poor middle of his bow Synge utilized the full sweep; and that where his wrist was stiff, and therefore his strokes disjointed, Synge's wrist was supple and his strokes mellow in their flow one upon another. Even so it was in the matter of language. An example may serve, for there are two accurate idioms of speech very much on the tongue of the people of the West; and both express the sense of time with extraordinary precision. In answer to such a question as "How's the health?" the reply may perhaps come, "Faith, I'm after having the Influence," or "I'm well presently, thank God!" The immediate past or the immediate moment (not, be it noted, the corrupt English usage, dating, it may be, from some fatal tendency to procrastination in the race) is thus expressed sharply. But in Synge's idiom there is no sharpness, all is mellow and musical. How then does he manipulate the above usages? The result is noteworthy; for the "presently" is virtually abolished, while the "after" is drawn into the cadence and stripped

of its sharpness. It is scarcely to be detected, whereas in the people it is very easily detected. The mellow movement of the master hand has made a richer music echo from the instrument, but the instrument is no less the same as the people used for their simpler purposes. So truly identical is it that it is impossible to recite it comfortably without using the brogue of the people.

This very fact, that he should thus have turned the occasional sharpness of distinction into mellowness of movement, is strangely significant. It accords fitly with the mood of the man, and the landscapes he stirred in, even as it strikes the dominant note of his plays. The customary conception of the dramatic in art and life is just this of sharpness, of sharpness even to antithesis. Lear standing watching his daughter, as Regan goes over and takes Goneril's hand—that seems the thought of dramatic tragedy; not an old woman keening over a turf-fire. But *Riders to the Sea* is of a new order of tragedy altogether. It is, perhaps, not so much tragedy as a fragment of life set in the atmosphere of tragedy. Even as there is not water in a mist of the hills because it is all moisture, so there is not tragedy in *The Riders to the Sea* because it is all tragical. It does not, like *Macbeth*, open in hope and wind to a disaster that falls like a shock; its opening note is conceived in gloom, the movement passes in intensity of gloom, concluding with the scanty relief of hopelessness. We know, and are vitally interested in, Macbeth, and his tragedy is poignant to us with a sense of personal loss. But we do not know Maurya thus. She is not a person to us. She is the soul of a mother set before a cliff of terror. We shudder for all mothers of Aran in her, whereas "Out, out, brief candle!" comes to us from a man whose magnificence won us.

The interest is the interest of a situation, in the wider meaning of the word. And when Maurya comes in slowly, with the undelivered bundle of bread in her hand, and sits over the turf-fire keening softly, the whole situation narrows and sharpens to intensity. When, in answer to her daughter's impatient query "Did you see Bartley?" she replies, "I seen the fearfullest thing," the senses sharpen to expectation of the doom the very

opening words of the play struck. And this is how it arrives:

NORA. Tell us what it is you seen.

MAURYA. I went down to the spring well, and I stood there saying a prayer to myself. Then Bartley came along, and he riding on the red mare with the gray pony behind him. [*She puts up her hands, as if to hide something from her eyes.*] The Son of God spare us, Nora!

CATHLEEN. What is it you seen?

MAURYA. I seen Michael itself.

CATHLEEN. [*Speaking softly.*] You did not, Mother. It wasn't Michael you seen, for his body is after being found in the far North, and he's got a clean burial, by the grace of God.

MAURYA. [*A little defiantly.*] I'm after seeing him this day, and he riding and galloping. Bartley came first on the red mare, and I tried to say "God speed you," but something choked the words in my throat. He went by quickly; and "the blessing of God on you" says he, and I could say nothing. I looked up then, and I crying, at the gray pony, and there was Michael upon it—with fine clothes on him, and new shoes on his feet.

CATHLEEN. [*Begins to keen.*] It's destroyed we are from this day. It's destroyed, surely.

With that the situation widens to the conclusion, and there-with Synge makes the only mistake in the play. For the intensity having once been released, it will not be possible to sharpen it again. Thus when the women come in and kneel and keen, and Bartley's body is brought in, the failure of the mind to respond to the horror it has already passed through so shrewdly and so sharply, makes their grief seem overwrought. It is Maurya who, dramatically, saves the situation. She brings the whole action on the lower plane of tragical resignation, saying, as she sprinkles the body with Holy Water: "It isn't that I haven't prayed for you, Bartley, to the Almighty God. It isn't that I haven't said prayers in the dark night till you wouldn't know what I'd be saying; but it's a great rest I'll be having now, and a great sleeping in the long night after Samhain, if it's only a bit of wet flour we do have to eat, and may be a fish that do be

stinking." Six sons, a husband, and a father-in-law; has the sea taken in toll from her; and the fulness of sorrow is its own relief. Her closing words are: "No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied."

With the exception of its one fault, the fault of a part that is strained, the play is a complete and perfect movement from start to finish, moving through its action like a foamless roller. The deftest skill of the intelligent craftsman is necessary to ensure this, hidden away though it be in the excellence of its own workmanship. Turf for the fire, in one place, Michael's clothes in another, the ominous white boards and the forgotten cake in Maurya's hand, all keep the movement in flow past awkward places till its course is accomplished. And it is worthy of note that they each and all come to be symbols of doom, being thus not only aids to the movement, but heightening, moreover, and intensifying, the very cause and tragical color of its being.

The interest of his earlier play too, *The Shadow of the Glen*, is that of a situation. The outward interest, what may be called the plot, is that of a man who, doubting his wife's fidelity, feigns death so as to discover her. Such was the story as Synge had it told him in Inishmaan. In his hands, however, an inner interest appears, and, as one may almost expect, it is the interest of a soul. Even as in *Riders to the Sea*, so here too, the atmosphere is in business to aid this interest. There the atmosphere was heavy with tragedy and poignant with eternal suffering; here it is gloomy with loneliness and isolation, even to oppression. And so the secret of Nora Burke is unlocked. We do not know her in any personal sense; but we see the soul of a young woman hungry for living. Her husband is old, and can find nothing congenial for her. There are no cottages near hers in the glen that is too often heavy with mists to the blotting out of the sun and all brightness. It all oppresses her; and life is slipping away from her. So that when Patch Darcy passes to and fro she looks for his coming gladly, to engage words with him; and when Patch Darcy goes she turns to Michael Dara the herd.

Outer and inner interests develop together aptly and unobtrusively so that when the mock dead man rises and bids her

begone out of his house we are not surprised to hear the tramp invite her to go forth and taste the world with him. "You'll not be getting your death with myself, lady of the house," says he, "and I knowing all the ways a man can put food in his mouth. . . . We'll be going now, I'm telling you, and the time you'll be feeling the cold, and the frost, and the great rain, and the sun again, and the south wind blowing in the glens, you'll not be sitting up on a wet ditch, the way you're after sitting in this place, making yourself old with looking on each day, and it passing you by. You'll be saying one time 'It's a grand evening, by the grace of God,' and another time, 'It's a wild night, God help us; but it'll pass, surely.'" Or: "Come along with me now, lady of the house, and it's not my blather you'll be hearing only, but you'll be hearing the herons crying over the black lakes, and you'll be hearing the grouse and the owls with them, and the larks and the big thrushes when the days are warm; and it's not from the likes of them you'll be hearing a tale of getting old like Peggy Cavanagh, and losing the hair off you, and the sight of your eyes, but it's fine songs you'll be hearing when the sun goes up, and there'll be no old fellow wheezing, the like of a sick sheep, close to your ear."

We are not surprised to hear the invitation. We are scarcely perplexed at seeing her go. Our interest goes with her, rather, for she goes to a hard life, yet to Life and the glory of the Earth. Such is drama indeed, but drama as it has not hitherto been known. It does not so much progress to a catastrophe as it moves and passes away in music. The action, what action there be, does not break into dramatic detail; it broods in the very spirit of dramatic intensity. It is like a Galway landscape: temperamental but not distinctive; too temperamental to be distinctive.

In his Preface to *The Tinker's Wedding* Synge has something to say in direct criticism of drama; and it is perhaps not too much to say that there is more of the matter of substantial criticism in his few passing comments than is to be discovered in much dialectical analysis, for he strikes to the grand first principles of drama. There he ranks drama with the symphony, claiming that it is the function of neither to "teach or prove any-

thing." Since the criticism of creative genius is ever the outer earthwork of its own citadel, this short preface, with its sweeping aside of "analysts with their problems and teachers with their systems," and its analogy of drama to symphony, becomes doubly significant. He goes on, however, to speak of the necessity of humor in drama; and therewith his criticism comes more closely home to himself. For as one recalls Falstaff's open mouthful of laughter, or Molière's subtle laughter of the mind, it will be wondered what fashion of humor so brooding and passionate a mind as Synge's will produce. And, surely enough, what the mind might guess the fact achieves. For the result is so deeply sardonic as nearly to overleap humor into the further depths of actual tragedy. In *The Tinker's Wedding* the boisterous conclusion thwarts this, but in *The Well of the Saints* it is manifest throughout. It is not that the humor is touched with tears; the richest humor is often thus. It is rather that the blade of the dramatist searches too deeply into the very secrets of living. It seems sometimes as though the dramatist's energy of thought swept him past his artistic intention, calling into question the very richness of the things he praises so rarely at other times. It is not the less valuable for this. It is perhaps more valuable; it is certainly more estimable if the business of Art be the unfurling and perpetuation of great minds.

The initial picture of two wrinkled, ugly, stunted beggars, blind, and therefore each deluded by the countryside into esteeming the other as the final consummation of male and female beauty, has itself gleams of tragedy in it. When the Saint restores their sight to them and they come to look on one another amazedly, each reviling the other shrewdly and harshly, after their late deep contentment in each other, it is not only tragical in itself, it cuts at very life. Nor does the next act relieve the pain. In truth, it drives the blade yet deeper home, for both husband and wife are not only separate, but, being no longer blind, are made to labor early and late for the hardest of fares. There is humor in it all, notwithstanding; and how shrewdly the humor cuts may be seen from the complaint of Timmy the Smith (Martin's master now) that since they received back their sight "it's a qu'er thing the way yourself and

Mary Doul are after setting every person in the place, and beyond to Rathvanna, talking of nothing, and thinking of nothing, but the way they do be looking in the face."

It is the third act that lifts the stern irony from the humor, leaving it whimsical and strangely beautiful. It is the only instance in Synge's work of the laughter that moves in the mind to tenderness. They are blind again, are these two; and though each is glad to have the other back on their old begging site, they revile each other. Then the beauty dawns through the darkness. For he bids her remember what she saw when she looked "into a well, or a clear pool, may be, when there was no wind stirring and a good light in the sky." And she replies: "I'm minding that surely, for if I'm not the way the liars were saying below I seen a thing in them pools that put joy and blessing in my heart." Still he reviles her; and then comes this passage, hard to rival, in or out of Synge, in modern drama.

MARTIN DOUL. If it's not lies you're telling would you have me think you're not a wrinkled poor woman is looking like three scores, may be, or two scores and a half?

MARY DOUL. I would not, Martin. [*She leans forward earnestly.*] For when I seen myself in them pools, I seen my hair would be gray or white, may be, in a short while, and I seen with it that I'd a face would be a great wonder when it'll have soft hair falling around it, the way when I'm an old woman there won't be the like of me surely in the seven counties of the East.

MARTIN DOUL. [*With real admiration.*] You're a cute thinking woman, Mary Doul, and it's no lie.

MARY DOUL. [*Triumphantly.*] I am, surely, and I'm telling you a beautiful white-haired woman is a grand thing to see, for I'm told when Kitty Bawn was selling poteen below, the young men itself would never tire to be looking in her face.

MARTIN DOUL. [*Taking off his hat and feeling his head, speaking with hesitation.*] Do you think to look, Mary Doul, would there be a whiteness the like of that coming upon me?

MARY DOUL. [*With extreme contempt.*] On you, God help you! . . . In a short while you'll have a head on you as bald as an old turnip you'd see rolling round in the muck. You need

never talk again of your fine looks, Martin DouL, for the day of that talk's gone for ever.

MARTIN DOUL. That's a hard word to be saying, for I was thinking if I'd a bit of comfort, the like of yourself, it's not far off we'd be from the good days went before, and that'd be a wonder surely. But I'll never rest easy, thinking you're a gray beautiful woman, and myself a pitiful show.

MARY DOUL. I can't help your looks, Martin DouL. It wasn't myself made with your rat's eyes, and your big ears, and your griseldy chin.

MARTIN DOUL. [*Rubs his chin ruefully, then beams with delight.*] There's one thing you've forgot, if you're a cute-thinking woman itself.

And then he imagines himself "in a short while" with "a beautiful, long white, silken, streaming beard, you wouldn't see the like of in the eastern world." As the "good days" of delusion and "great talking" return, the irony is there, but gentle. When the Saint returns to give back their sight, and they will none of it, the humor grows sardonical again, relieved though it be by boisterousness.

If *Riders to the Sea* is Synge's loftiest achievement, *The Well of the Saints* is the most human. And even as these touch one pole and another, so is the famous *Playboy of the Western World* his greatest, and *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, despite some strange faults, his most beautiful. But *The Well of the Saints* and *The Playboy of the Western World* stand in a manner of illuminative relation one to the other. For while the first is energetic and distinctive in a way strange with him, the latter is brooding and temperamental in a way wholly his own. It is as though coming from the lofty passion of *Riders to the Sea* he had struck out in a sudden advent of sardonic humor and then relapsed again into the brooding imagination of *The Playboy*.

Once again a dramatic situation in the history of a soul passes before us in musical movements. In *The Shadow of the Glen* it had been the cramped hungry soul of a young wife; now it is the swathed soul of a youth strangely learning his own

value. He had grown up under a harsh father's control, to reckon himself a fool and worthless. His father genuinely thought it so; and he accepts it so. But one day, provoked to excess, he lifts his loy and strikes his father working in the fields, stunning him. No sooner is the blow struck, however, than his old-timed pusillanimity asserts itself, and he flees in terror, thinking himself a murderer.

Yet to this there is added the crisis in another's soul: the soul of a young girl impatient at the littleness of life around her. When Christy Mahon enters her father's shebeen, terrified to think his crime discovered, the vigor of the deed strikes on her imagination with the glowing sense of color. It is no matter of moralities with her; the insistent fact is that here was a man capable of a divine fury of soul, a man that therefore put to shame the male kind about her, her betrothed especially. Her glory in his virility glows about Christy like a summer sun, and he swells to her estimation of him, the swathings dropping away from his soul. He discovers himself. He is pitted by her against the countryside; and he beats them all at their sports. He becomes the Playboy of the Western World; and Pegeen Mike's accepted lover.

Then his father returns, and the old terror comes back on him, whereas Pegeen turns from him seeing his deed now as not virile at all, but only cowardly. Yet he is not wholly what he once was. It is with some passion that he says, "If you're after making a mighty man of me this day by the power of a lie, you're setting me to think if it's a poor thing to be lonesome, it's worse, may be, to go mixing with the fools of the earth." He strikes his father again with a loy to win back his heroic halo about him; but to Pegeen now this is merely sordid. "I'll say a strange man is a marvel, with his mighty talk," says she; "but what's a squabble in your backyard, and the blow of a loy, have taught me that there's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed." But they cannot fend his discovery of himself. When his doughty parent appears yet again he goes out with him, now the master of the two, telling the company, "you've turned me a likely gaffer in the end of all, the way I'll go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to

the dawning of the Judgment Day." He leaves Pegeen to lament that he is indeed the only Playboy of the Western World.

The Playboy is thus not alone a well-nigh faultless play; its deeper interest is that it chances to be the play in which Synge most fully found himself. The situation of a soul finding itself, caused his brooding genius to expand itself to the fullest. All the music of speech that he had learned from Aran to Wicklow strikes its richest harmonies as Christy's tongue learns its own power. It is thus he says: "It's well you know it's a lonesome thing to be passing small towns with the light shining sideways when the night is down, or going in strange places with a dog noising before you and a dog noising behind, or drawn to the cities where you'd hear a voice kissing and talking deep love in every shadow of the ditch, and you passing on with an empty stomach failing from your heart." It is thus the eloquence of love comes on his lips: "It's little you'll think if my love's a poacher's or an earl's itself, when you'll feel my two hands stretched around you, and I squeezing kisses on your puckered lips, till I'd feel a kind of pity for the Lord God is all ages sitting lonesome in His golden chair." It is thus, when Pegeen turns from him, he cries out on her that, "There's torment in the splendor of her like, and she a girl any moon of midnight would take pride to meet, facing southward on the heaths of Keel. But what did I want crawling forward to scorch my understanding at her flaming brow?" In the Preface he says that "in a good play every speech should be as fully flavored as a nut or an apple." But it is not always nor often that a soul could feel such ecstasy in it as to swell to such music as this. The mood in Christy Mahon called out the utmost in Synge, and that mood was one of adventurous imagination.

It is not only in speech, however, that *The Playboy* excels. Its craftsmanship is of the deftest. The lurking figure of his father in the second and third acts seems only to be a preparation for his final entrance. It is that; but it is more also. It carries the movement forward past awkward gaps with extraordinary skill. The result is that the whole thing swells to its conclusion without a ruffle, one mood or movement passing into and becoming part of another in a manner strangely akin

to the mind of a man himself. It and he are one in a peculiar sense.

The same skill of craftsmanship does not mark *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. Doubtless this was because he died at work on it, and therefore it may not be estimated as a finished piece of work. As it stands, however, the charge holds good. The fault is the worse since it occurs at the very crisis. That Deirdre should beg Conchubar for life for Naisi and herself despite the fact that she urged their return from Alban, fearful that Naisi's love for her should fail and desirous of a death together to frustrate this, might have been covered by a hint of frailty in her, however little likely it might seem. But that, after Naisi has been done to death, she should wail over his body, speaking in prospect of a long life of miserable retrospect, is unforgivable. For we know she is to die at her own hand. And we feel she is being kept alive till Fergus and Conchubar return to witness her death, and Emain is burnt. Since the passage of time is not only markedly artificial, but harrowing and painful moreover, rebellion is stirred in the reader or witness. The conclusion is ruined despite the high mood wherewith Deirdre goes to her death. The less easily is this to be understood since in the second act Synge displays his dramatic sense at its highest. When Deirdre comes out of her tent and hears Naisi confess to Fergus the possibility that love may fail in him, the situation is critical not only for her, but for the dramatist. A lesser dramatist would have made her withdraw; and when subsequently she urges their return to Emain the appeal would have been to irony. Not so Synge! He lets Naisi know she has overheard him. He takes the sterner task on him, directing the emotion with all the facts known, making the appeal to stark strength of dialogue.

It is a beautiful scene this, the most beautiful in all the slender volume of his work. Deirdre chooses death rather than a withering of love, and thereby love is approved in her. "There are as many ways to wither love," she says, "as there are stars in a night of Samhain." "It's a long time we've had, pressing the lips together, going up and down, resting in our arms, Naisi, waking with the smell of June in the tops of the

grass and listening to the birds in the branches that are highest. . . . It's a long time we've had, but the end has come, surely." It chastens as the highest beauty ever chastens, and thereto the style is chastened and exalted. He who bade adieu to Angus, Maeve and Fand, to drink in Tubber Fair, was won at length by the higher beauty. He gave it the strength of earth to glory in, while it gave him an exaltation that purged. That the product should be marred at its finish is a pity of pities, for the interest of the psychic demands attention to the end. Had Synge lived such a complaint would not have had cause.

It is permitted to none to rule the future, or to coerce its will. To the Artist his Art is largely its own end, and the making of Beauty an abundant recompense. Yet in this very making of Beauty he lays hold on Eternity; and, except for such mortal accidents as buried Blake for a while, the Maker of Beauty, so it be Beauty, does indeed hold the ages in his fist. Therefore in asking if the Art of J. M. Synge will abide, the question is not if it be clever or forceful, analytical or brilliant, but merely one of the final appeals of Beauty. And by such an appeal there seems little question in the matter. For he brooded on Beauty: the very pages of his prose topography are alive with it. He brooded on the soul of Man: even when describing the inhabitants of Aran, Wicklow or Kerry, he does not paint externals, he conveys essences; he does not describe pictures, he carries atmospheres and moods through the mind. He was not one to spring to energy; he brooded in peace. And if sometimes his brooding conveys a sense of utter desolation, it is a "desolation that is mixed everywhere with the supreme beauty of the world." Such a mood does not achieve a bulk of work. Moreover, he died young. But he found his soul; he found Beauty; and he found the Art that could enable him to express one in terms of the other.

ILLUMINATION

SADA LOUISE COWAN

TO-MORROW I am to be operated upon. To-morrow . . . only thirteen hours more. I look at the white-washed walls, the hospital bed, the ugly bare room and wonder if I shall ever look upon them again after to-day.

It is an odd sensation sitting here quite alone, a prisoner; watching the moments slip by, wondering and fearing. My thoughts are ugly. The doctor has just left me. He smiled as he stroked my hand reassuringly: "You are not afraid, little Lady, I have seen your courage before."

God . . . if only he knew! Afraid? Oh, a thousand times worse than afraid. Rebellious, bitterly, passionately rebellious. My life hangs on a thread. Even the doctor dreads the coming of to-morrow.

But more than all the fear, doubt and uncertainty is a feeling of hatred, a deep hatred of myself. For I have wasted my life. Ill, morbid and unhappy for years I have had but one desire: to die. How often have the words risen to my lips: "Oh, if only this were the end!"

I have found happiness nowhere. My being was tuned in a minor key and I never knew how to live. I looked back upon the past with regret, almost remorse; I looked upon the future with grave misgiving. And all the while life . . . pulsing and vibrant . . . was slipping past me and I was quite unheeding. I believed that I was sincere when I said that I wanted to die. I believed that the turbulent unsatisfied craving within me was a longing for rest, whereas it was but an intense desire for life; for life as I had never known it; for all that had passed me by.

I have just looked at my watch. Another hour has gone. How fast the second hand flies around! Does life really spend itself as quickly as all that? There . . . I have broken the glass. I did not mean to do it. I wanted only to put my finger on that taunting bit of steel. It tells me that I am beaten . . . life is going . . . going . . . and I have never lived. Oh, the